

the  
FrontProject

# Two years of preschool: **Every child. Everywhere.**

A pathway to national universal  
three-year-old preschool



November 2024

# The Front Project 2024

## Contact

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## Acknowledgement of Country

The Front Project respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and learn, and pay respect to Elders, past and present. Sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.



## Acknowledgements

This case study was developed as part of the Educational and Developmental Gains in Early Childhood (EDGE) study. EDGE is an independent evaluation of the development and roll out of three-year-old kindergarten in Victoria. It is a collaboration between the University of Melbourne and The Front Project and is funded by the Paul Ramsay Foundation and the Ian Potter Foundation.

VISION

Children, families and communities are thriving

ACCESS

Two years of preschool - Every child. Everywhere.

CONDITIONS

Responsive to all children's learning, development and wellbeing

Quality settings that support access and flexibility

Minimum learning entitlement

Degree qualified early childhood teacher and specialist supports

Community and parent support pathways

CAPABILITY

**Inclusion and support**  
Assessment and response  
Inclusive  
Culturally responsive

**Infrastructure**  
Quality environments  
Accessible  
Capacity - places

**Quality**  
Structural and process  
Practice and inclusion

**Workforce**  
Qualifications, scholarships, mentoring  
Conditions

**Wraparound supports**  
Connection to supports, resources, and interventions

CONTROLS

Mechanisms to manage pressure and pace

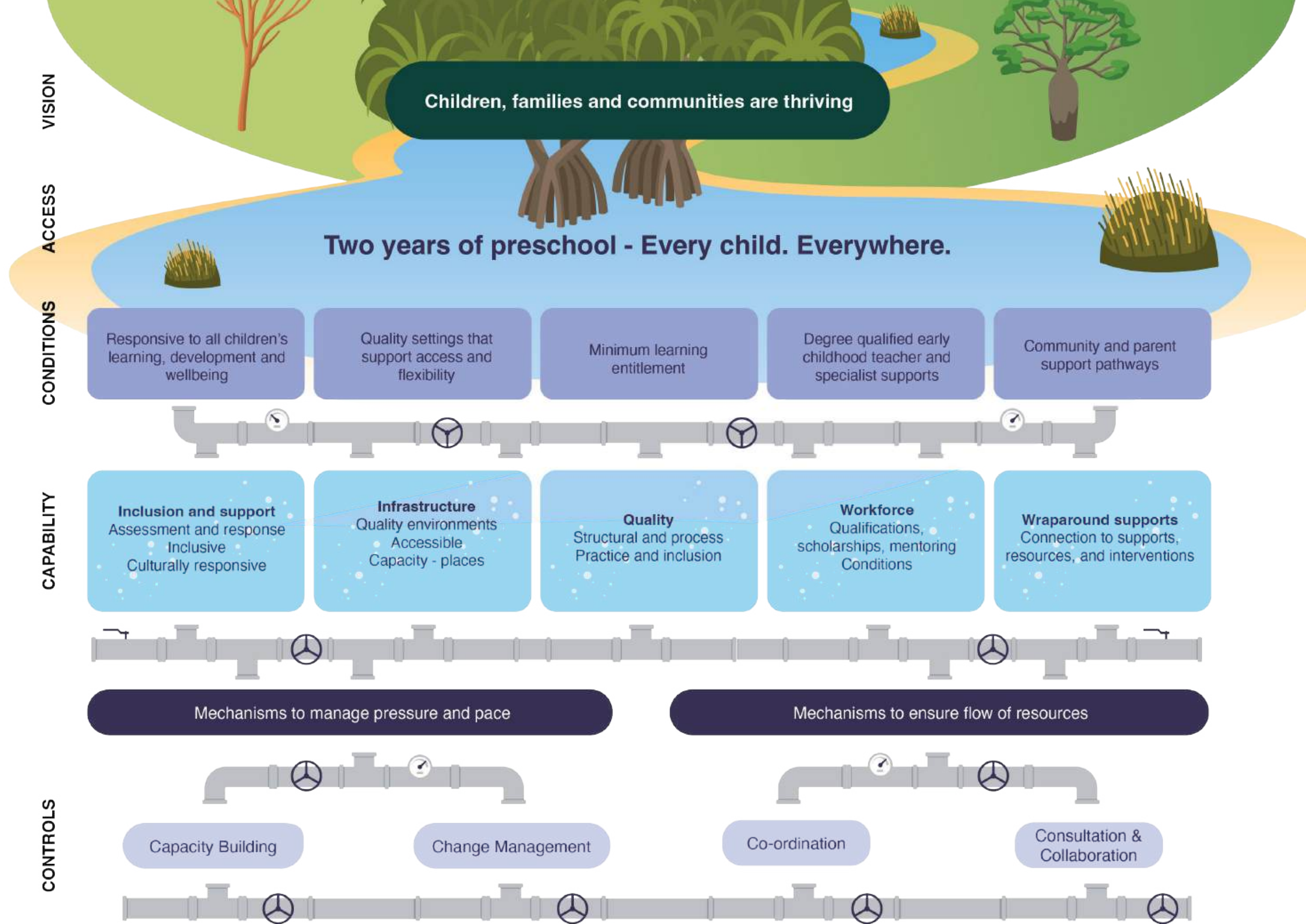
Mechanisms to ensure flow of resources

Capacity Building

Change Management

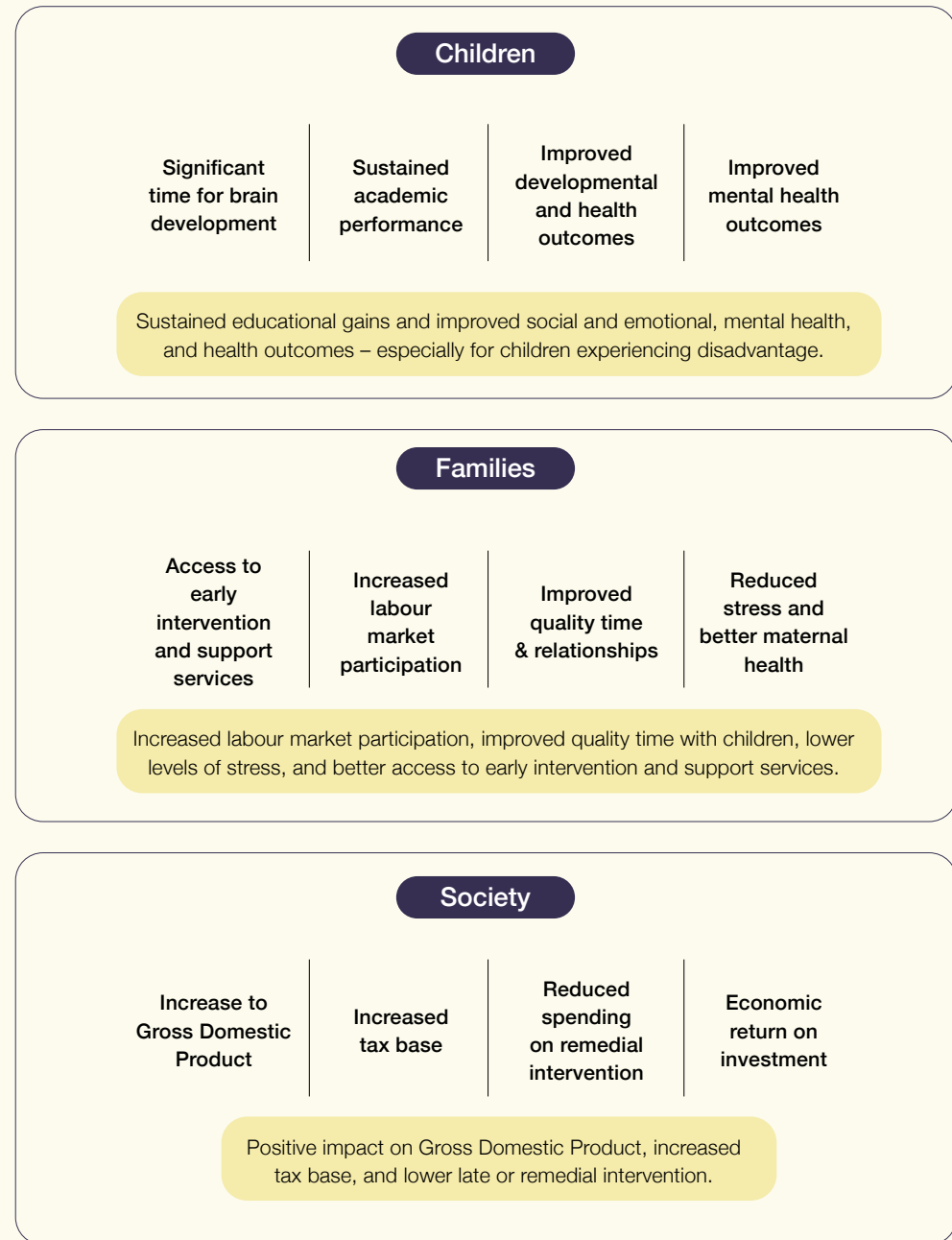
Co-ordination

Consultation & Collaboration



# Quality preschool supports children, families and communities to thrive

High-quality early childhood education and care has immediate and lasting benefits for children, families, and communities. Two years of quality preschool in the years before formal schooling is an investment in universal education with transformative potential. Two years of preschool: every child. everywhere. outlines a vision for two years of high-quality, accessible, and universal preschool naming some of the core conditions, capability and capacities required, and the controls needed to deliver for every child, everywhere.





# Australia has strong foundations to build on

Australia has a National Preschool Reform Agreement that sets out the relationship between the federal and state and territory governments in progressing universal preschool for at least 15 hours, delivered across settings by a qualified early childhood teacher for all children in the year before formal schooling. The reform agreement establishes minimum standards and a common understanding of preschool in Australia, however, jurisdictions are increasingly acknowledging broader conditions required to support access to preschool