



Centre for Community Child Health



What the AEDC tells us about trends in children's development

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Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)



- National measure of children's development at school entry
- Conducted every three years since 2009 (teacher reported)
- Provides a picture of early childhood development in Australia over time



Physical health and wellbeing

Children's physical readiness for the school day, physical independence and gross and fine motor skills.



Social competence

Children's overall social competence, responsibility and respect, approach to learning, and readiness to explore new things.



Emotional maturity

Children's pro-social and helping behaviours, and absence of anxious and fearful behaviour, aggressive behaviour, hyperactivity and inattention.



Language and cognitive skills (school-based)

Children's interest and skills in literacy and numeracy, and memory.

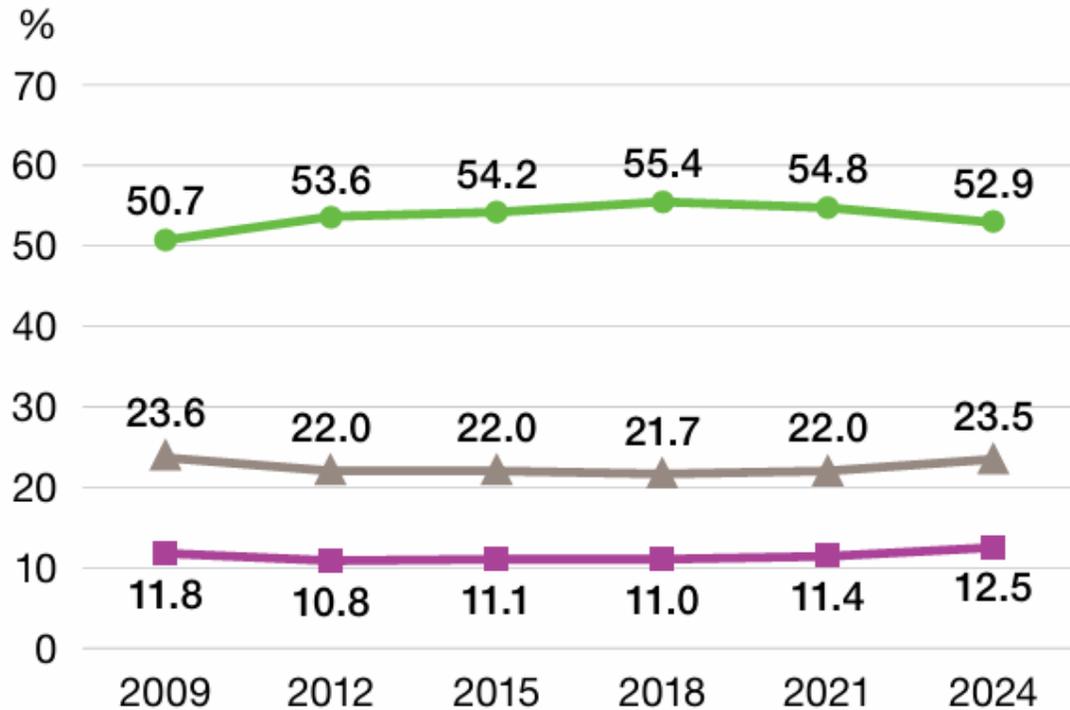


Communication skills and general knowledge

Children's communication skills and general knowledge based on broad developmental competencies and skills.



Trends in children's development at school entry



—●— OT5
—▲— DV1
—■— DV2

OT5

The percentage of children who are developmentally on track on five AEDC domains.

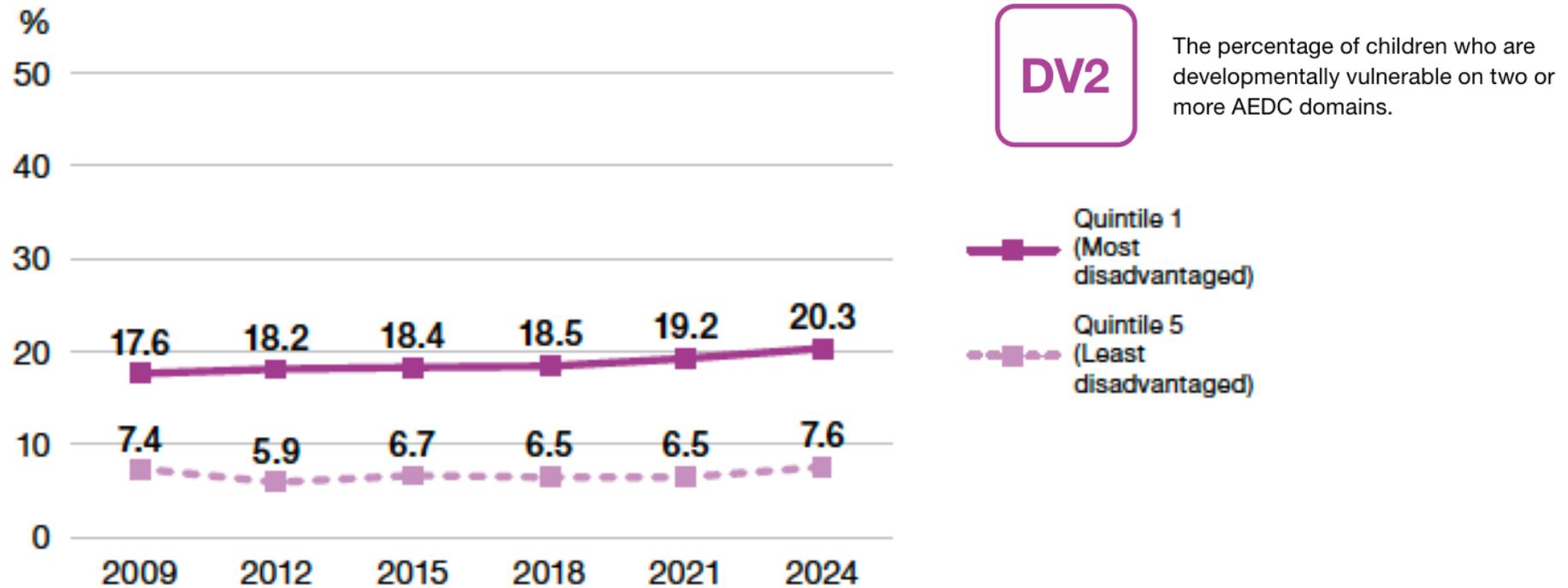
DV1

The percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more AEDC domains.

DV2

The percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable on two or more AEDC domains.

Persistent inequities in early child development



National trends in children experiencing greater developmental vulnerability by SEIFA, 2009-2024

SOURCE: AEDC National Report 2024 (<https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/2024-aedc-national-report>)

Children with Additional Health and Developmental Needs



“Children who have, or are at increased risk of having, a chronic physical, developmental, behavioural or emotional condition which requires more medical, allied health, education or related services than their peers”¹

Measures	Definition
Children with established needs	Children requiring special assistance in the classroom due to a medically diagnosed chronic medical, physical or intellectually disabling condition
Children with emerging needs	Children without diagnosed needs who had a condition that affected their learning and/or whose teachers indicated they were currently being assessed or needed further assessment

