



Municipal Early Years Plan 2014 to 2018

Appendix 3 – Government Policy

Funded by Whitehorse Council.
Prepared by the Whitehorse MEYP Reference Group.

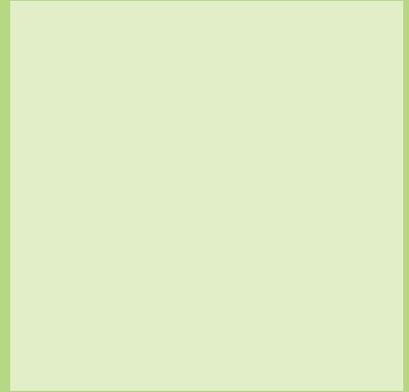
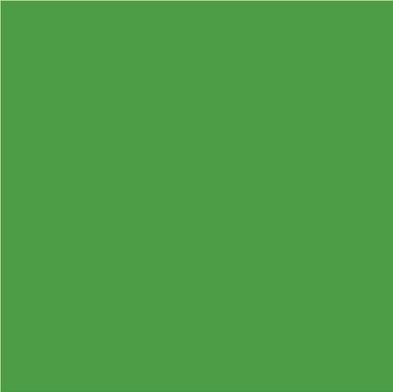


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1. Context

1.1 The importance of the early years – international research

The importance of the early years on the long-term development and health and wellbeing of individuals and the community is well documented with a substantial body of evidence to suggest that the early years of a child's life are the most critical in influencing child development.

Research indicates that from the minute children are born they learn and from then on their learning and development at each stage of life forms the foundation, competence and coping skills that will affect lifelong learning, behaviour and health. In addition, the period from birth to eight years is characterised by more rapid brain development. At this stage children acquire more skills and knowledge than in any other period in their lives (DEECD, 2009b).

The capacity for risk and protective factors to shape children's development is also widely acknowledged in the research. This means that children exposed to multiple risk factors become vulnerable to developmental problems of health, learning and wellbeing, whereas those exposed to protective factors are more likely to develop resilience and a greater capacity to overcome environmental adversities.

A holistic view of child development is important with recognition of the impact of risk and protective factors at multiple levels including family, neighbourhood, community and economic. A focus on building child and family-friendly communities will support the reduction of factors that place children at risk and promote those that protect children. Participation in quality early childhood services has been identified as particularly effective in reducing the impact of disadvantage, often associated with exposure to risk factors.

The evidence also shows that the economic returns on investment in the early years are much higher than when children are older. In addition, intervention to promote development in early childhood has been shown to reduce the effects of disadvantage, increase educational attainment, reduce crime and promote later workforce productivity (Centre for Community Child Health, 2006).

1.2 Key policy frameworks

Policy and practice developments in the early years are considerable with the early childhood sector experiencing marked reform in recent years at both the national and state level. Key developments such as the national approach to quality and regulation of early childhood education and care through the National Quality Framework, and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, are designed to enhance all children's learning and development from birth to eight years of age.

2. Federal Government

Through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), all Australian Governments have committed to making early childhood an area for national reform. COAG's reform agenda includes action to:

- Address early childhood workforce issues.
- Establish a national Early Years Learning Framework.
- Create a national approach to quality and regulation of early childhood education and child care through the National Quality Framework (DEEWR, 2012) that took effect on 1 January 2012 with key requirements such as qualifications, educator-to-child ratios and other key staffing arrangements phased in between 2012 and 2020.
- Improve data and performance information in early childhood.
- Develop a national early childhood development strategy.

Key Federal policy frameworks for the early years include:

- *The National Early Childhood Development Strategy - Investing in the Early Years* (COAG, 2009). In jointly developing the Strategy, the Australian, state and territory governments signalled their intention to take a leadership role in early childhood development now and into the future. It covers children from before birth to eight years and aims to improve the health, safety, early learning and wellbeing of all children and better support disadvantaged children to reduce inequalities.
- *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The National Early Years Learning Framework* (DEEWR, 2009), that underpins universal access to early childhood education, and will ensure the delivery of nationally consistent and quality early education.
- *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* (FAHCSIA, 2009). In April 2009 COAG endorsed the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020. The Framework aims to achieve a substantial and sustained reduction in child abuse and neglect in Australia over time. Under the Framework all families should have access to universal supports, such as education and health care. Those families requiring more assistance should be able to access more intensive prevention interventions. Tertiary interventions, such as Child Protection, are seen as a last resort.
- *My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia* (DEEWR, 2011) another key component of the COAG's national reform agenda for childhood education and care. It has been incorporated in the National Quality Standard in order to ensure delivery of nationally consistent and quality school age care across sectors and jurisdictions.
- In addition, to the above policy frameworks, the Productivity Commission *Early Childhood Development Workforce Research Report 2011* outlines findings and recommendations to guide the future development of the early childhood workforce required to underpin the nationally agreed reforms. In particular, guidance is provided on

the provision of quality early childhood education and care services to children with additional needs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children in rural and remote locations.