for children and families and that recognise and respond to children's learning, development and wellbeing requirements. These foundations can be built on to articulate a strong vision and conditions for delivering high quality, accessible and universal three year old preschool that delivers a minimum learning entitlement that is inclusive and responsive to all children's learning, development and wellbeing, delivered in quality settings that support access and

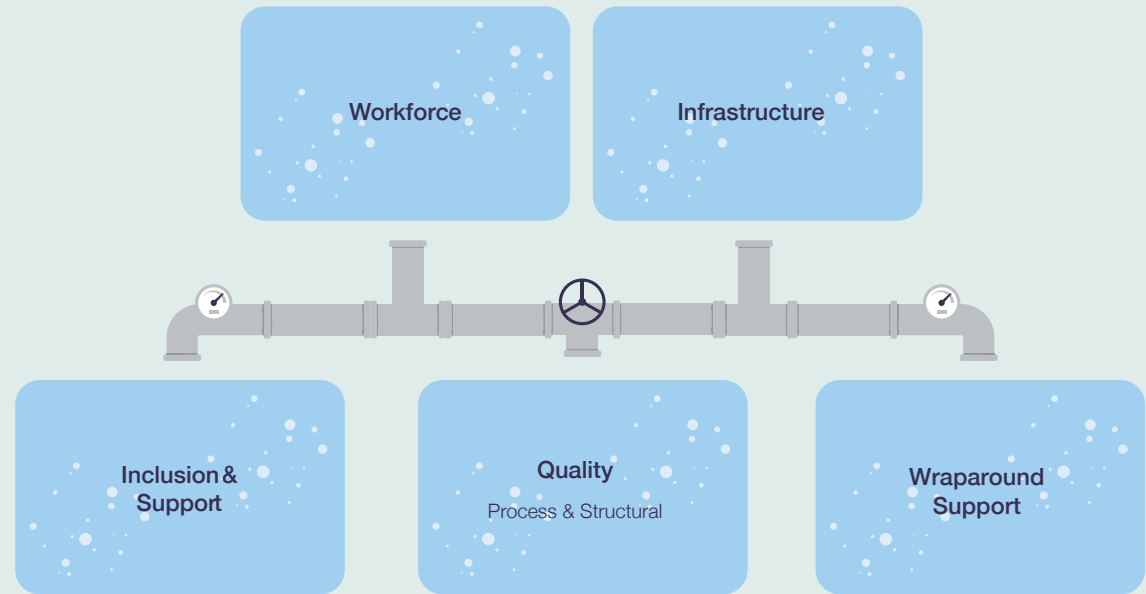
flexibility by degree qualified teachers with access to specialist supports and that provides pathways to family and community supports.

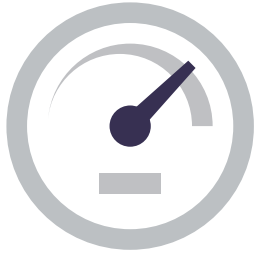
Progressing two years of quality preschool is a progressive step towards larger scale reforms, for example those described in the Productivity Commission Inquiry into ECEC draft recommendations. These recommendations propose a national partnership for ECEC and progressing a child-level entitlement of three days of quality ECEC for every child along with structures such as National Partnership Agreements and an ECEC Commission to progress and oversee reforms. Extending the existing National Preschool Reform Agreement to three-year-old children would deliver half of the three days/thirty hours proposed as the child level entitlement in the Productivity Commission's draft recommendations. Broader reforms focussed on building the necessary foundations and conditions for quality preschool alongside increased entitlements are imperative for success.



