



Australian Government
Department of Social Services

A report about our draft Early Years Strategy

What we heard from the community

Easy Read version



How to use this report



The Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) wrote this report.

When you see the word 'we', it means DSS.



We wrote this report in an easy to read way.

We use pictures to explain some ideas.

Bold
Not bold

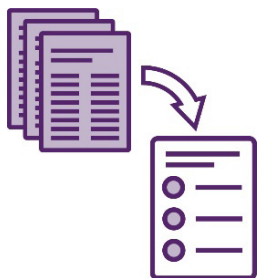
We wrote some words in **bold**.

This means the letters are thicker and darker.



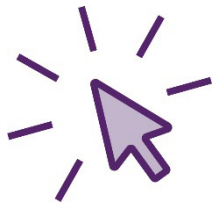
We explain what these words mean.

There is a list of these words on page **42**.



This is an Easy Read summary of another report.

This means it only includes the most important ideas.



You can find the other report on our website.

www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children-programs-services/early-years-strategy



You can ask for help to read this report.

A friend, family member or support person may be able to help you.

What's in this report?

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About our Early Years Strategy



We are making a plan to support young children in Australia from before they are born until they are 5 years old.

This includes:

- their families
- communities they live in.



We call it the Early Years Strategy.

In this document, we call it our Strategy.



We are working with the community to make our Strategy.

We asked the community to share their ideas about our Strategy with us.

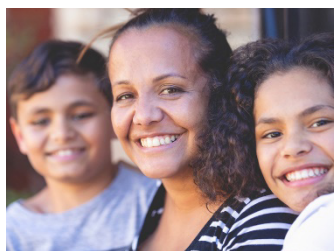


We collected their ideas for 7 months.



In this report, we explain what they shared with us.

Who we heard from



We heard ideas from:

- young children
- parents, families and carers
- communities.

We also heard from:



- experts



- people and organisations who work with young children and their families



- **providers** – who support young children and their families by delivering a service.

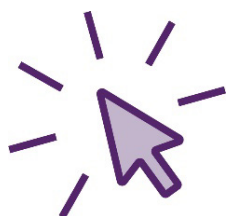
How people shared their ideas



We heard from over **100** people at a meeting we held called the National Early Years Summit.



They shared their ideas about how we can make sure children have the best start in life in Australia.



You can learn about it on our website.

www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children-programs-services/early-years-strategy



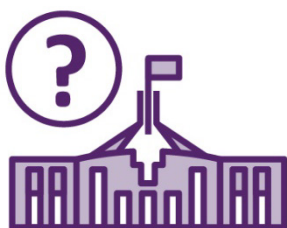
2,243 people from all over Australia responded to our survey.

The survey asked what we should focus on when we make our Strategy.

We also wrote a document that asked people for their ideas about:



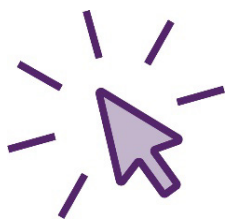
- what Australia should aim for when it comes to supporting young children



- how the Australian Government should support young children.



352 people shared their ideas about this document with us.



You can read what people told us on our website.

www.engage.dss.gov.au/early-years-strategy-view-public-submissions

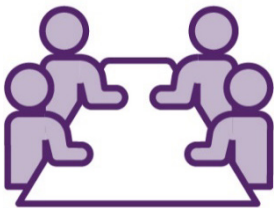
We also ran meetings in each state and territory and online:



- with different groups in the community



- on different topics about how we can support young children.



We ran **39** of these meetings.

More than **750** people took part in them.



We also heard from **115** children between 3 and 5 years old.



We asked them:

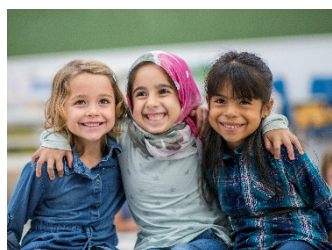
- what matters most to them
- what would make today a better day.