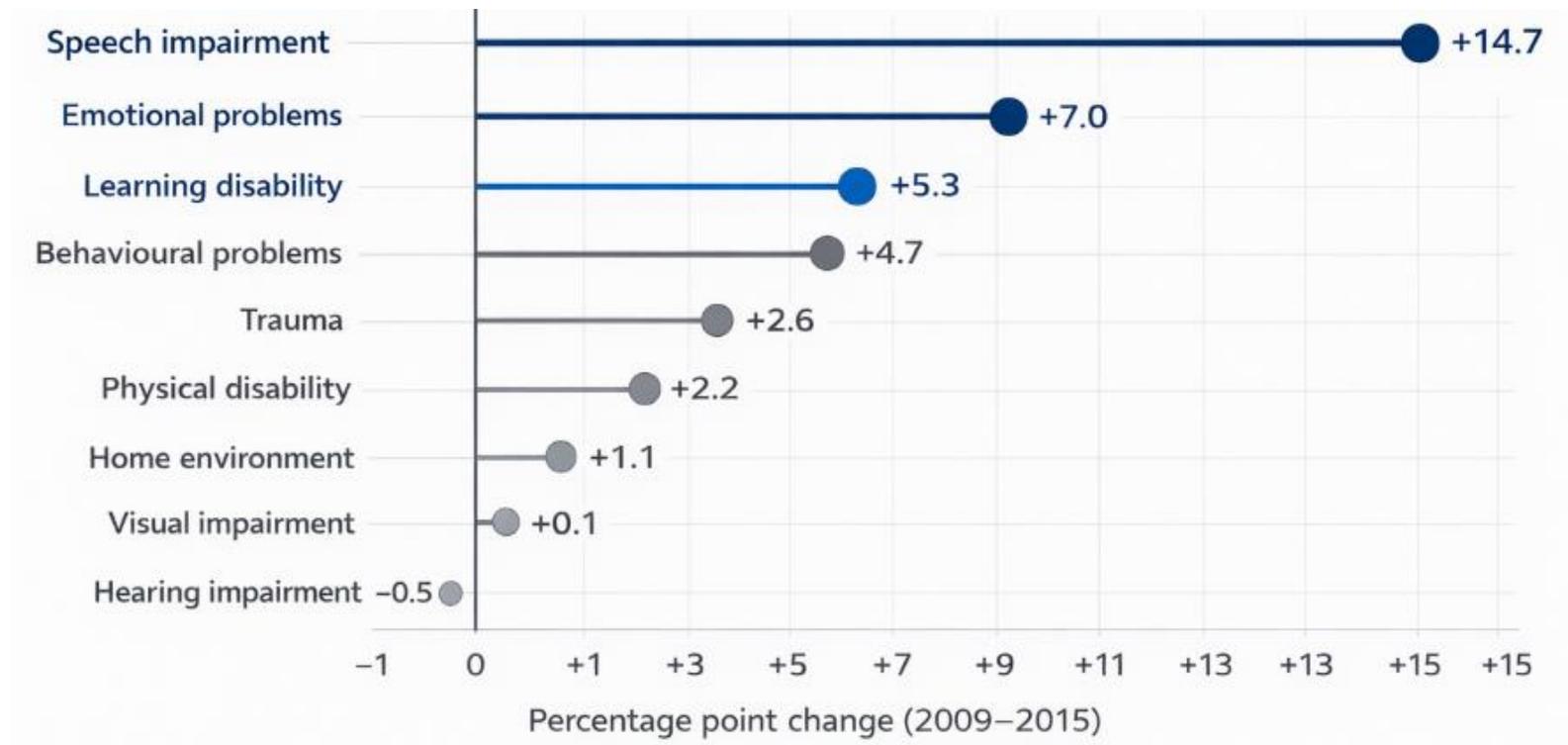
¹ O'Connor M, O'Connor E, Quach J, Vashishtha R, Goldfeld S. Trends in the prevalence and distribution of teacher-identified special health-care needs across three successive population cohorts. *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*. 2019;55:312–319. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/jpc.14192>

Children with Additional Health and Developmental Needs



- Almost **1 in 20** children start school with **established needs**¹
- Almost **1 in 5** start school with **emerging needs**¹
- Emerging needs at school entry associated with lower reading and numeracy outcomes by Grade 3 (~9 months learning difference)²

Change in teacher-reported impairments among children with emerging needs (AEDC 2009-2015)¹



¹ O'Connor M et al. Trends in the prevalence and distribution of teacher-identified special health-care needs across three successive population cohorts. *J Paediatr Child Health*. 2019;55:312-319.

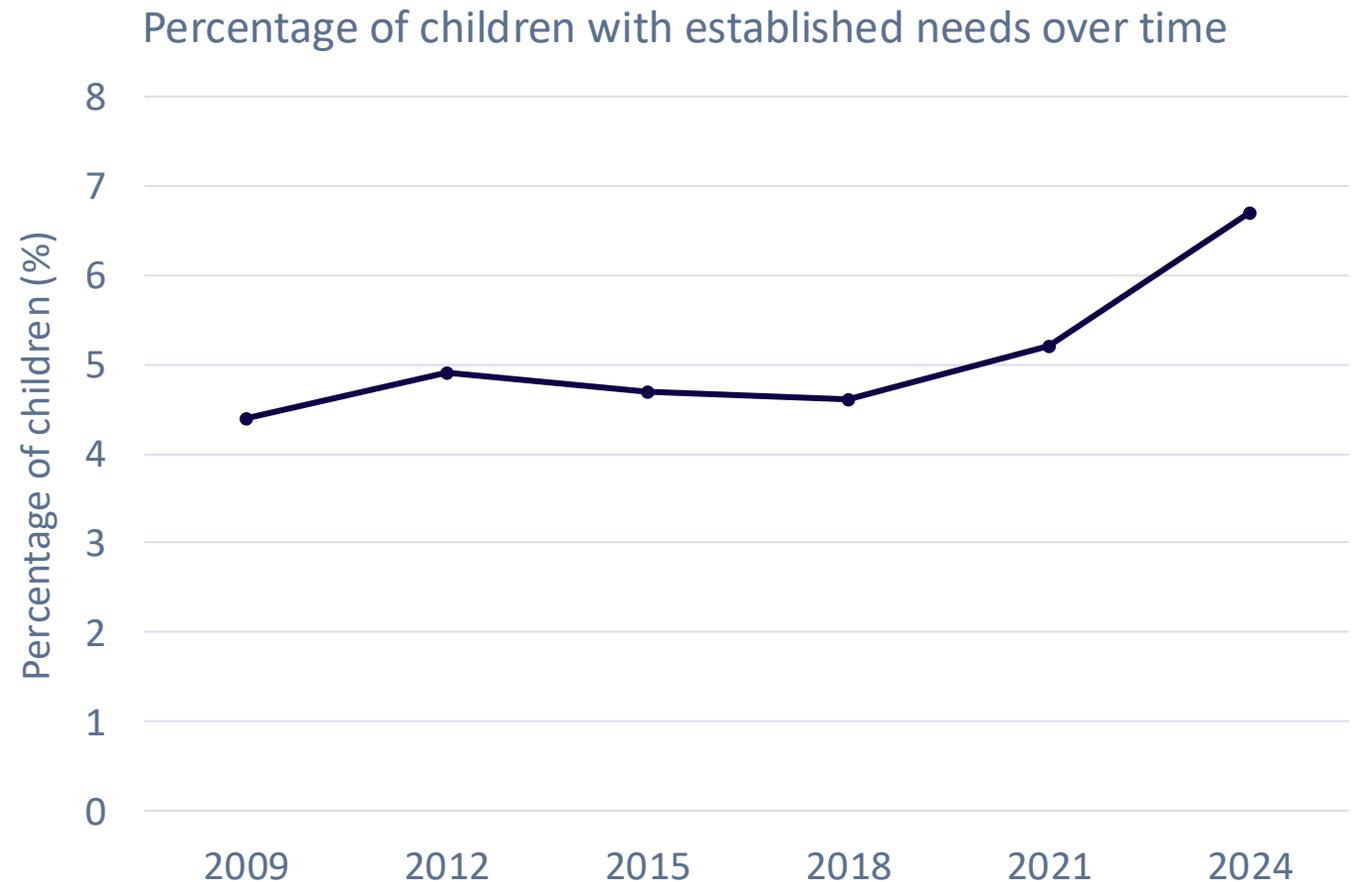
² O'Connor M et al. Learning outcomes of children with teacher-identified emerging health and developmental needs. *Child Care Health Dev*. 2020;1-9.