- *Assisting families living with disabilities*: in addition to the Coalition Government's funding commitment of over \$300 million to the launch of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the 2013-14 Budget will direct \$266 million to improve services. Key initiatives funded this budget include:
 - \$107 million over four years for additional individual support packages for people living with a disability, including their carers and families.
 - \$62 million to utilise innovative models of accommodation to meet the needs of complex clients.
 - \$7.9 million to improve and personalise the home environments of residents in State care.
 - \$4 million over three years to help people living with a disability to obtain the aids and equipment they need to improve their quality of life and build independent living skills.

3. State Government

The Victorian Government demonstrates a strong commitment to the early years through the provision of a wide range of services that support children's learning and development.

Key State policy frameworks for the early years include:

The Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD, 2009) that sets out the Government's five year agenda for learning and development from birth to adulthood including:

- strategies for system improvement; partnerships with parents and communities; and workforce reform. *The Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development* emphasises the importance of supporting children's and families' transitions as they move within and across services throughout the early childhood period.
- *The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework For all Children from Birth to Eight Years* (DEECD 2009b), aligned with the National Early Years Learning Framework, is designed to advance all children's learning and development from birth to eight years of age and provides early childhood professionals with a common language for describing outcomes for children, and describes practice principles to guide early childhood professionals to work together, with children and with families to achieve the best outcomes for every child. The Victorian framework also complements other frameworks including:
 - The National Quality Framework
 - Maternal and Child Health Key Ages and Stages Framework
 - Victorian Essential Learning Standards
 - Universal Access to Early Childhood Education

- All states and territories have committed to moving to 15 hours of early childhood education for children in the year before school through a national partnership on early childhood education with the Australian Government, to be implemented by 2013.
- *Balart Boorron: The Victorian Plan for Aboriginal Children and Young People (2010-2020)* (DEECD, 2010) outlines the common aim of Victorian Aboriginal communities and the Victorian Government to ensure that Aboriginal children have the best start in life, are able to succeed in school, and grow into capable, active adults.
- *Improving Victoria's Early Childhood Workforce: Working to give Victoria's children the best start in life* (DEECD, 2009a), responds to the need for an appropriately skilled workforce to meet growing demand and expectations around appropriately qualified early childhood workforce to support national and state reform programs and outlines associated government investment in this area.
- *Assisting children with a disability to learn and achieve: the Early Childhood Intervention Service* provides a family-centred approach to helping children with a disability or developmental delay from birth to school age. The 2013-14 Budget delivers a major boost to this program, funding an additional 1 000 Early Childhood Intervention Service places annually. This budget's \$31 million in funding over four years adds to existing program funding of \$82 million in 2013-14.

Additional funding of \$38 million will be provided for the Program for Students with Disabilities, building on the Coalition Government's existing funding in 2013-14 of \$585 million. The Government will also invest an additional \$13 million for the Students with Disabilities Transport Program, building on existing funding in 2013-14 of \$57 million.

- *Upgrading kindergartens and school: the 2013-14 Budget* supports capital upgrades across the early childhood and schools sectors.

Grant funding of \$7 million will be available to build and upgrade kindergarten and children's services.

The 2013-14 Budget provides for total school capital works of \$203 million. The funding will provide for five new schools and land acquisitions in growth locations, so that these areas benefit from quality education in the future.

This funding builds on the Coalition Government's recent announcement of \$52 million for maintenance at more than 200 schools across the state.

- *Sustaining support for vulnerable children: the 2012-13 Budget* responded to the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry with a funded package of initiatives totalling \$336 million, which will improve outcomes for vulnerable children and sow the

seeds for future reform. The Coalition Government augments this with an additional \$152 million over four years in this budget, including:

- \$18 million to support the provision of the 24-hour child protection emergency response service.
- \$91 million to address demand for out-of-home care placements, and expand therapeutic foster care to improve the system's capacity to respond to the needs of complex clients.
- \$21 million to provide effective specialist support to vulnerable students facing barriers to learning.
- An additional \$3.8 million to protect women and children from family violence, building on the existing funding increase of \$16 million over four years announced in September 2012.

4. Local Government

Whitehorse City Council has a comprehensive suite of policies that respond to the diversity of community needs in the City of Whitehorse encompassing: leadership, planning, support, and advocacy; and the delivery of sustainable local services and facilities to support the health and wellbeing of children aged 0 to 12 years and their families living in the City of Whitehorse.

