About the AEDI

The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) is a population measure of how young children are developing in different communities across Australia. Teachers complete a checklist for children in their first year of formal full-time school to measure five key areas, or domains, of child development.

The AEDI domains are:
- physical health and wellbeing
- social competence
- emotional maturity
- language and cognitive skills (school-based)
- communication skills and general knowledge.

These domains are measured because they are important areas of child development and also good predictors of adult health, education and social outcomes.

The findings from the AEDI will benefit the whole community — helping local schools, community groups and government understand what’s working well in the community and what needs to be improved or developed to better support children and their families.

It will also help strengthen links between schools, kindergartens, preschools, playgroups, health centres, libraries and other local organisations who support children and families.

Adapting the checklist

The AEDI is based on the Canadian Early Development Instrument (EDI), which has now been adapted for use in many countries including the United States of America, Indonesia, Jamaica, Chile, Brazil, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Egypt, Jordan, Moldova, China and the Philippines.

Two studies have been undertaken — the AEDI Indigenous Adaptation Study and the AEDI Language Diversity Study* — to ensure that the AEDI is relevant to Australia. More information on these studies is available at www.aedi.org.au.

Language diversity

The AEDI results reveal great diversity in the languages spoken by Australian children. The 2012 national AEDI results report:

- 19.1 per cent of all Australian children speak languages other than English at home (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages). There are 305 different languages spoken.
- 19.8 per cent of Australian Indigenous children speak languages other than English at home, with 109 different languages spoken.
- 20.0 per cent of children with a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE)** who are also proficient in English*** are developmentally vulnerable on one or more of the AEDI domain/s, compared with 93.7 per cent of children who have LBOTE status and are not proficient in English.
- 8.3 per cent of children who are proficient in English and have LBOTE status are developmentally vulnerable on two or more of the AEDI domains, compared with 58.0 per cent who have LBOTE status and are not proficient in English.

* The Language Diversity Study was formerly titled the AEDI Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE) Study.
** For the AEDI, children are considered LBOTE (Language Background Other Than English) if they speak a language other than English at home and/or have English as a Second Language (ESL) status.
*** Proficient in English refers to what is expected of the average monolingual English speaker in a similar phase of development. More information is available at www.aedi.org.au.
Building a picture of children’s development

Understanding the local context is an important step when interpreting and using the AEDI results. Communities are encouraged to use a mix of data and local knowledge to build a comprehensive picture of children’s development in their community.

Considerations for interpreting AEDI results for children from diverse language backgrounds

In communities where many children speak a language other than English at home, there are particular and complex considerations when working to understand and interpret the AEDI results.

The AEDI Checklist aims to measure universal child development trends. It cannot always capture more detailed elements of child development that are important across cultures or the skills that children have in other languages.

The AEDI results tell us about the skills and competencies that children have displayed as they start school. Teachers report on these skills as they are demonstrated by children in English in their school setting (in Australia, this is predominantly an English-speaking environment).

The results do not capture the language capacities children display at home or in other contexts where their first language and literacy skills might be strong.

For communities with many children who speak a language other than English at home, it is important to consider the English proficiency levels of those children as a group when interpreting community results. Although the results could show that the community has higher proportions of children ‘developmentally vulnerable’ in the language and cognitive skills (school-based) domain, it’s important to remember that the children’s first language and literacy skills have not been measured.

This consideration might also come into play when communities are reviewing results for the other AEDI domains. This is because limited English might present barriers for social and emotional skills and a range of communications with children’s teachers and peers.

Understanding community results: insights from national data

Looking at the results for all children in Australia can help communities that are home to many children from diverse language backgrounds better understand their results.

The 2012 national AEDI results show that children who speak a language other than English at home and are not yet proficient in English had higher proportions of developmental vulnerability on all AEDI domains compared with AEDI results for all children.

Looking closely at the AEDI results for all Australian children gives us other important insights:

- the percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable is highest in the most socioeconomically disadvantaged areas.
- children who speak a language other than English at home are more likely to live in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas than children who speak English only.
- children who do not attend preschool in the year before school have higher proportions of developmental vulnerability than children who do attend preschool in the year before school.
- children who speak a language other than English at home are slightly less likely to attend preschool than other children.

More information about how the AEDI results have been used in communities where many children speak a language other than English at home is available at www.aedi.org.au.

For more information visit www.aedi.org.au

The Australian Government and State and Territory Governments are working in partnership with The Royal Children’s Hospital Centre for Community Child Health in Melbourne, the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, and the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth, to deliver the AEDI. The Social Research Centre, Melbourne, is managing the AEDI data.