More recent trends in Additional Health and Developmental Needs



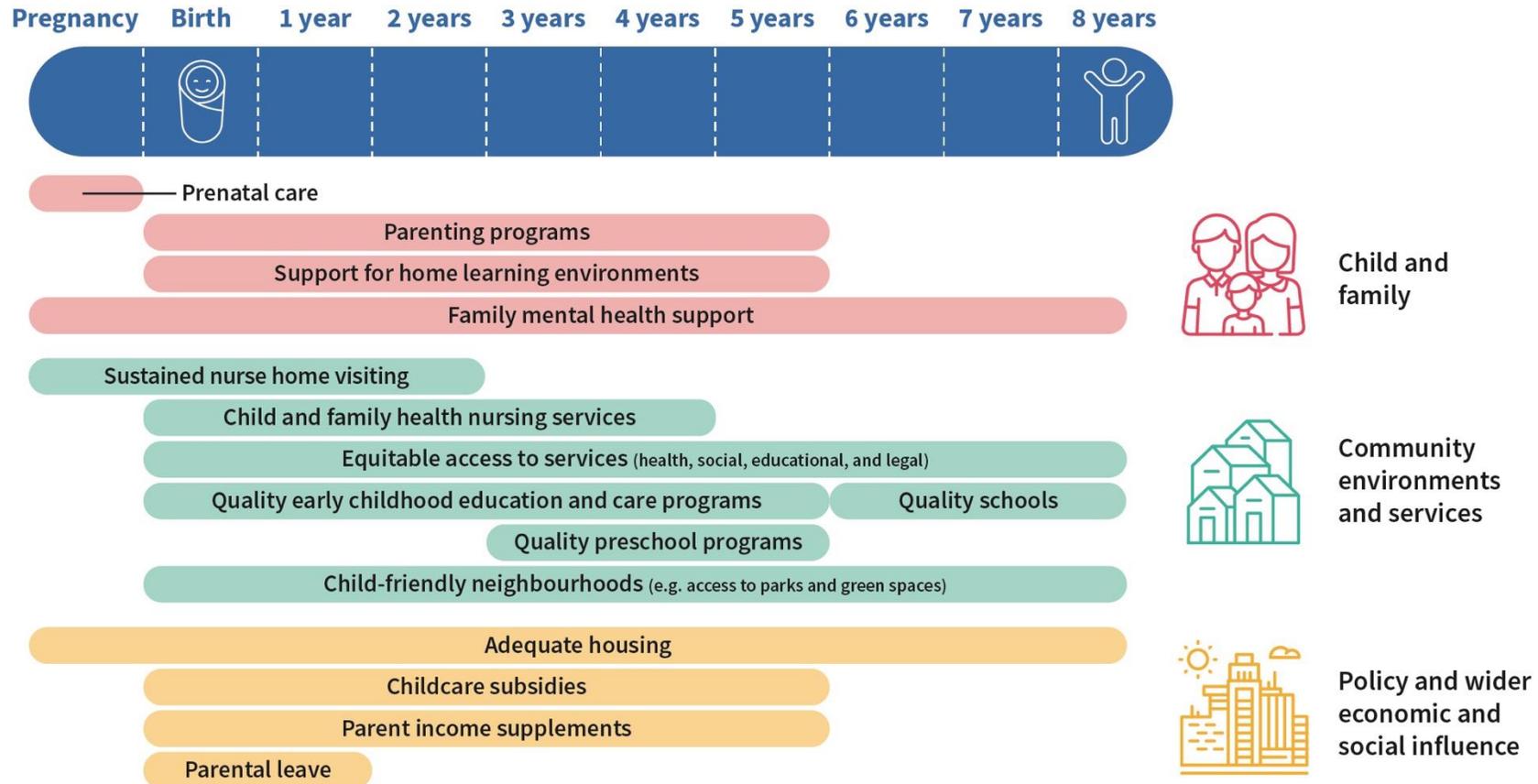
In 2024:

- **6.7%** of children had established needs
- **20.5%** of children were currently being assessed or were identified by a teacher as needing further assessment





Changing Children's Chances



1. Goldfeld S., et al. Beyond the silver bullet: Closing the equity gap for children within a generation. Medical Journal of Australia. 2024;221(10):508–511.

Since 2002, the Australian Government has worked in partnership with eminent child health research institutes, the Centre for Community Child Health at The Royal Children's Hospital and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, and The Kids Research Institute Australia to deliver the Australian Early Development Census program to communities nationwide. The Australian Government continues to work with its partners and with state and territory governments to implement the AEDC.



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www.ccch.org.au

The Centre for Community Child Health is a department of The Royal Children's Hospital and a research group of the Murdoch Children's Research Institute.

**Melbourne
Children's**

A world leader
in child and
adolescent health



**murdoch
children's
research
institute**



Supported by The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation



Evidence to Action: Strengthening children's development through a

National Best Practice Framework for Early Childhood Intervention

AECD Webinar March 2026



Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the unceded land on which we work, learn and live. We acknowledge and are grateful to the Traditional Owners, Elders and Knowledge Holders of all Indigenous nations and clans who have been instrumental in our reconciliation journey.

We recognise the unique place held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and custodians of the lands and waterways across the Australian continent, with histories of continuous connection dating back more than 60,000 years. We also acknowledge their enduring cultural practices of caring for Country.

We pay respect to Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge the importance of Indigenous knowledge in the Academy.

In making this Acknowledgment of Country we commit to respectful and responsible conduct towards all others according to the Traditional lores of this land, particularly at times of formal ceremony.

A partnered approach to development



Consortium partnership



Reviewed the evidence



Consulted widely



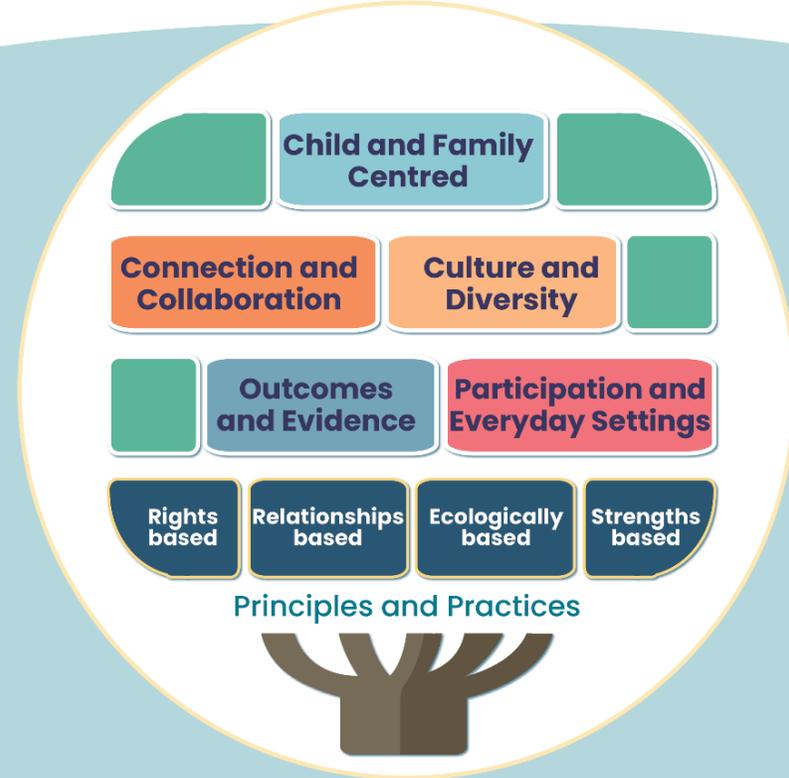
Synthesised findings and insights

National Best Practice Framework for Early Childhood Intervention

National Best Practice Framework for Early Childhood Intervention

All children with developmental concerns, delay or disability and their families thrive in their early years

