



Community
Child Care

Vision into Practice

2022–2032

ROADMAP FOR EDUCATION AND CARE: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Community Child Care Association (CCC) acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of this nation and the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work. We recognise their continuing connection to culture, land, water and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge the strength of family connection and kinship within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their ongoing dedication to educating and caring for children. Sovereignty of these lands was never ceded.



Artwork by Yorta Yorta and Gunnai artist Dixon Patten. It depicts the cultural learning journey Community Child Care Association is on. Get the full story in our [Reconciliation Action Plan](#).

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WHY WE NEED THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

There is nothing more important than giving our children the best possible start in life.

Our 2022–2032 roadmap for education and care strives for every child in every community to reach their full potential within 10 years. By 2032, we hope to see that all Australian children can access high-quality education and care services regardless of where they live.

Our roadmap's aspirations, actions and methods of measuring success for a brighter future are rooted in theory and evidence. In this paper, we explore the research supporting our four advocacy signposts:

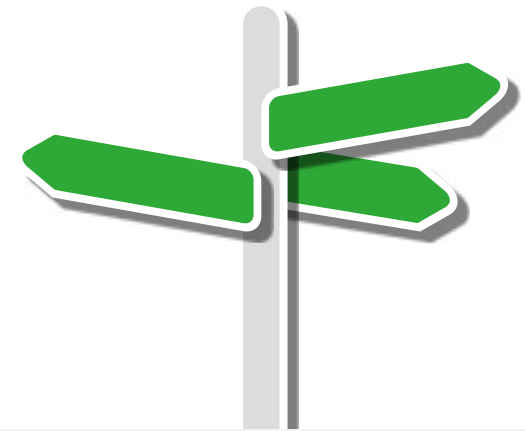
1. Access for all
2. Quality education and care
3. An empowered workforce
4. Sector sustainability

At CCC, we use Theory of Change models to illustrate the thinking behind our programs and the causal chains we anticipate will lead to positive impacts. The Theory of Change approach allows evaluators to move beyond quantitative measurements of *how much* – it enables them to determine qualitative and theory-building knowledge of *how and why* impacts occurred, and for *whom*. This has benefits not just for an organisation, but for the whole of society.



OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

2022-2032 ROADMAP FOR EDUCATION AND CARE



ASPIRATION

An Australia where every child can enjoy the proven benefits of education and care.

ENABLERS

Expertise

With the extensive experience of our staff and partners combined with evidence-based practices, we will develop customised solutions to emerging and entrenched problems in the sector.

Communication

Using engaging, clear, and accurate messaging, we will be a conduit between the sector, the wider community and governments. Our transparency will facilitate mutual trust and cooperation.

Collaboration

We will support stakeholders to collaborate, share resources and communicate. In a spirit of mutual intentions alongside First Nations organisations and sector stakeholders, we will maximise our collective knowledge and experience to create effective solutions and magnify our reach and voice.

Co-operation and funding

The success of the advocacy roadmap relies on the cooperation and commitment of governments and our partnerships with sector stakeholders. Achieving our mutual goals requires secure ongoing funding and commitment.

ACTIONS

Develop or co-design tools models and solutions

Explore and promote appropriate quality-focused resources for the sector

Representation in decision making

Shift public mindsets

Responsive action that meets current and emerging needs of teachers and educators

Build collaborative partnerships

Stand alongside First Nations people

Influence policymakers

Leverage community-owned not-for-profit governance models

SIGNPOSTS

Access for all

Quality education and care

An empowered workforce

Sector sustainability

MEASURES

Free, universal early education and outside school hours care for all

- Free education and care services
- An effective funding model
- First Nations-specific services where children can learn and develop in culturally-safe settings
- Each child and every family feels that they belong in education and care

A high-quality sector that prioritises the voices of children

- Contextual: Education and care is localised to meet the specific needs of each community
- Ethical: Children's voices are heard and children's best interests come first
- Political: Outcomes are measurable and assessable to justify public investment and highlight quality improvement
- Relational: Respect is shown between educators, families, children and communities
- Meaningful: The sector is easily understood and valued by the Australian community
- Aesthetical: Beauty, creativity and the natural environment are valued in education and care settings
- Accountable: Individuals/providers are responsible for outcomes

Our workforce is valued and supported

- Highly qualified: There are clear career pathways, more degree qualifications available, and support for micro-credentials and additional skills training
- Well remunerated: There is a national industrial instrument with pay and conditions that reflect the skills and responsibilities required, and is comparable with other sectors requiring equal or comparable skills and responsibilities
- Well resourced, appropriately supported: There is a funded employee assistance program (EAP), subsidised professional learning, diversity support and appropriate staff:child ratios
- Valued and respected: Families, communities, policymakers and politicians acknowledge and respect the value education and care adds to society

Not-for-profit and community-owned and managed services that are valued by government and community and are appropriately resourced to support future generations

- Government investment in not-for-profit and community-owned and managed services
- Community-owned and managed services in every community
- A robust planning system that ensures services meet the specific needs of their communities

IMPACT

Free, universal early education and care and OSHC for all.



Community-owned and managed services in every community.



A high-quality sector that prioritises the voices of children.



Our workforce is valued and supported.



Early education and care and OSHC are valued by our government and community. They will thrive to support future generations.

OUR SIGNPOSTS AND THE RESEARCH THAT UNDERPINS THEM

Our roadmap includes four signposts that will guide us as we transform our vision for the Australian early and middle years education and care sector into reality.

Signpost 1: Access for all

The voices of children, and their identities as agency-holders and change-makers, is integral to the pursuit of our advocacy work. Every child has the right to education, to play and to access environments that support their healthy development (UNICEF 1989). To improve the health, wellbeing and learning outcomes of every child across Australia, we need to provide universal access to funded, high-quality early childhood and outside school hours care services, which support the specific needs of each child and each community. This will create a healthier society, both now and in the future.