The City of Whitehorse Council Plan 2013-17 provides the strategic framework and overall policy direction for Whitehorse City Council to ensure a thriving community for all those people who live and work in Whitehorse. Of particular relevance to the MEYP are the following strategic objectives:

- *Strategic Objective 1: Support a healthy, vibrant, inclusive and diverse community - Appropriate multipurpose programs, services, facilities and initiatives that promote and deliver wellbeing and inclusive connected communities.*
- *Strategic Objective 2: Maintain and enhance our built environment to ensure a liveable and sustainable city – Maintain, develop and enhance our built environment.*
- *Strategic Objective 3: Protect and enhance our open space and natural environments – Increase in the amount of quality space and improvement in the sustainability of our natural environment.*
- *Strategic Objective 4: Strategic leadership and open and accessible government – Strong leadership and governance in partnership with the community and supported through regional collaboration and cooperation.*
- *Strategic Objective 5: Support a local healthy economy – Dynamic local economic environment that is regionally connected.*

Other key Council policies relevant to the early years include:

- ***Whitehorse Council Plan and Whitehorse Council Vision 2013-2017.*** These two documents outline Whitehorse City Council's long term vision for a healthy, vibrant, prosperous and sustainable community now and in the future, and have been developed in consultation with the community. The aspirations of Councillors, the community and staff of the City of Whitehorse have formed the basis of five key strategic directions, these being:
 1. Supporting a healthy, vibrant, inclusive and diverse community.
 2. Maintaining and enhancing our built environment to ensure a liveable and sustainable city.
 3. Protecting and enhancing our open spaces and natural environments.
 4. Strategic leadership and open and accessible government.
 5. Supporting a healthy economy.
- ***Youth Plan – Young People Thriving in Whitehorse 2009-2013*** was prepared to deliver a whole of Council approach to providing young people aged 12 to 25 years with a greater opportunity for active participation in the Whitehorse Community. The Plan, developed through consultation with local young people, explores ways that Whitehorse City Council can assist young people in having a greater opportunity to participate in decision making processes and Whitehorse City Council's future direction. A new Youth Plan is currently being prepared for the years 2014 to 2018.
- ***Health and Wellbeing in Whitehorse Plan 2013-2017.*** Over the next four years, Whitehorse City Council will deliver in partnership a significant number of strategies and initiatives that work towards improving the health and wellbeing of people who live, work and play in Whitehorse. This Whitehorse Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, *Health and Wellbeing in Whitehorse 2013-2017* (the Plan) is Council's fifth plan for the area and represents Council's long term commitment and endeavours towards improving the health and wellbeing of the municipality. This Plan builds upon the work undertaken in previous plans, strengthening Council's approach to supporting a liveable city for all. The Plan is strongly aligned with the *Whitehorse Council Vision 2013-2023* and the *Whitehorse Council Plan 2013-2017*, sharing the following goals for the municipality:
 1. Support a healthy, vibrant, inclusive and diverse community.
 2. Maintain and enhance our built environment to ensure a liveable and sustainable city.
 3. Protect and enhance our open space and natural environments.
 4. Provide strategic leadership and an open and accessible government.
 5. Support a healthy local economy.

- ***Diversity Policy and Action Plan 2012-2016*** that will guide Council's approach to supporting, promoting and celebrating its culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse community over the next four years. The Plan focusses on 4 priority areas, these being: strengthening Council's capacity to work with diverse communities; supporting, promoting and celebrating diversity; improving access to information, services and facilities; and partnerships and advocacy.
- ***Disability Policy and Action Plan 2012-2016*** that will assist Council to understand the aspirations, interests and needs of people with disability who are working, living, learning, taking part in recreational activities or visiting the municipality. The Plan outlines five priority areas, these being: changing attitudes; social connectedness; information and communication; accessible built environments; and employment, training and volunteering.
- ***Whitehorse Reconciliation Action Plan 2011-2015*** is a statement of what Council will set out to achieve and identifies and prioritises its actions, in order to assist the organisation in its contribution to indigenous equality. The Plan was prepared to develop and strengthen Whitehorse City Council's relationship with its Indigenous community through commitments to strengthen organisational capacity, engage the Indigenous community, promote and celebrate Indigenous culture and strengthen service delivery for the Indigenous community.
- ***Whitehorse Play Space Strategy 2011***. The purpose of the strategy is to provide Council with a framework for the sustainable provision of its network of play spaces, and to more fully quantify the cost of maintaining and improving the network into the future. The objective of the strategy is to provide a framework and principles for the planning, design and management of Council's network of play spaces. It will also provide the service framework for the assessment of play space provision on a site-by-site or area basis and the development of an asset management plan for play spaces. The plan will inform Council's future capital works priorities and will assist in ensuring that the service can be sustained into the future.