Aims and outcomes for children, families, communities and services



An integrated system providing a continuum of support for children and families

Universal Supports

Foundational Supports

National Disability Insurance Scheme

Vision and aims



Vision
All children in
Australia thrive in
their early years

All children with
developmental concerns,
delay or disability and their
families, thrive in their early
years

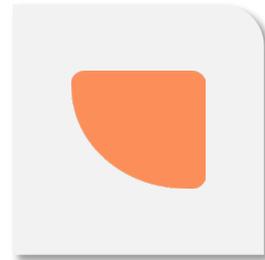


Aims and outcomes for early childhood intervention services



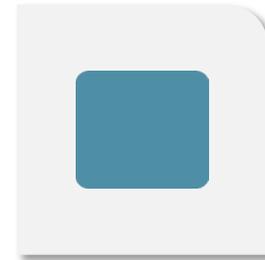
Children

To build on child strengths and interests to enhance learning, development and meaningful participation in everyday activities



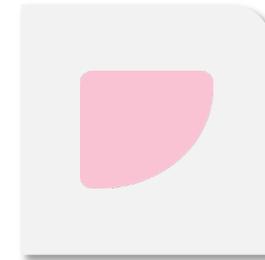
Parents, carers and families

To acknowledge and respect family and community cultures and to strengthen knowledge, skills and confidence to support child and family quality of life



Communities

To understand child development and wellbeing, and to help create safe, welcoming, inclusive and connected communities



Service agencies and practitioners

To contribute to the development of a collaborative and integrated network of holistic supports for children, parents, carers, families and communities and to build supportive networks with colleagues

Services for children with developmental concerns, delay or disability



An integrated system providing a continuum of support for children and families

**Universal
Supports**

**Foundational Supports
Thriving Kids**

**National Disability
Insurance Scheme**



Principles and related practices

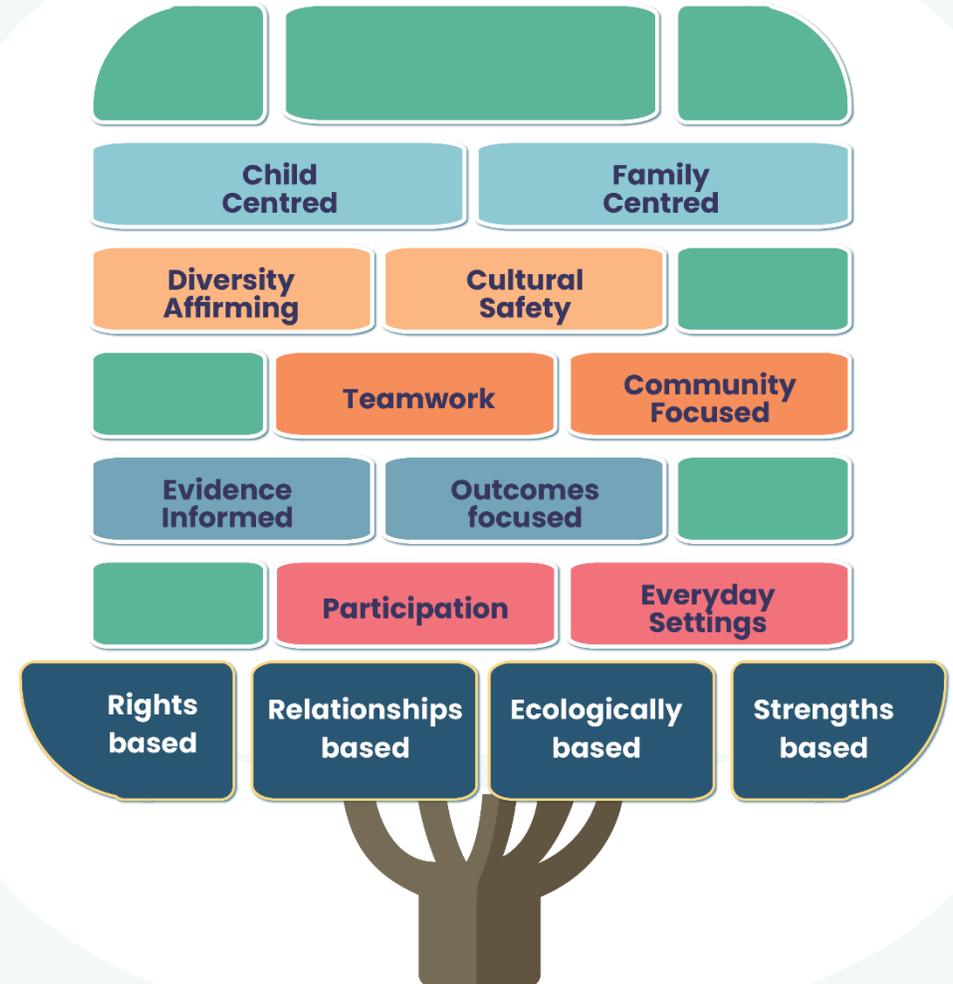
Four universal principles underpin all aspects of early childhood intervention services and supports for children with developmental concerns, delay or disability.

They are:

- rights-based
- relationship-based
- strengths-based
- ecologically-based

National Best Practice Framework for Early Childhood Intervention

Principles and Practices



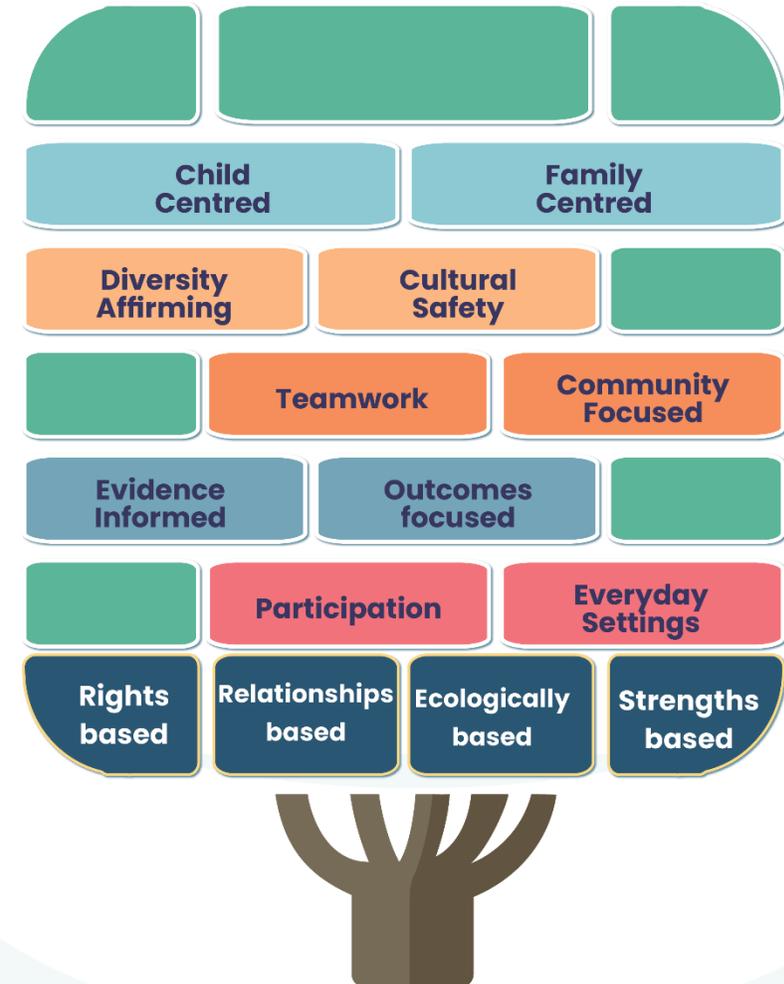
Principles and related practices

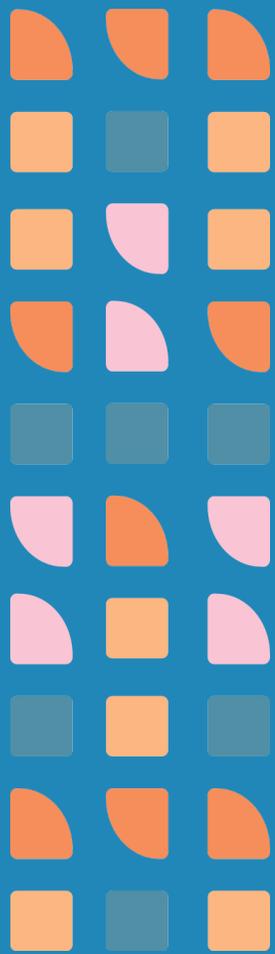
In addition to the four universal principles, best practice in early childhood intervention is also underpinned by ten key principles, grouped into five clusters:

- Child and family-centred
- Culture and diversity
- Inclusion
- Connection and collaboration
- Outcomes and evidence

National Best Practice Framework for Early Childhood Intervention

Principles and Practices





Framework resources



Family Resources

“

Don't forget to get to know the child. That when you start with the child and know the child... you can then integrate therapy. You can't do it the other way around. It just doesn't work.



Factsheets for families about how to talk to children about early childhood intervention

This resource was co-designed with young people with disability. It covers what young people want families to understand, do and know about early intervention.

Tools and resources



Practice Guidance

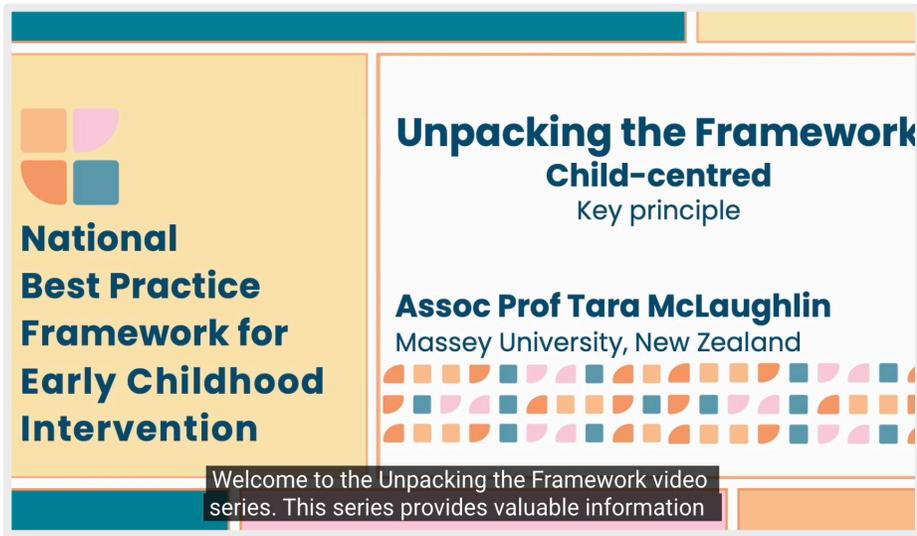
These resources include an overview of the principle and rationale, and a list of related practices and links to resources



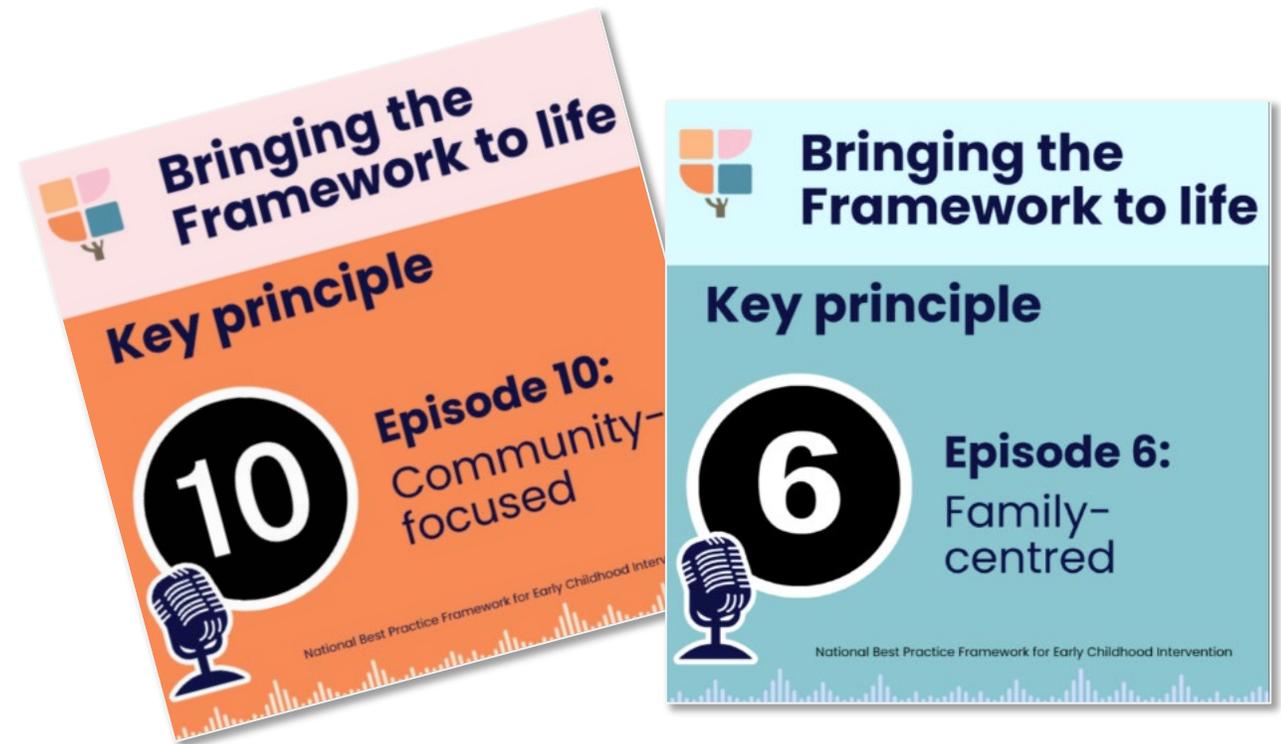
Looks like, Doesn't look like

These fact sheets assist with reflection on best practice in ECI processes

Tools and resources



Videos: International and national perspectives



Podcasts: hearing from families and professionals

Outcome Measures



Suite of resources to support implementation of the Best Practice Framework for Early Childhood Intervention

These resources provide guidance about selecting outcome measures and information about tools that are appropriate for:

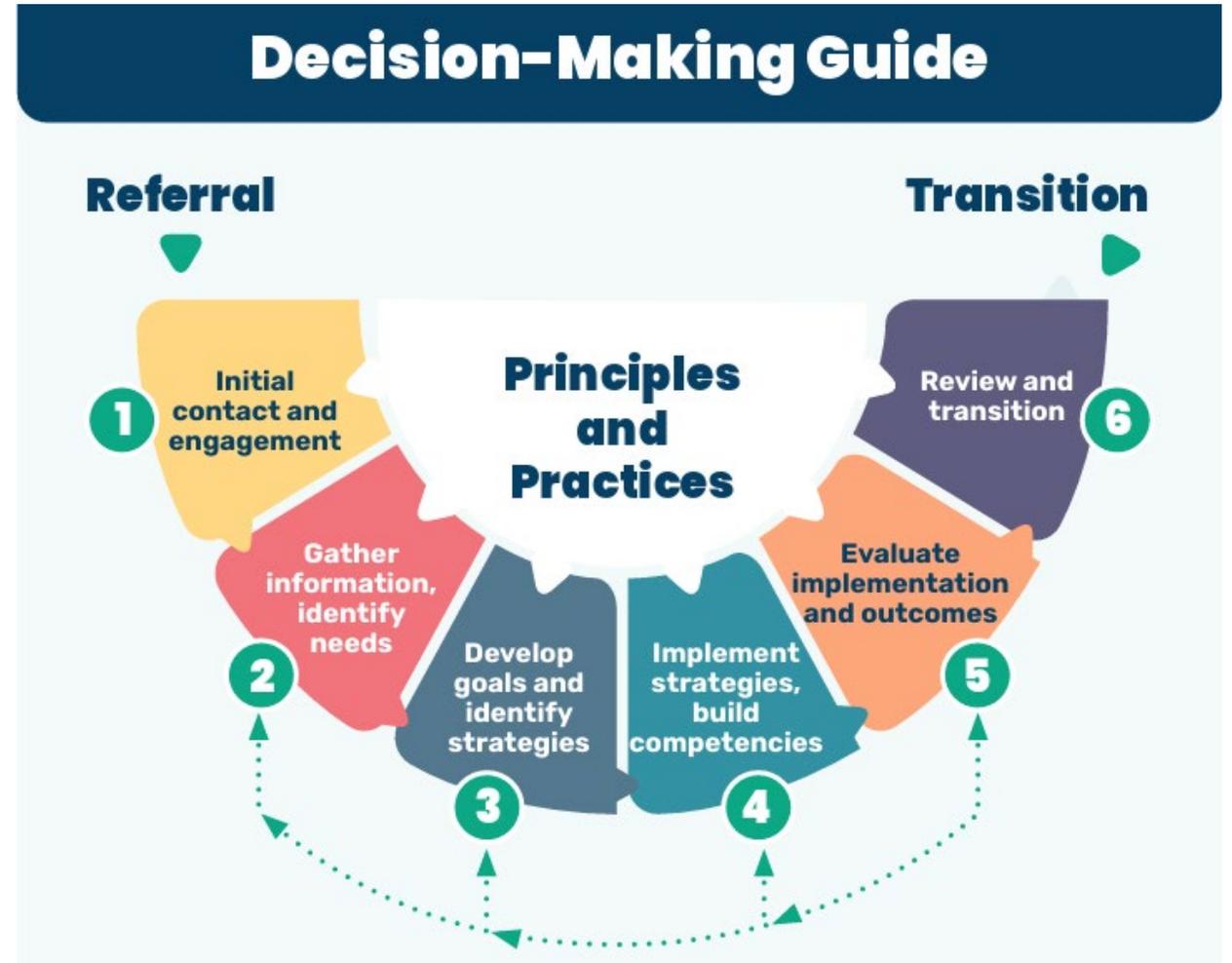
- children
- parents, carers and families
- practitioners and services



Decision making guide

Parents, carers and families have many decisions to make over time, including:

- what goals to focus on
- what strategies to use
- who should be on the ECI team
- what form support should take
- where services should be provided
- how intensive the services should be



The Framework is not just for ECI practitioners and families. It has been designed with a wide group of users in mind.

- We also think it is **vital that this information informs Thriving Kids** and also the way early childhood intervention is funded and structured under the NDIS.
- **This framework is designed to be really practical** and is for everyone involved in helping children to develop, so that they thrive.



The Framework and resources are all publicly available

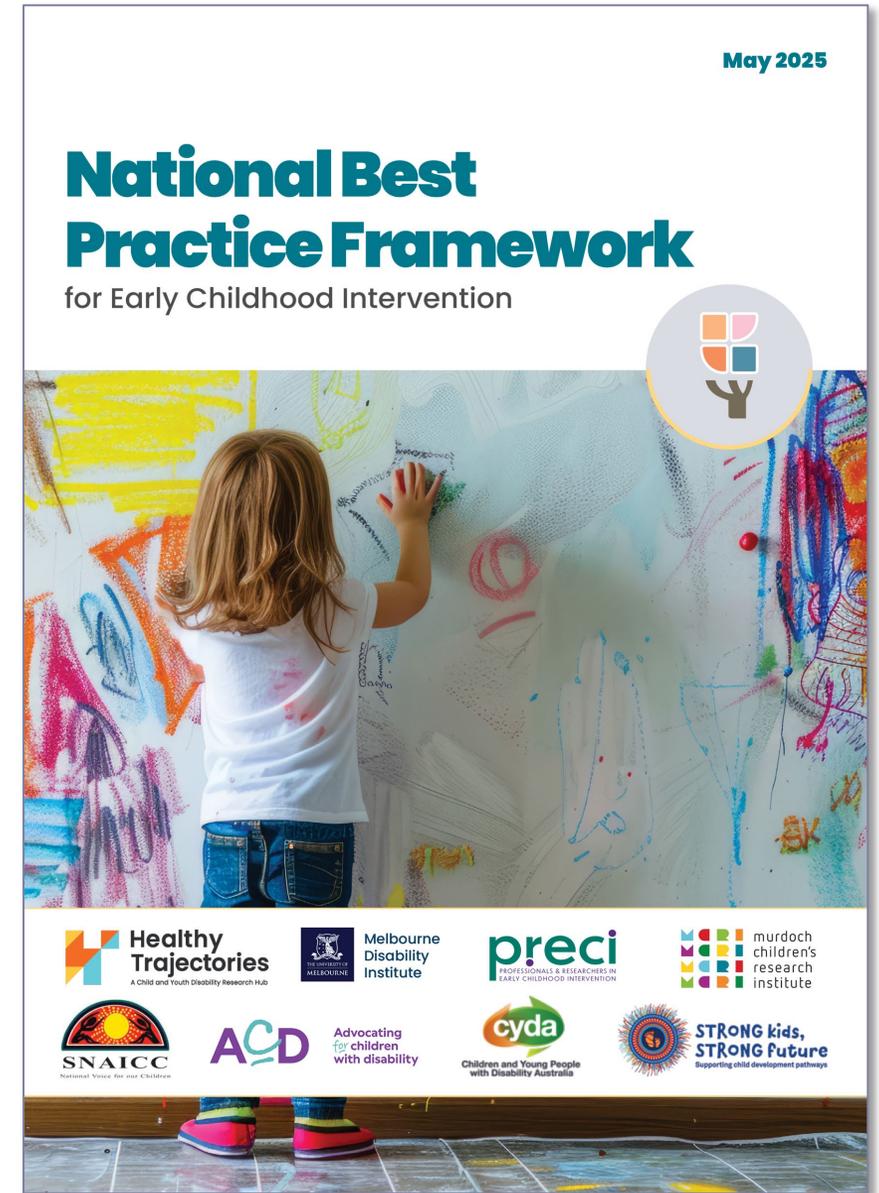
Read more on our website

<https://healthy-trajectories.com.au/eci-framework/>



Contact us

eci-framework@unimelb.edu.au



Thank you





Karen Dimmock - CEO

Family perspective:

Connecting and supporting families raising children with developmental delay or disability



Acknowledgement of Country

ACD acknowledges the traditional owners of this land. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and community.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present.



