

AEDC 2021 Data Story

Parent's and Carer's Guide to the AEDC

*What works to improve
outcomes for children?*



Parents, families and the AEDC

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a nationwide census (similar to a questionnaire) measuring early childhood development. The AEDC can help people to understand what is important for children's development and can be used to tell whether children and families need more support from conception through to when children start school.

While families have a primary role in supporting children, children do best when their mothers, fathers, and caregivers are well supported. Families thrive when they are connected to their community and high-quality early learning environments, and when they are engaged in their children's schooling and able to access health and other services.

When schools, communities and governments invest in resources to support children and families during these early years, it brings life-long benefits to children and the whole community.

Key messages

- Associations between children's attendance of early childhood education and care settings and development on the AEDC demonstrate the many ways development is supported through children's earliest experiences. The data shows that each experience has the potential to provide a benefit and that together, a rich tapestry of early experiences supports children's holistic development.
- Parents and families are children's first and most important teachers, the home learning environment providing the building blocks for children's growth and development.
- High-quality services and supports are crucial for families in supporting their children's health, wellbeing and development. A range of services at different stages and levels are necessary to support all families, including:
 - Antenatal care
 - Maternal child health services
 - Playgroup
 - Early education and care
 - Social networks and community
 - Health services for parents
 - Family support services

A snapshot of children and families in 2021



The median age of mothers is **31.6** and fathers is **33.6** years



41% of parents have a Bachelor's degree or higher



92% of children attended a preschool or kindergarten program in the year before starting full-time school



26% of children speak a language other than English at home

Families provide the foundations for children's development, learning, health and wellbeing

The first five years of life are a particularly important time for children's development. During these early years brains grow and develop more rapidly than at any other time in the life course (ARACY, 2006).

Families are at the heart of children's lives and the investments they make in the early years benefit not only their children but also their communities. Through the family environment, children learn values, culture and history. Communities and governments also play an important role in supporting the development of children by providing policies, programs and environments that support parents and caregivers navigate the ups and downs of parenting. Figure 1 shows the types of supports that are important for families in the early years.

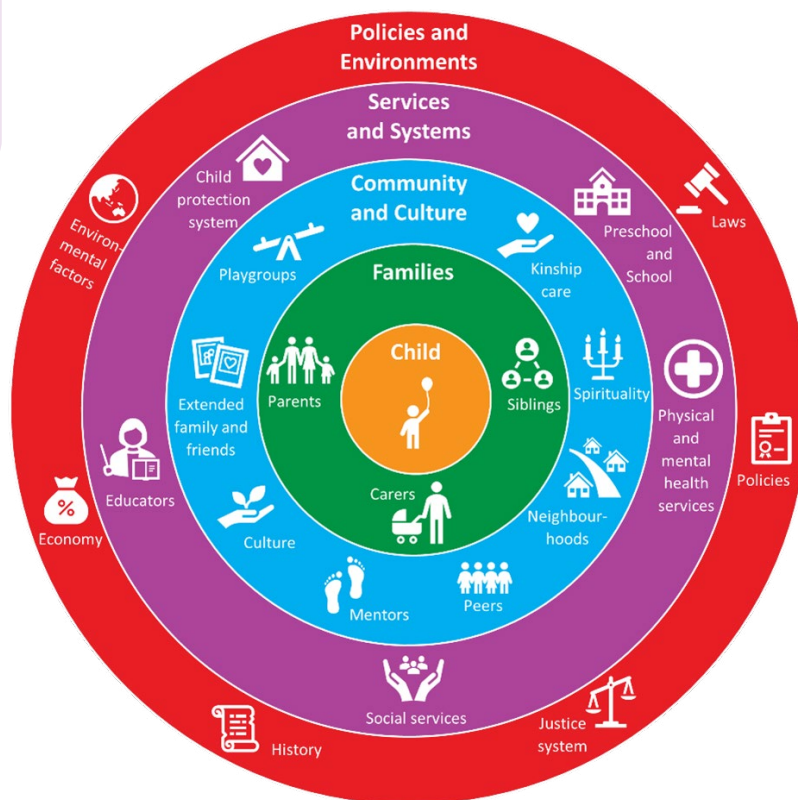
When these layers and their components all work together, it supports families in their role as children's first and most important teachers. In each layer, elements can be protective or present a risk for children's development. Positive influences in any layer can buffer the impact that challenges or hardships can have on children's development, health and wellbeing (Toumbourou et al., 2014).