What the community told us

What children told us



We heard **4** main ideas from young children.



1. Connecting with other people is important to them.

1



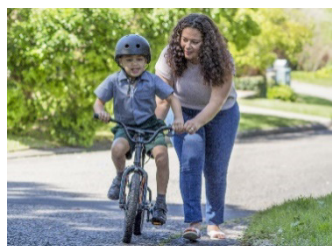
2. They feel strongly about the places they live, play and learn.

2



3. It is important for them to use their imagination and be creative.

3



4. They like to be physically active.

4

What people shared about the vision



Our **vision** is what we want for Australia's young children.



People told us they want all children in Australia to:

- live well in their early years
- have strong futures.



People also told us they want families to:

- feel confident to raise their children
- get the support they need
- be connected to their communities.

People told us that they also want to see an Australia where children:



- are healthy in all areas of their life



- can be who they are and develop



- can get support no matter who they are or where they are in Australia.



People also shared that they want children to be safe in their homes and communities.



This includes communities that:

- care for them
- celebrate who they are.

People also shared they want families to have what they need to:



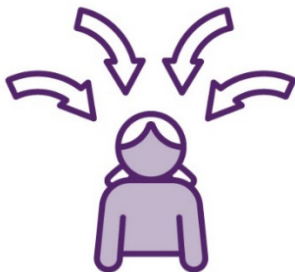
- care for their children
- spend time with their children.

What people shared about the principles

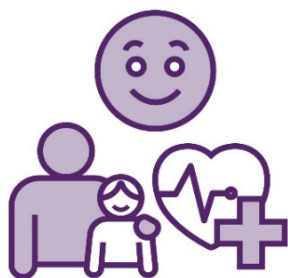


People shared their ideas about the principles that should guide our Strategy.

Principles are important ideas we should always think about.

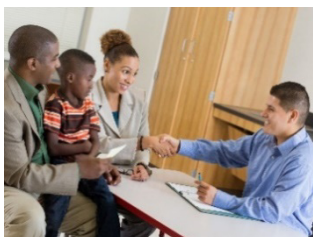


We heard that our Strategy should show that many things support a child's **wellbeing**.



Wellbeing means children have:

- enough care and support
- what they need to be happy and healthy.



People shared that children and families should take part in decisions we make that affect them.

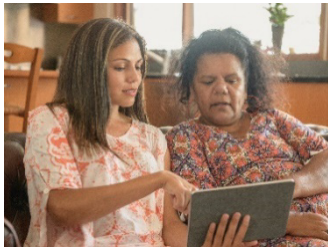
This includes decisions about programs and services.



We also heard there should be services that work well for everyone.



And there should also be services that can support what each child and family needs.



We heard we should support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to make their own decisions when we work with them.



We also heard that services should respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' **culture**.

A child's culture is:



- their way of life
- how they think or act now because of how they grew up
- their beliefs
- what is important to them.

What people shared about the outcomes



We will know we have achieved our vision for young children in Australia when we reach our **outcomes**.

Outcomes are important results we want to achieve.



People shared their ideas about what outcomes matter most for young children and their families.



They shared that many parts of a child's life are important for their wellbeing.



For example:

- feeling connected to their family and community
- being healthy and happy.



People shared it's important for children and their families to be able to find and use supports.

11

In a survey, we gave the community a list of **11** outcomes that our Strategy could focus on first.

5!

They chose **5** of them as being the most important outcomes to focus on first.



1. Mental health.

1



2. Learning and growing.

2



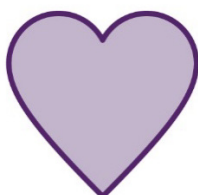
3. Having things like food and clothes.