Each year, over 60,000 Australian children are assessed as being developmentally vulnerable when they start school (Australian Early Development Census 2018). Due to missing out on vital years of early learning in education and care services, many children begin school behind their peers and often aren't able to catch up. Children from families experiencing economic disadvantage, those living in rural and remote parts of Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are most among those missing out.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, there can be significant barriers – including cost, racism and concerns for cultural safety – to their access to and participation in education and care

services (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2020). More services specifically designed to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families must be developed, so that all children and families feel welcome and have their culture recognised and valued.

Society is healthier when investments are made in children (OECD 2019). In addition to supporting healthy development and learning outcomes for children, fairer access to education and care means more families – especially, more women – will have the opportunity to engage in paid work. In 2021, 67,800 people were not available to start a job or work more hours within four weeks – the predominant reason women were unavailable to start work was 'caring for children' (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020).

Affordable, accessible early learning provides essential support for Australian children, families and communities. By providing universal access to free, high-quality early education and care, we can ensure all children will experience the lifelong benefits that come with it, especially those who are most in need. All children deserve the chance to reach their full potential, regardless of their background, their family's income or where they live.



Signpost 2: Quality education and care

High-quality education and care plays a vital role in supporting a child's healthy development and wellbeing, with positive, lasting impacts beyond the early years. High-quality experiences and interactions with teachers and educators help children develop new skills, such as communication, behaviour regulation and social interaction, well before they begin school (Centre for Policy Development 2021).

The positive impacts of quality service provision in education and care have flow-on effects for families and communities. The economic return on investments made by governments in early education is significant – for every dollar invested now, Australia receives two dollars back over a child's life (The Front Project 2019). This return is greatest for children experiencing disadvantage (Pascoe & Brenan 2017).

The quality of education and care services in Australia varies greatly. In rural or remote areas of Australia, there are not enough high-quality education and care services to support the needs of families (Centre for Policy Development 2021). The communities with the highest proportion of children who do not arrive at school ready to learn are the same communities that have the highest proportions of early childhood services that do not meet national standards (Lamb 2015).

Universal access to early education and care is a key measure proven to reduce vulnerability and increase equality across societies. Governments must ensure that there are high-quality services that meet the needs of children and families and that are affordable and available in all communities.



Signpost 3: An empowered workforce

The attraction and retention of staff – a long-standing challenge for our sector – has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and is now at a critical point. A skilled, stable and respected workforce is paramount to ensuring high quality and sustainability for our sector and delivering improved outcomes for all Australian children.

Educator wellbeing and work environments are instrumental in ensuring high quality (Cumming, Wong & Logan 2021). Improving the pay and conditions of educators and teachers is vital for ensuring a professional and committed workforce. In the not-for-profit sector, wages and conditions for educators are generally better than in for-profit services, with many services paying above award rates. For not-for-profits, this can mean up to 80 per cent of their income is spent on staff wages (Warrilow, P, Graham, N & Robertson, C 2021).

Workforce turnover is generally higher in privately-owned, for-profit services, with 58 per cent of services with this management type reporting turnover having increased or greatly increased (Community Early Learning Australia, Early Learning Association Australia & Community Child Care Association 2021).

There is a growing body of research highlighting the connection between early childhood educators' and teachers' professional identities and how cultural discourse about 'just care' and low qualifications undermine their sense of professionalism. UNICEF's 'Where do rich countries stand on childcare?' report recommends that 'investment is made in the education and care workforce, their qualifications and their working conditions, to encourage the highest possible standards' (Gromada, A & Richardson, D 2021).

A National Industrial Instrument that improves pay and conditions for educators is the most effective tool for resolving the most pressing concerns facing our workforce. Nearly half of all job vacancies in education and care settings remained unfilled in early 2021, with services suggesting it was mostly the poor pay and conditions contributing to a lack of applicants (Community Early Learning Australia, Early Learning Association Australia & Community Child Care Association 2021).



Signpost 4: Sector sustainability

All Australian families need – and deserve – to have access to affordable, high-quality education and care for their children in their communities. Australia is well-resourced. We can choose to make the investment in the long-term sustainability of education and care in this country. By deciding to value the education and care sector and incorporating education and care into key government policies, we will see positive, long-term effects on children, families and communities.

Our sector is facing significant viability pressure, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Centre for Policy Development 2021; Hurley, Matthews & Pennicuik 2022; Noble & Hurley 2021). The amount of community-owned and managed services, which produce the best quality outcomes for children, are diminishing (Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority 2022). Education and care services need ongoing government and financial support if they are to remain viable.

There is no coordinated approach to infrastructure investment in community-owned and not-for-profit education and care (Centre for Policy Development 2021). Piecemeal funding and an overheated property market mean many communities are

missing out (Community Child Care Association, Community Early Learning Australia & Early Learning Association Australia 2022; Centre for Policy Development 2021; Hurley, Matthews & Pennicuik 2022; Morrissey & Moore 2021). Government support is needed to ensure good governance and infrastructure are delivered across the sector.

Community-owned and managed, not-for-profit education and care services are more affordable and accessible for families than for profit-services (Bray et al. 2021). With government investment, it is possible to ensure the longevity of the not-for-profit sector for future generations of children and families. By establishing community-owned and managed education and care services in new and growing communities, the sector could continue to grow and flourish.

Sustainability for the sector must be secured without increasing the cost for families. The Australian Government needs to play a lead role in planning for the sustainability of the sector by encouraging community-based services to be opened where they are needed – and ensuring they are appropriately supported by ongoing funding.

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