AEDC data, explored alongside data about the early experiences of children and families, can support policy makers and service providers interrogate where families are well supported in the early years and where families may need additional support. This information can also support parents in making choices that give their children the best chance in life.

What we know about the early learning environments of children in Australia

In Australia, the provision of early education and care is a key investment in children's development and family support. Since 2009 the AEDC has collected information about children's early learning experiences prior to commencing school. Across all collections, preschool was the most accessed type of non-parental care with rates relatively stable over time (see Figure 2 on page 3).

While usage of early years' service provision has been mostly stable over time, there has been a notable increasing trend in children attending long day care, and a steady increase in grandparent care, with this dropping off slightly in 2021. Exploring this ECEC data alongside AEDC data highlights the value of these early environments.



Nurturing **Families** provide a secure base for children to develop foundations for learning and wellbeing

Strong connections to **Community and Culture** can help to build children's sense of belonging

Services and Systems help families thrive when they are culturally safe, accessible, and meet their needs

Policies and Environments that are family friendly can enable parents to balance caring and work responsibilities

Figure 1: A network of support for children and families

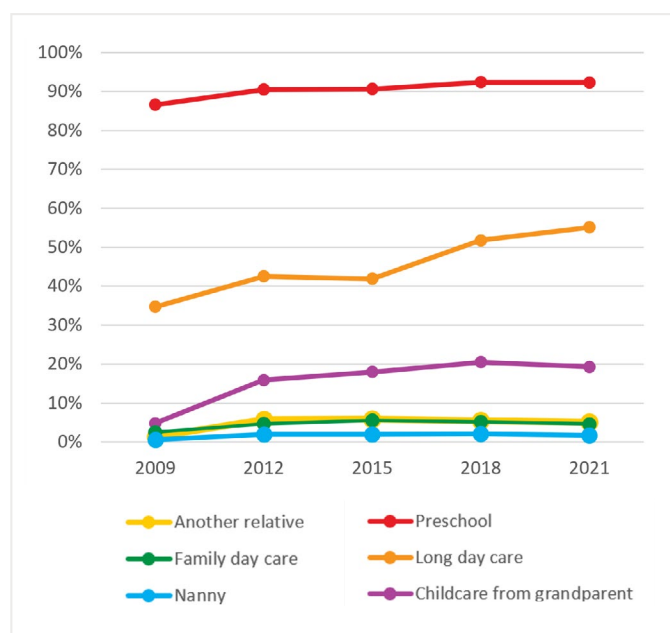


Figure 2: Types of non-parental early childhood education and/or care (ECEC)

In Australia around 1 in 3 parents attend playgroup with their children

A diverse mix of early experiences is best for children's development

The Australian Early Childhood Education and Development Experience (AEEDE) Research Project (Collier et al., 2019) completed in 2020 found that having a diverse range of both formal and informal care in the year before school (such as that from extended family members or grandparents) was associated with better development outcomes at school entry. The AEEDE study highlighted the importance of families having access to quality ECEC services and the value of intergenerational support networks, recognising the role that grandparents and other family members have in the early lives of children in Australia.

Engage parents in their children's learning from birth

The AEDC collects information about parental engagement with children's education prior to and once they have commenced school.

Research has shown that when parents engage with early years child-parent programs, such as playgroup, children are more likely to be developmentally on track on all five domains of the AEDC by the time they commence school.