# Reform requires the system to develop its capability

Delivering the outcomes of quality preschool to the standards needed for children and the broader community to thrive will require capabilities within both the ECEC and surrounding systems. There are five key areas of capability on which reform rests including the workforce (qualifications, professional learning, recognition and conditions), quality (ratios, qualifications, settings, practices and inclusion), infrastructure (enough places where they are needed, quality environments, and accessible), inclusion and support (assessment and interventions focussed on children's learning development and wellbeing), and wraparound support (connection to community supports for families).





## Control mechanisms help to manage the flow, pace and pressure of reform

The following elements have been drawn from key findings of Implementing Large-scale Social Policy Reform: Three-year-old kindergarten roll-out in Victoria, which examined the conditions for and stages of implementing three-year-old kindergarten in Victoria. While there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to implementing large-scale policy reform, the learnings from this work offer insights for planning.

### Capacity building

Government needed to work with the entire sector to deliver three-year-old kindergarten at the scale required. There was an intentional capacity building approach adopted in Victoria, which focussed on articulating the capacity required in the system to deliver reforms as well as building capacity within and across government and the broader ECEC sector. The success of the reform relied on capacity in the areas of workforce, infrastructure, and quality. This set the agenda for capacity building and the directed the new relationships required to progress it. This was reflected in the structures of government and the authorising environment as well as in processes adopted by departments that interfaced with DE, for example, planning and building authorities. Understanding the different conditions, strengths and barriers across different regions was also an important element of capacity building.

Operating with a clear understanding of the gap between current capacity and that required to deliver the reforms, enabled targeted effort to build the capacity of the existing system. Relationships and funding agreements were structured to deliver the critical elements of the reform while being informed by the contextual and operating knowledge of the sector. While there were requirements that needed to be met to deliver three-year-old preschool, the rollout enabled service delivery to be scaled based on an accurate understanding of the capacity needs of the service landscape.

### Change management

Implementing large-scale reform of this kind requires significant change and communication across a range of stakeholders and interest groups.

The case study highlighted structures that were developed to support change management including effectively communicating the change and a shared understandings of service delivery requirements. Additional processes were embedded that supported joint assessment, planning, and resource allocation were deployed to support services and providers to respond within their capacity allowing different approaches that apply local knowledge and insights while being consistent with the overall aims of the project. The staged implementation of the reform enabled government, stakeholders, and interest groups to prepare for reforms and to learn from earlier stages of implementation.

### Coordination

The case study identified the role that DE took up in coordinating resources that extended beyond the design stage into the delivery of the reforms. This coordinating role was adopted across a broad group of stakeholders in the sector and in and outside of government. The role of coordination spanned roles in building the evidence base, assessing capacity, needs analysis, and developing centralised processes (such as central enrolment). Services and providers entered agreements and relationships with DE that enable them to coordinate access to three-year-old kindergarten in ways that were not previously available.

### Consultation and collaboration

Consultation and collaboration with stakeholders and interest groups was critical to understanding the complexity and diversity of the operating environment, addressing emerging issues and establishing processes. This was particularly important because the reforms relied heavily on the sector to deliver them.



# Jurisdiction Maps

The table below maps examples from different jurisdictions to the areas of capability identified as necessary to deliver the condition of quality preschool for three-year-old children. This is followed by a series of guiding questions for policy makers to consider their approach in relation to the conditions for quality and the enabling control mechanisms identified through the examination of Victoria's large-scale kindergarten reforms. The jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction map outlines each state and territory's overarching approach to early learning, their specific offering (if applicable) for three-year-olds, and analysis of progress towards each of the core conditions in our vision of quality preschool. Once again, these specifically include relevant government programs, initiatives and funding that aim to deliver in the areas of infrastructure, quality, workforce, inclusion, and wraparound supports.





# Current national three-year-old offer



## Australian Capital Territory

3-year-olds in the ACT can access 6 hours per week of free preschool delivered by a degree-qualified ECT.

## New South Wales

Currently trialling its approach to supporting "three-year-old" preschool delivery through its Start Strong program, which provides \$500 fee relief per year to families of 3-year-olds accessing a quality early childhood program. Families of three-year-old children can access \$4,220 per year in fee relief for community and mobile preschools.

## Northern Territory

Access to free "3-year-old" preschool is limited to selected cohorts; namely, children in very remote areas and only under certain circumstances (such as in the presence of a parent/carer).