This artwork was created by Yorta Yorta and Wurundjeri artist Renee Jenkins.

To create the artwork she reflected on her own parenting experience, which she likens to a journey with stepping stones along the way.



**Advocating
for children
with disability**

ACD is the Victorian advocacy service for children with disability and their families.

We are a not-for-profit organisation led by and for families of children with disability.

We help families gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence to advocate for their children. We support families with children from birth to 18 with all types of disability.

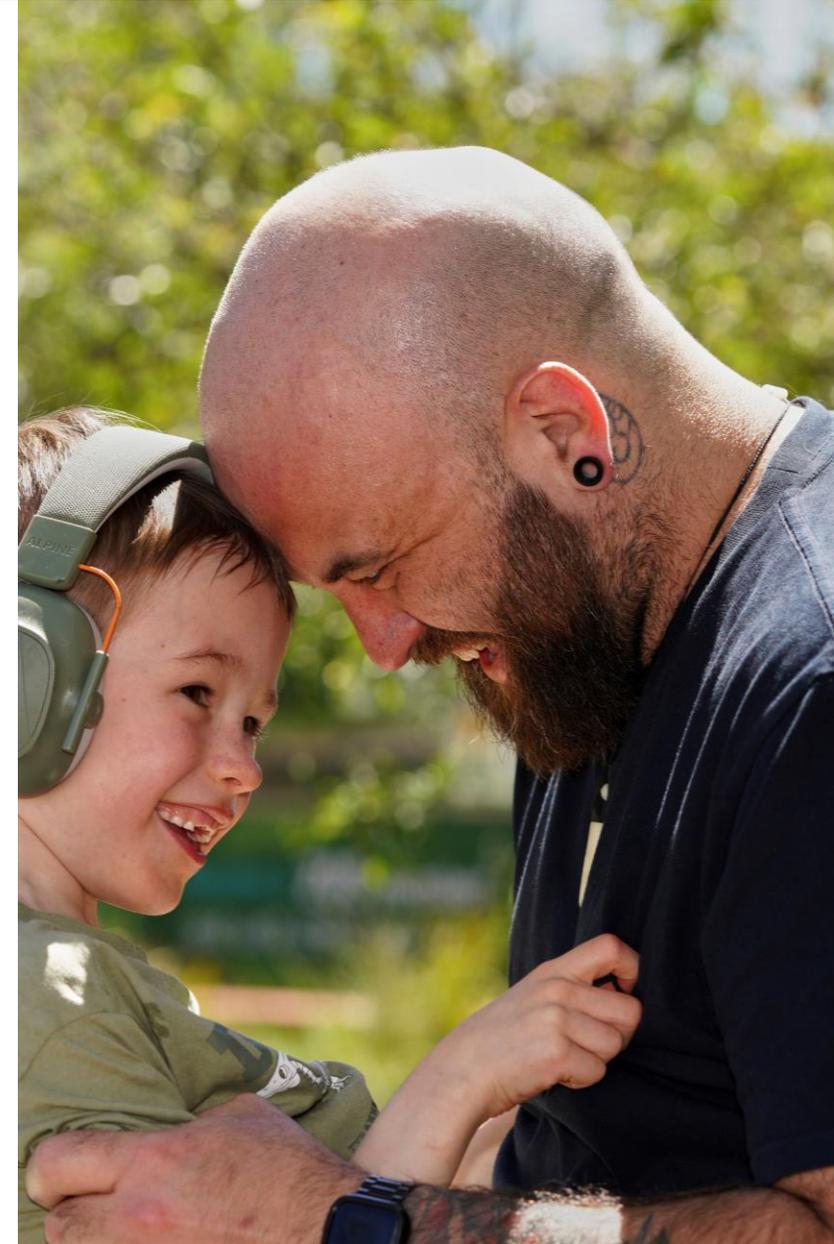
Our work means we hear directly from thousands of families every year. We amplify their voices and experiences to improve the lives of children with disability.

Hearing from families

For so many families identifying their child has developmental delay begins with going round in circles.

If families have concerns about their child's development they are wanting help to support their child's attachment, communication and play.

The best place to start is by helping families know what they can do at home.



Family priorities

For their children to be welcomed and included in education.

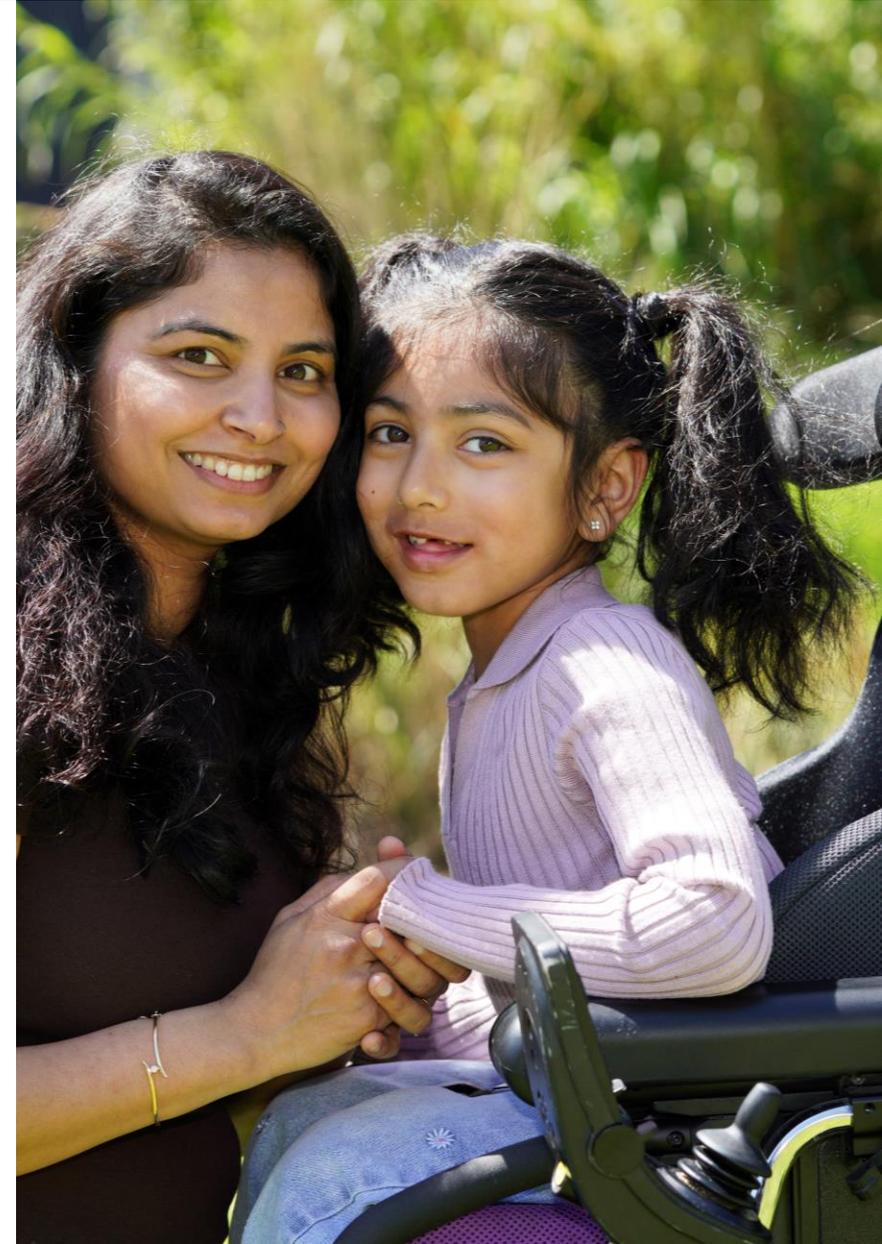


What else helps

Families value connection with others in similar situations.