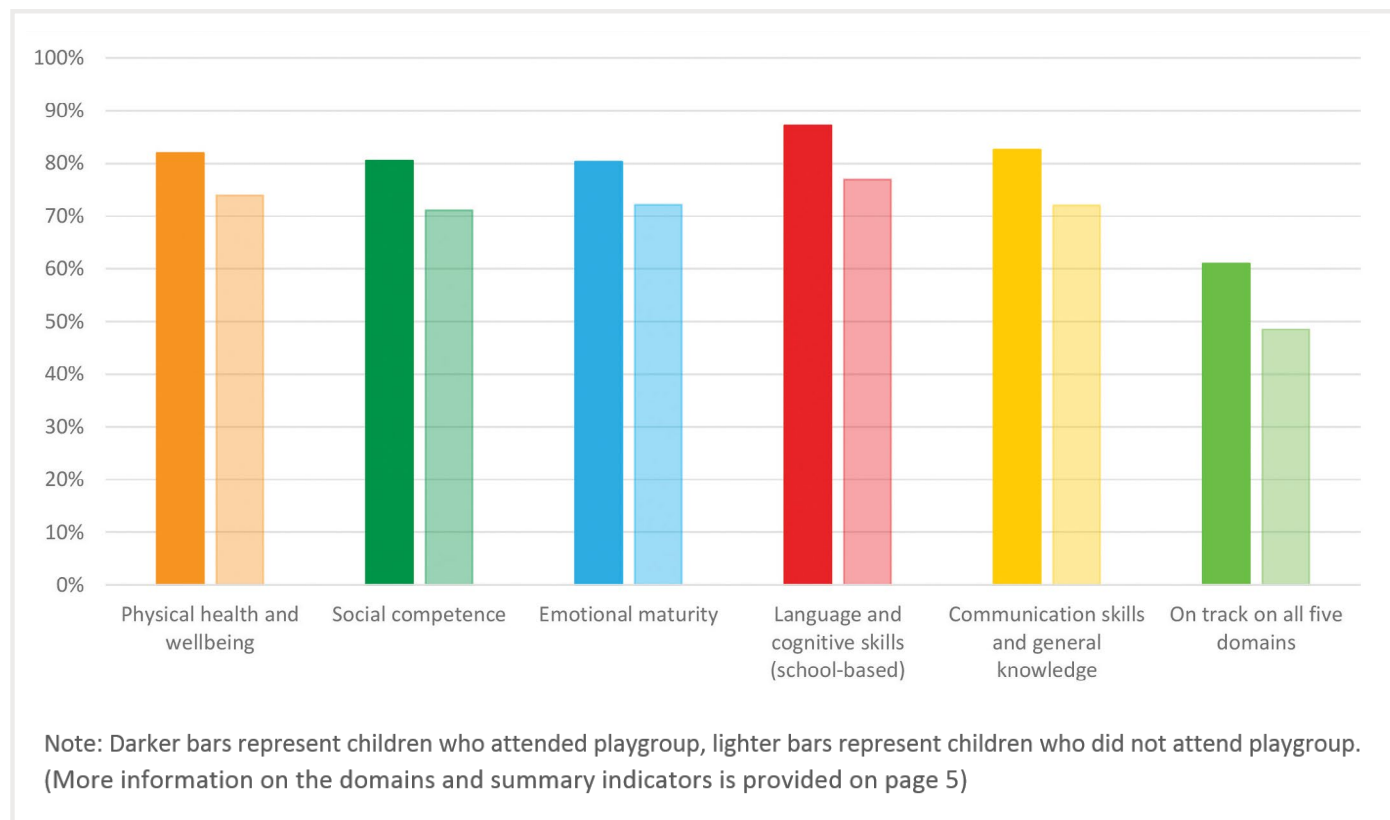


Figure 3: Percentage of children developmentally on track on each AEDC domain and summary indicator by playgroup attendance (2021 AEDC)

Parent engagement in children's learning is also associated with better development at the start of school. Most teachers report that parents are actively engaged with their child's school, and this has remained steady over time. Irrespective of socio-economic status, children whose parents are engaged in their education are more likely to be developmentally on track when they start school than those whose parents are not engaged.