## Queensland

Targeted funding through the KindyLinQ program supporting "3-year-olds" in 40 identified locations to attend in the year before kindergarten.

## South Australia

Implementing universal preschool for 3-year-old children by 2032 following its Royal Commission into ECEC. Currently trialling out of hours preschool scheme, Kindy Care. Beginning in government-run out of school hours care, across 20 trial sites. Aboriginal children and children in care can access preschool from age 3 for 15 hours per week.

## Tasmania

Targeted funding for 20 hours of free early learning per week to families of 3-year-olds in select cohorts. Current trial providing 20 hours a week of free access to early learning in ECEC settings, with additional wraparound supports in select regions in 2024.

## Victoria

Progressively providing up to 15 hours of three-year-old kindergarten.

## Western Australia

No current universal preschool for 3-year-olds. The KindiLink scheme provides 6 hours per week for 3-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, delivered via 38 public schools.

# Examples of capacity building effort across jurisdictions

CAPABILITIES



Victoria's School Readiness Funding (SRF) framework supports inclusive early learning by providing additional needs-based funding to services based on families' socioeconomic status. Allocated funding is spent on items from an evidence-informed inclusion-focussed menu, including programs, supports, and services that target speech, language, and literacy, or improve the social and emotional wellbeing of children.

The South Australian Royal Commission findings adopted a definition of preschool that includes a focus on developing a suite of funded interventions that respond early to the identification of children's additional developmental needs.

New South Wales has announced 100 new public preschools to be built by 2027, alongside funding commitments to upgrade non-government preschools and support growth of not-for-profit services in areas of high demand.

Victoria's Building Blocks initiatives includes building kindergartens on school sites along with grants and planning initiatives to support infrastructure growth, development and improvement. In addition, the Victorian Government has committed to building 50 government owned and operated Early Learning and Child Care services.

South Australia has developed a 20-year infrastructure plan that focuses on building new facilities to meet demands, targeted uplifts leveraging existing infrastructure, and maintaining quality assets.

Queensland's Kindy Uplift planning and funding process supports services to enhance quality across multiple practice areas, including cultural safety, inclusion, and pedagogical focus on literacy and numeracy.

In conjunction with ACECQA, in 2019 NSW introduced a colour-coded star rating scheme, allowing families to easily recognise services of differing quality level.

ACT and the NT are pursuing legislative avenues to implement professional registration of early childhood teachers; a move that will enhance professional identity.

Victoria, ACT, and the NT have all made moves towards introducing a portable long service leave scheme for early learning staff.

WA has allocated funding to allow local government areas to encourage workforce attraction and retention by way of financial incentives.

Fast-track qualification programs.

Tasmania's Early Learning for Three Year Olds ('EL3') initiative, being trialled in selected regions in 2024, provides 20 hours per week of free access to early learning in ECEC settings, supplemented by and connecting to wraparound supports.



# Questions for policymakers

CONTROLS

## Inclusion and support

### Mechanisms to manage pressure and pace



Capacity Building

Change Management

### Mechanisms to ensure flow of resources



Co-ordination

Consultation & Collaboration

#### Understanding the current need

- What data is available or collected at local, regional and jurisdictional levels to understand early intervention needs and demand?
- How is this data used and shared to inform service planning, particularly in the early learning and early childhood development contexts?
- What is the investment in upskilling existing educator workforce?
- What is the investment in growing the specialist workforce to provide supports in ECEC?

#### Establishing and communicating expectations

- Are current community attitudes and expectations relating to early intervention understood at community, regional and jurisdictional levels?
- Are early intervention expectations and demands understood across services at a local, regional and jurisdictional level?

#### Connecting resources and initiatives and pacing change relative to priorities

- How are children's inclusion needs identified, understood and prioritised at local, regional and jurisdictional levels?
- Are resources and responses aimed at strengthening early intervention pathways in ECEC settings coordinated at a community, regional or jurisdictional level?
- Is there funding and resource equity for children across settings and service types?

#### Relationship that identify challenges and support implementation

- What consultative frameworks do you manage that facilitate conversations about early intervention between various stakeholder groups?
- Are community level demand and priorities understood relative to broader initiatives?
- What are the challenges currently faced across different providers, service settings and types?