3



4. Families that can support their children.

4



5. Love and care.

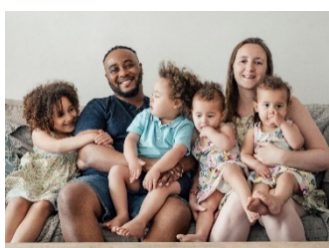
5

What our Strategy should cover



Most people we heard from agreed with what we thought our Strategy should cover.

They agreed our Strategy should focus on:



- what young children and their families need



- the first 5 years of a child's life, as well as when the parent is pregnant.



Some people thought our Strategy should also focus on older children.

They said they felt it was important to get support when children move into school.

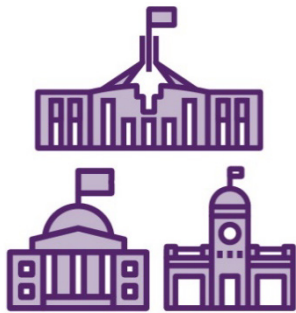


People agreed that the Australian Government should lead our Strategy.



And they agreed that our Strategy should work well with other plans that the Australian Government runs.

People also told us our Strategy should involve:



- all levels of government



- people and organisations who support young children and their families.



People liked that our Strategy will be part of how Australia meets its international agreements about human **rights**.



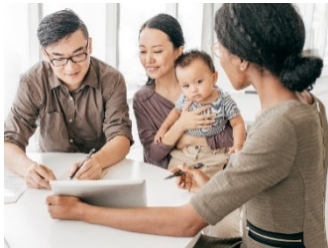
Rights are rules about how people must treat you:

- fairly
- equally.

We also heard that our Strategy should build on the work people and organisations are already doing to support:



- young children



- their families.

This includes work to:



- update laws



- make better programs and plans.

Ideas about the different parts of our Strategy

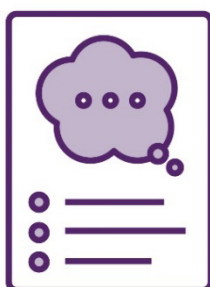


Most people agreed with what we thought the different parts of our Strategy should be.

This includes that it should have a:



- vision



- principles



- outcomes.



People told us other ideas about what our Strategy could include.

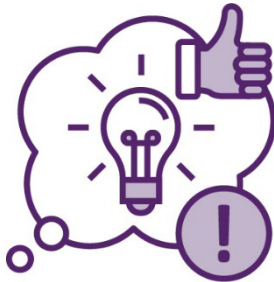


We heard our Strategy should put children and families at the centre of everything we do.



We heard that our principles should be based on **evidence**.

Evidence is proof that something is true.



We heard that we should agree on the principles for the Strategy before it starts.



We also heard our principles should guide:

- how our Strategy works
- what it does.

People shared that we could explain what the aim of our Strategy is.



And this aim should be:

- in clear words
- easy to understand.

People also shared that we should make plans for how we will:



- deliver our Strategy



- check our Strategy is working well



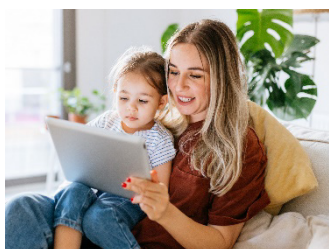
- make sure our Strategy works with our other plans.

Important things our Strategy should focus on



The community shared their ideas about which areas our Strategy should focus on.

Getting support



We heard that parents and carers want to be the experts about their own children.



And sometimes they need support to:

- understand what their child needs
- take care of their children.



We also heard it's important for communities to support the families of young children.

For example, other families who can share their experiences.



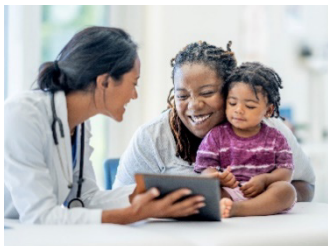
We heard it's important for communities to have safe places where families can easily:

- share information
- get support.