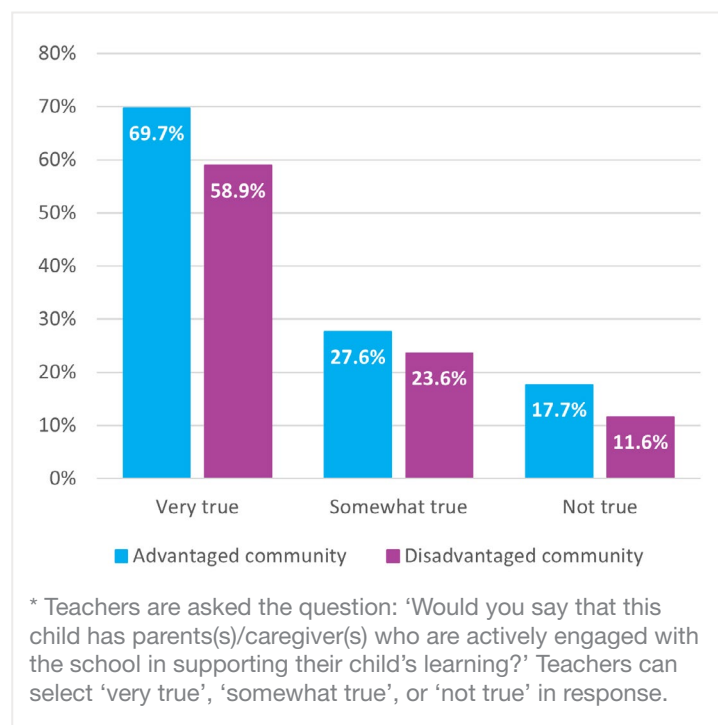


Figure 4: Percentage of children developmentally on track on all five domains by parents engaged with the school* and community socioeconomic status (2021 AEDC)

Attending preschool in the year before school supports children's early development

The important adults in children's lives influence their early development through everyday interactions. These interactions happen in a range of settings, from the home and broader community to early childhood education and care.

High quality early childhood education and care services can have a positive impact on children's development. In 2021, children in the AEDC who attended preschool in the year before school were more likely to be developmentally on track on all five domains than children who did not attend preschool.

The strongest association between preschool attendance and development was evident for children's language and cognitive skills (school-based) and communication skills and general knowledge, with slightly smaller associations seen for emotional maturity and social competence.

Preschool attendance captured in the AEDC is associated with advantages for children's development on the whole. This is consistent with previous summaries of early education and care utilisation in Australia. Importantly, research has linked the quality of these early years programs with better outcomes for children (AIHW, 2015).