# Questions for policymakers

CONTROLS

## Infrastructure

### Mechanisms to manage pressure and pace



Capacity Building

Change Management

### Mechanisms to ensure flow of resources



Co-ordination

Consultation & Collaboration

#### Understanding the current need

- Do current infrastructure settings meet existing and projected demand for preschool?
- Is current capacity spread across service types or is it service type specific?
- Where are areas of higher demand relative to infrastructure capacity?
- Are infrastructure needs in any of these areas of demand addressable by leveraging and developing existing assets/structures (as opposed to requiring the construction of entirely new settings)?

#### Establishing and communicating expectations

- Do you have a plan for communicating with the sector and the community about infrastructure implications of an expanded preschool offering?
- How is demand and usage understood at a community, regional and jurisdictional level when planning new infrastructure projects - and what learnings could you apply from this broader context to preschool expansion plans?

#### Connecting resources and initiatives and pacing change relative to priorities

- What structures or bodies do you have in place to support communities in identifying and addressing infrastructure needs relating to the provision of early learning services?
- What role does central government play in coordinating policy design, reform, community and sector engagement, and service delivery?
- Are local authorities coordinated in their approaches to development, rollout and redeployment of infrastructure?

#### Relationship that identify challenges and support implementation

- Do communities and service providers have a clearly defined and accessible mechanism through which to communicate and share their views on early learning infrastructure needs?





# Questions for policymakers

CONTROLS

## Quality

Mechanisms to manage pressure and pace



Capacity Building

Change Management

Mechanisms to ensure flow of resources



Co-ordination

Consultation & Collaboration

Understanding the current need

- Do you have a clear understanding of the quality of current preschool delivery?
- What level of community, regional and jurisdictional information is available in relation to quality gaps and improvement requirements?

Establishing and communicating expectations

- Do you have a clear definition and expectations of minimum conditions for quality preschool (as distinct from ECEC)?
- Are definitions and expectations of quality shared at a community, regional and jurisdictional level?
- Do expectations align between parents, providers and government departments?

Connecting resources and initiatives and pacing change relative to priorities

- What approaches are coordinated at community, regional and jurisdictional levels to resource and respond to priority quality needs?
- How do you engage with services and providers in relation to matters of quality improvement?

Relationship that identify challenges and support implementation

- How do you consult and collaborate with the early learning sector and the community on the connection between service quality and children's outcomes?



# Questions for policymakers

## Workforce

CONTROLS

### Mechanisms to manage pressure and pace



Capacity Building

Change Management

### Mechanisms to ensure flow of resources



Co-ordination

Consultation & Collaboration

#### Understanding the current need

- Do you have a clear understanding of current workforce capacity, at various geographic levels?
- What specific initiatives have you introduced, or are considering, to help boost ECEC workforce numbers – particularly of degree-qualified teachers?
- What specific initiatives have you introduced to help upskill existing ECEC staff (e.g. from Diploma to Bachelor's qualifications), and to enhance morale and sense of professional identity, and address retention issues?

#### Establishing and communicating expectations

- Have you identified whether workforce capacity differs across settings in which early learning is currently delivered?
- Have you engaged with the workforce across different settings, to understand how specific industrial and pedagogical conditions may enhance staff morale and retention in an expanded preschool context?

#### Connecting resources and initiatives and pacing change relative to priorities

- Have you engaged other stakeholders in the pursuit of building capacity in the early learning workforce? (e.g. universities, training providers, unions, etc.)

#### Relationship that identify challenges and support implementation

- How will, or do, you ensure that the perspectives of the early learning workforce (on a broad range of issues, including industrial conditions but also pedagogy and quality, etc) are sought and acted on?



# Questions for policymakers

CONTROLS

## Wraparound supports

### Mechanisms to manage pressure and pace



Capacity Building

Change Management

### Mechanisms to ensure flow of resources



Co-ordination

Consultation & Collaboration

#### Understanding the current need

- What is known about the capacity and gaps of wraparound supports and services required to ensure strong ECD outcomes for children?
- What plans do you have to build new, or strengthen existing, capacity in these areas?

#### Establishing and communicating expectations

- Are there communication channels in place that connect relevant service provider to preschool services?
- What level of cross-sector engagement occurs at community, regional and jurisdictional delivery levels?
- Are there shared understandings and expectations about providing wraparound support.

#### Connecting resources and initiatives and pacing change relative to priorities

- How do you facilitate conversations between health, education and disability portfolios?
- What mechanisms exist to connect services and referral pathways?
- Do data sharing arrangements support connections between different service providers?

#### Relationship that identify challenges and support implementation

- Do community, regional and jurisdictional forums exist that promote consultation and collaboration between stakeholder groups across the early learning and broader support systems?



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