

Quality Early Education for All

The early years are a critical window for building the foundations that enable all children to become creative, entrepreneurial, resilient and capable learners. Australia has made significant advances in increasing participation in, and the quality of, early education in the past five years but there is more to be done.

Quality Early Education for All explores the challenges and opportunities facing the provision of early education in Australia. It identifies key areas of focus and strategies to achieve sustained and impactful change so that all children can benefit from a quality early education.

Key findings

- Every year around 60,000 children arrive at school vulnerable and already behind their peers
- One in three children do not attend early education for the number of hours needed to make a difference
- There is a widening gap in learning and wellbeing between the wealthiest and poorest children
- The kids missing out on early education are the ones who will benefit most
- A third of early childhood services that have been assessed are not yet meeting minimum quality standards. Providing a developmentally-appropriate, play-based learning environment is the standard that services struggle with the most.

Why is this problem?

We talk about early education as something that helps parents work – not as something that is crucial for children's ongoing learning and development.

Early education is one of the most significant investments that governments can make. It has positive impacts on all children and is a key strategy for overcoming the impact of early disadvantage on educational outcomes and life chances.

High quality early education is one of the most effective tools we have for changing children's trajectories and making sure all children are ready to thrive at school.

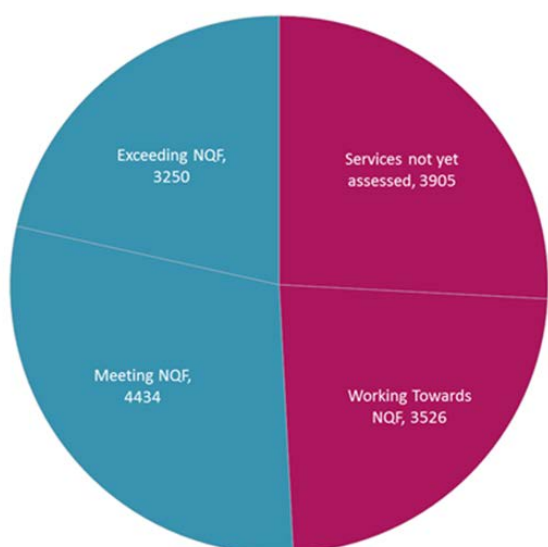
By not extending educational opportunity equally to all children we are missing out on chances to maximise their potential. This has long-term consequences for the future productivity and prosperity of the nation.

In spite of the rapid expansion in provision, access and funding for early learning in the last decade, there are cohorts of children who are either not accessing a preschool education, or who are not accessing the hours needed to make a positive difference.

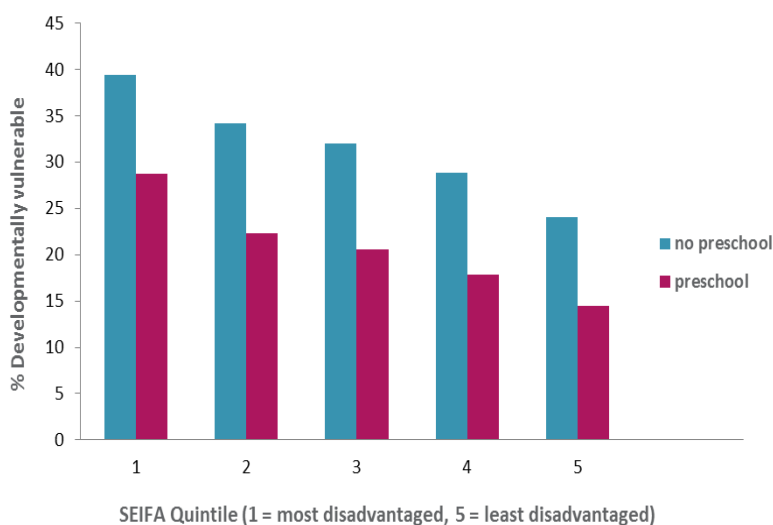
Progress in assessing early childhood services under the National Quality Standard has been too slow, with a quarter of approved services still to be assessed after five years.

There are cohorts of children and a number of communities that continue to exhibit poor outcomes on the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) - where levels of developmental vulnerability have remained relatively consistent since 2009.

Caption: Breakdown of service assessment ratings as at 31 December 2015 (ACECQA 2016)



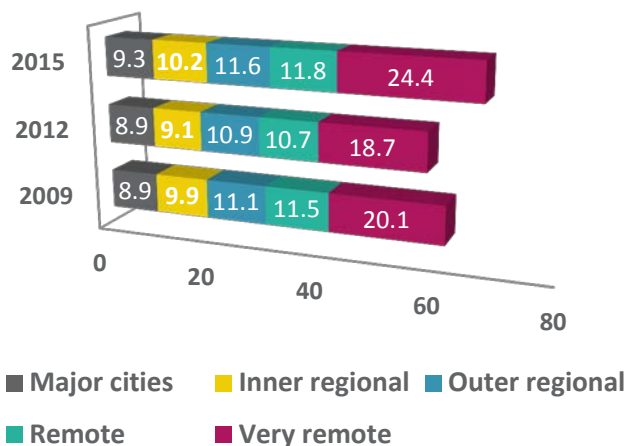
Caption: Developmental vulnerability by preschool participation status (AEDC, 2009)



ACHIEVING MORE EQUITABLE OUTCOMES INVOLVES ...

- Ensuring access to early learning for all children
- Ensuring all children receive high quality early learning
- Investment that is proportionate to impact

Caption: AEDC % developmentally vulnerable by social competence domain



What are the solutions?

In the next five years, Australia must act decisively to ensure all children have access to high quality early education.

Early education has as much – if not more – impact than primary school and investment needs to match this. We need to:

- Make sure that all children have access to the right amount of great-quality early education in the year before school - establishing affordable access to preschool as a legislated entitlement
- Ramp up quality across the system so that every child experiences a positive and play-based learning environment in their early years - all services should be meeting or exceeding the National Quality Standard by mid-2017
- Invest in scaling up evidence-based, high-intensity programs for the most vulnerable children, targeting the communities scoring in the bottom 10 per cent in the AEDC in each state and territory
- Deliver a national early childhood data strategy that establishes the information infrastructure needed to drive policy and practice improvement into the future.
- Commence a national campaign to highlight just how important early education is for kids.

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