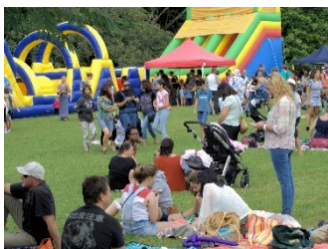


People also shared that it is very important to support parents through pregnancy.

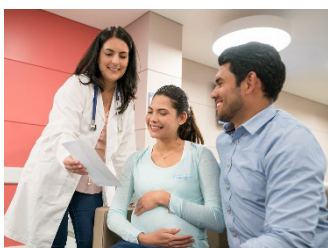
This includes support to:



- learn how to keep their child healthy



- connect with other families in the community.



We also heard families want support to go to pregnancy appointments.

This would help other family members be involved in the pregnancy and birth.



Families shared that it can be hard to spend time with their child.

For example, if they don't have enough spare time or money.



We also heard that people often expect the mother to be the main carer of their child.

And that this can make it hard on:

- the mother
- the rest of the family.



People also shared that it's important to have a group of supports that:

- work well for everyone
- meets what each family needs.



People shared that families should be able to get support before things get bad for them.



People also shared that it should be easier for families to find and use the information they need.

Making decisions



We heard that different organisations and governments in Australia don't always work well together.



This includes:

- having different rules
- how they make decisions.



People told us that it's important for everyone to have a shared vision about what we want for children.



People shared that families and communities should be part of making decisions that affect them.

We also heard that services should focus on:



- treating people fairly



- things that different organisations and governments can do best.



We also heard that it's important for us to share how our Strategy is going.



People told us it's important for rules and services to work well for each community.



If rules and services don't work well, they might waste time and money.



People shared that living far away from cities and towns can be a **barrier** for people who need services.



A barrier is something that stops you from doing something you:

- need to do
- want to do.



We also heard that **funding** should support services and organisations who will:

- make decisions with each community
- work well with each community.



Funding is money from the government that pays for services and supports.

Things that can help us make better supports and decisions



People shared that we need to improve how we collect and share **data** about what:

- works well
- does not work well.



When we talk about data, we mean:

- facts
- information
- records.



We heard we need to include data about many different groups of people.



For example, people living far away from cities and towns.



We also heard that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should have control over data about them.

This includes the way people collect and use the data.



People told us that we should plan to change our rules and programs if things:

- are not working well
- work better than we thought they would.



People also told us that our Strategy should include how we will use data to check if our Strategy:

- is working well
- needs to change.



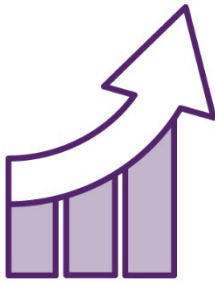
We heard about challenges that people who work with young children and their families face.

For example, teachers and health workers.

We heard that it's important for these workers to have:



- good working conditions



- ways to progress in their jobs



- good pay.



People also told us that we need to recognise the important roles some people play in their culture.



This includes the ways Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples teach and care for:

- young children
- their families.

What we heard from different groups



We heard from members of lots of groups in Australia.



They shared their experiences with us to help us make our Strategy.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people shared that our Strategy must work with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.



The National Agreement on Closing the Gap explains how we support and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



We also heard that our Strategy needs to work with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy.

This is a plan to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the first years of their life.



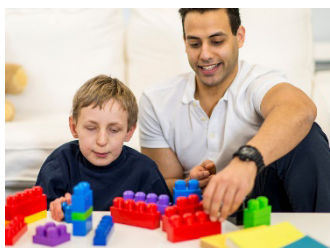
We heard our Strategy needs to respect the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

And it should respond to what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples want and need.



We also heard that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should lead and deliver some services.

Families of children with disability and developmental delay



We heard from families of children with:

- disability
- **developmental delay.**



When a child has a developmental delay, it means they don't grow or develop at the same pace as other children of the same age.



This means they may need extra help to do everyday things.

They might need this help for a long time.

We heard that children with disability or developmental delay can face challenges with:



- other people treating them differently



- finding and using supports.