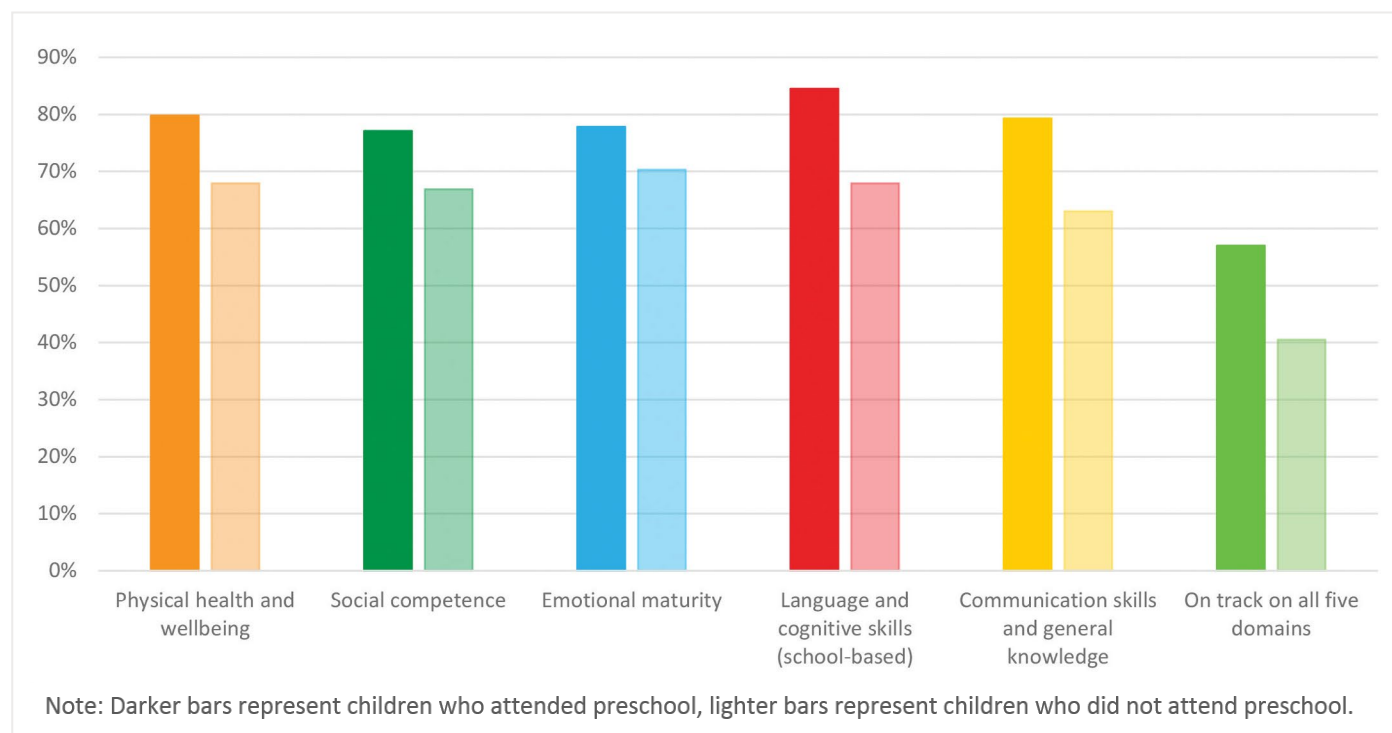


Figure 5: Percentage of children developmentally on track on each AEDC domain and summary indicator by preschool attendance (2021 AEDC)