Families value early childhood intervention, and the importance of hope and feeling supported.

Those who are a little further in their journey share the value of balance: therapy appointments are important, but so is time as a family.



'Learning about the importance of focusing on my child's strengths, not just her challenges, was a game-changer. It shifted my entire perspective and approach at home.'

- Parent





NGUNGA GROUP
WOMENS
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

Ngunga Group Women's Aboriginal Corporation

www.ngungagroupwomens.org.au

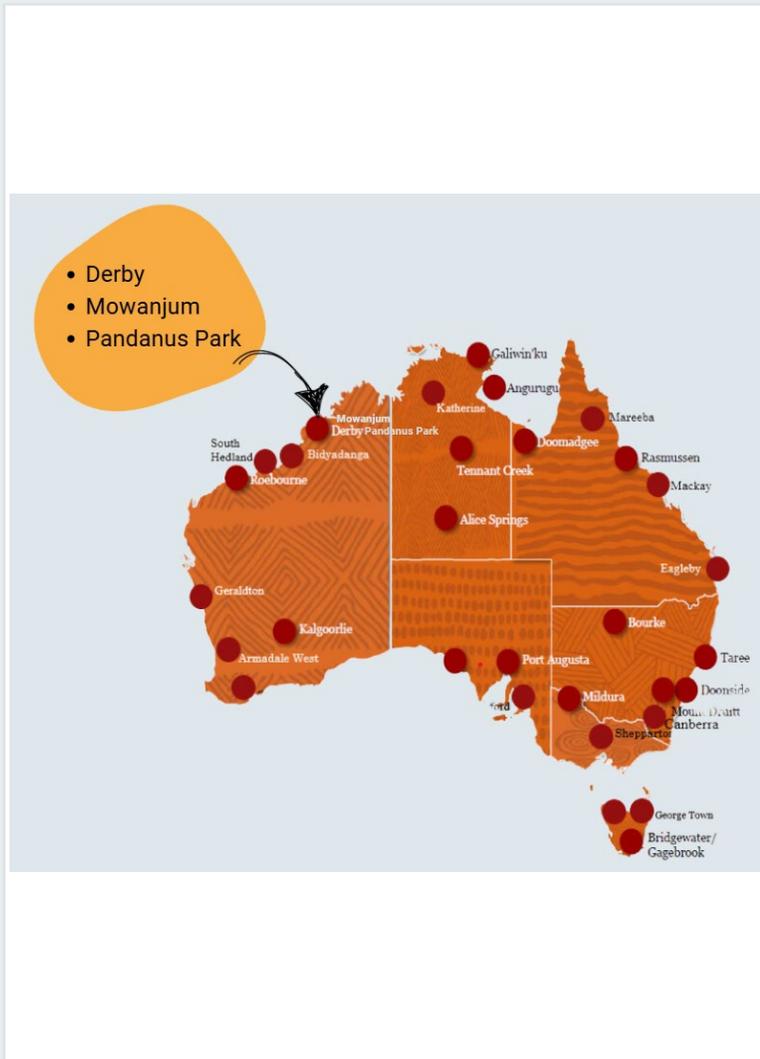
Rowena Mouda is the Chief Executive Office of the Ngunga Group Womens Aboriginal Corporation (Ngunga) in Derby, Western Australia. Rowena has over 20 years' experience in community and economic development in remote Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley region. Ngunga offers a range of early childhood years programs and culture and language programs that respond to community priorities.

Community-led early years support across Derby, Mowanjum and Pandanus Park and the Gibb River Road.

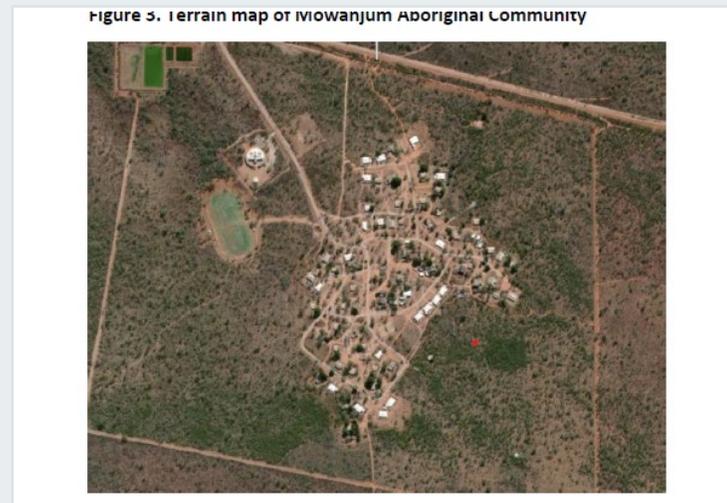


Map of locations

Derby township with partner communities Mowanjum and Pandanus Park.



Derby township



Mowanjum Aboriginal Community



Pandanus Park Aboriginal Community

Ngunga's programs and data vision

Programs that respond to community priorities, and a practical approach to telling the story of change.

Programs

- **Place-based playgroups** in Derby, Mowanjum and Pandanus Park, with wider outreach along Gibb River Road.
- **HIPPY** home-based learning that helps parents and carers be their child's first teacher.
- **Connected Beginnings** linking families with health, education and family support services.
- **RJED, Dunyji Jarndu & Ooba Babanil (Strong Women and Children), Seasonal Calendar, Language Booklet, First Nations Playgroup**
- **Culture, language and access supports** including community music, local resources and transport access.

Vision for capturing our data to tell our story

- Through Bonterra, potfolios and Folktale we bring together **program reporting, KPI tracking, family voice and service evidence** into one Ngunga-owned picture of change – indigenous data sovereignty.
- Capture what is changing at **child, family and community level** - not just outputs for separate funders.
- Use data to:
improve decisions, show what works and advocate for investment in community-led early years services.



Ngunga's successes and challenges

Successes

Years of community-led work in the Derby region

- Over three decades of community leadership and trusted local presence.
- Programs spanning playgroups, HIPPY, Connected Beginnings, Dunyji Jarndu and Ooba Babanil (Strong Women and Children), Seasonal calendar, Pandanus Park transport, Early Years Centre and Family Hub and culture/language work.
- EYP Capability milestone 1 marked complete, with practical tools for stronger program capability.
- New Derby Early Learning and Family Centre funding announced in 2026, building toward a community-led hub for Derby, Mowanjum and Pandanus Park.

Challenges

Reporting items already tracked in the current register

- Services span multiple communities, so access depends on transport, travel and coordinated partnerships.
- Staffing: mixed skill levels across literacy, documentation and compliance, compliance vs real world delivery tension – real world context = remote, cultural, relationship, unpredictable. Creates challenge staff struggling to create paperwork vs community engagement, risk of under-documenting, data evidence and some reporting gaps.

Next steps: targeted coaching and mentoring on track, documentation routines, training, simplifying forms, templates and visual guides on track.

Training key staff in data system that supports accountability, learning, advocacy and Indigenous data sovereignty at the same time.

Opportunity: build one Ngunga-owned data system that supports accountability, learning and advocacy at the same time.