We also heard that there needs to be more support for:



- teachers who work with these children



- their families and carers.

Culturally and linguistically diverse families



We heard from **culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)** families.



CALD people:

- come from different cultures and backgrounds
- speak languages other than English.



We heard it can be hard for CALD families to get services to support their young children.



We heard they can face **barriers** in Australia.

They can face barriers to do with:



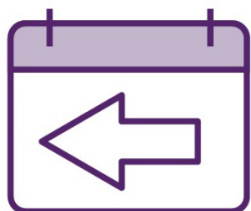
- language



- culture



- legal issues



- past experiences.



We heard services that support young children and families should be easy to use and understand.

And this should include resources in different languages.

Families living in places far away from cities and towns



We heard from families and providers in places far away from cities and towns.



They shared challenges about finding workers in their local area to support young children and their families.

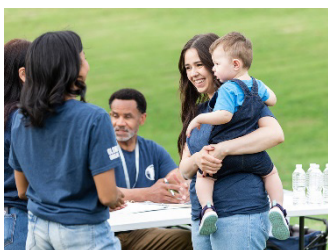


We also heard that services often cannot support what each community needs.

This means we need to:



- learn what each community needs



- work with each community to support young children and their families in their local areas.

LGBTIQA+ children and families



We heard from **LGBTIQA+** families.



The letters LGBTIQA stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or questioning and asexual.

The '+' is for people who are part of the LGBTIQA+ community but don't talk about themselves using a word from this list.

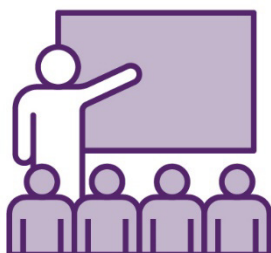
We heard that these families face barriers in Australia to do with:



- feeling part of the community



- getting services.



They shared that there needs to be more training for people and organisations to understand LGBTIQA+ families.

Next steps



What we heard from the community will help us make our Strategy.

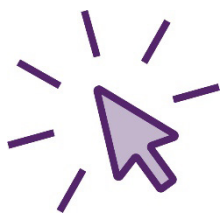


It will also help us make plans to deliver our Strategy.



We call these plans our action plans.

More information



You can find out more about our Strategy on our website.

www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children-programs-services/early-years-strategy



You can call us.

1300 653 227



You can email us.

EarlyYearsEngagement@dss.gov.au

Support to talk to us



You can call the National Relay Service if you:

- are deaf or hard of hearing
- find it hard to speak using the phone.



Teletypewriter (TTY)

1800 555 677



Speak and listen

1800 555 727



If you speak a language other than English, you can call the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS).

131 450

Word list

This list explains what the **bold** words in this document mean.



Barriers

A barrier is something that stops you from doing something you:

- need to do
- want to do.



Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)

CALD people:

- come from different cultures and backgrounds
- speak languages other than English.

Culture

A child's culture is:



- their way of life
- how they think or act now because of how they grew up
- their beliefs
- what is important to them.



Data

When we talk about data, we mean:

- facts
- information
- records.

Developmental delay

When a child has a developmental delay, it means they don't grow or develop at the same pace as other children of the same age.



This means they may need extra help to do everyday things.

They might need this help for a long time.



Evidence

Evidence is proof that something is true.



Funding

Funding is money from the government that pays for services and supports.

LGBTIQA+



The letters LGBTIQA stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or questioning and asexual.

The '+' is for people who are part of the LGBTIQA+ community but don't talk about themselves using a word from this list.



Principles

Principles are important ideas we should always think about.



Providers

Providers support young children and their families by delivering a service.



Outcomes

Outcomes are important results we want to achieve.



Rights

Rights are rules about how people must treat you:

- fairly
- equally.



Vision

Our vision is what we want for Australia's young children.



Wellbeing

Wellbeing means children have:

- enough care and support
- what they need to be happy and healthy.



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