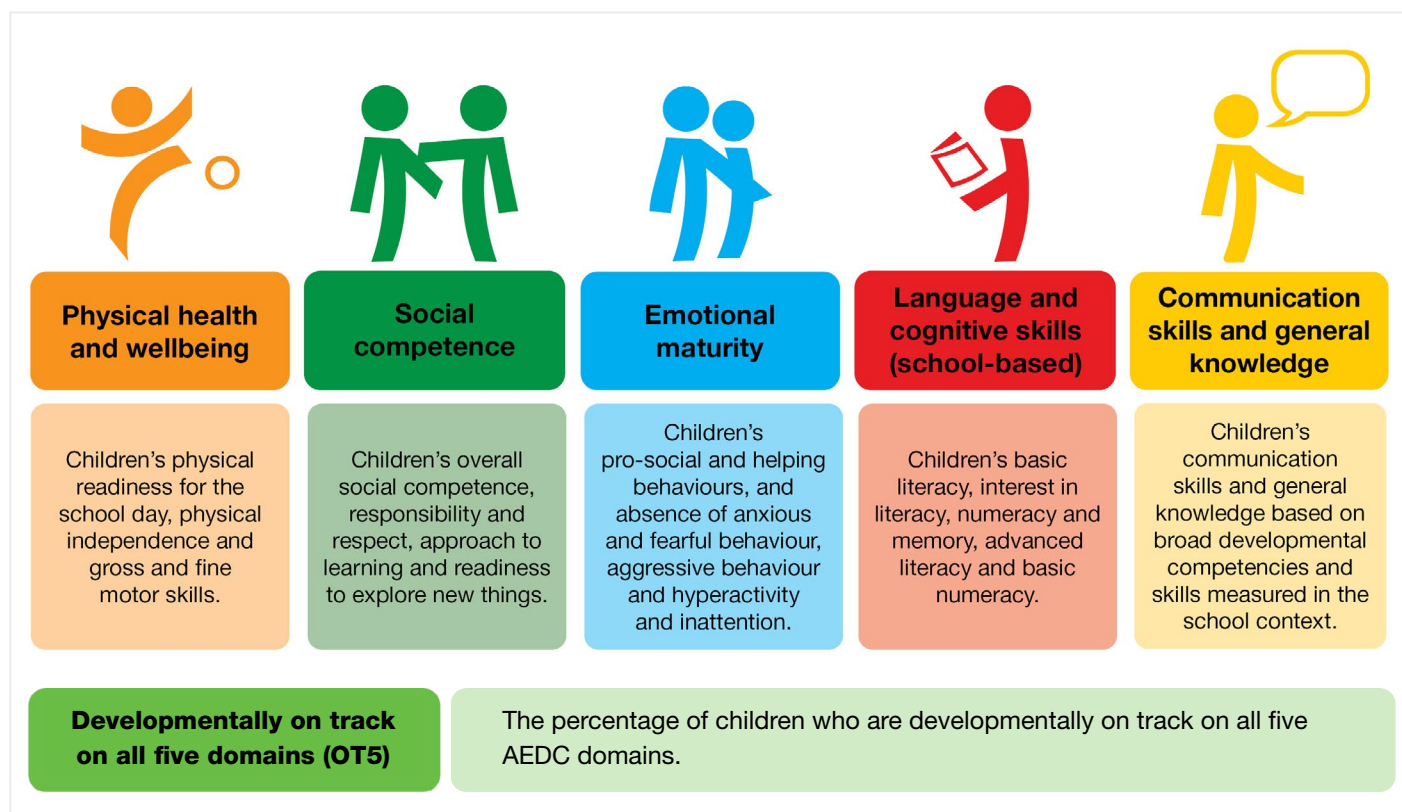


Figure 6: OT5 and the five domains of the AEDC. For more information about the AEDC domains visit [about the AEDC domains](#).

Highlights

- AEDC sheds light on factors supporting families with young children
- AEDC highlights the value of early learning experiences
- AEDC data shows the importance of parental engagement in children's early learning

Resources and information for parents and families

In Australia, parents and carers have access to a range of information and resources to support them in their roles. A starting point for finding quality support services and information are listed below.

- [Resources for parents \(aedc.gov.au\)](#)
- [Queensland Early Childhood Development Story](#)
- [Raising Children Network](#)
- Maternal child health services:
 - VIC - [Maternal and Child Health Service](#)
 - SA - [Child and Family Health Service](#)
 - WA - [Child and Adolescent Health Service](#)
 - NT - [Pregnancy, birthing & child health](#)
 - QLD - [Children's Health Queensland](#)
 - NSW - [Maternal, child and family health](#)
 - ACT - [Maternal and Child Health](#)
- Playgroup associations:
 - [Playgroup Victoria](#)
 - [Playgroup SA](#)
 - [Playgroup WA](#)
 - [Playgroup NSW](#)
 - [Play Matters Queensland](#)
 - [ACT Playgroups](#)
 - [Playgroup NT](#)
 - [Playgroup Tasmania](#)

References

AIHW. (2015). Literature review of the impact of early childhood education and care on learning and development. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra, Australia. Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/learning-development-impact-of-early-childhood-edu/summary>

ARACY (2006). Early childhood and long term development: The importance of the early years. Topical Paper. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. Available at: <https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/area?command=record&id=62>

Collier, L., Gregory, T., Dal Grande, E., & Brinkman, S. (2019). The Australian Early Childhood Education Development Experience Research Project (AECED): Exploring the association between early childhood education and care pathways and child development outcomes at school entry. Telethon Kids Institute, Adelaide, Australia. Available at: <https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/aecede-research-project-final-report>

Toumbourou, J.W., Hall, J., Varcoe J., & Leung R. (2014). Review of key risk and protective factors for child development and wellbeing (antenatal to age 25). Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. Available at: <https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/area?command=record&id=236>

For further information

About AEDC 2021 Data Stories

AEDC 2021 Data Stories provide an in-depth exploration of some of the key findings from the **2021 AEDC National Report**. This is the first issue in a series of seven AEDC data stories. The AEDC program is funded by the Australian Government. For further up-to-date information consult the AEDC website and its many resources: www.aedc.gov.au.

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About the Telethon Kids Institute

The Telethon Kids Institute is one of the largest, and most successful medical research institutes in Australia, comprising a dedicated and diverse team of more than 1,000 staff and students. Our vision is simple – happy healthy kids. We bring together community, researchers, practitioners, policy makers and funders, who share our mission to improve the health, development and lives of children and young people through excellence in research. Importantly, we want knowledge applied so it makes a difference. Our goal is to build on our success and create a research institute that makes a real difference in our community, which will benefit children and families everywhere.

www.telethonkids.org.au

About the Centre for Community Child Health

The Centre for Community Child Health is a department of The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, and a research group of the Murdoch Children's Research Institute. We strive to improve the lives of children and families.

www.rch.org.au/ccch

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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, Melbourne, and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Melbourne, and the Telethon Kids Institute, Perth 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. This AEDC Data Story was developed by the Telethon Kids Institute on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Education.