



## Submission

# Education Evidence Base - Productivity Commission Inquiry

May 2016



*The period from birth through to eight years, especially the first three years, sets the foundation for every child's social, physical, emotional and cognitive development. Early childhood education and care provides a basis for life and learning, both within and beyond the home, and is supported by healthy, safe and stimulating environments. Children who participate in quality early childhood education are more likely to make a successful transition to school, stay longer in school, continue on to further education and fully participate in employment and community life as adults. Support for Indigenous children in the early years before school is particularly important to ensure a successful transition to schooling, which may involve a culturally different learning environment.*

**- The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, 2008**



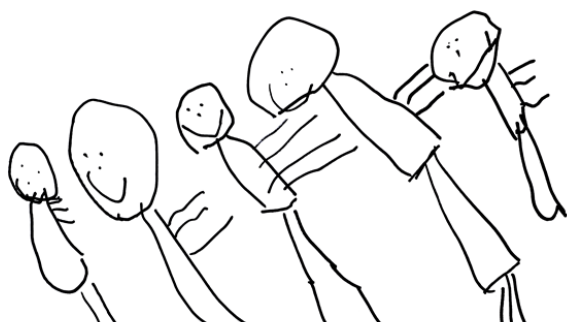
## Summary

Northside welcomes the opportunity to contribute to Productivity Commission's Inquiry into the National Education Evidence Base.

Education, across the entire spectrum of formal learning, is a vital investment in the future wellbeing and civic contribution of all Australians. With around a quarter of children arriving at school falling behind in one or more developmental domains<sup>1</sup>, ensuring a strong and consistent focus on evidence-based practice is crucial.

Northside strongly supports the development of a more robust, consistent and accessible National Education Evidence Base (NEEB), beginning with all forms of early childhood education.

We address the rest of our submission to a number of the questions asked in the Issues Paper.



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/2015-aedc-national-report>

**Should the scope of the evidence base include data on children younger than four years old (or prior to the year before compulsory schooling begins? If so, why, and should it cover all children, or only those attending early childhood education and care programs outside the home?**

We submit that the evidence should, and must, include data on children younger than 4 years old. The overwhelming evidence and research now available<sup>2</sup> highlights the importance of the first 5 years for brain development. Australian data from the Australian Early Development Index points to a significant number of children starting at school with some form of developmental delay, and that the best way to have a positive impact is high-quality early intervention – the earlier, the better.

Northside particularly refers the Commission to the work of Professor Frank Oberklaid at the Royal Melbourne Children's Hospital<sup>3</sup>.

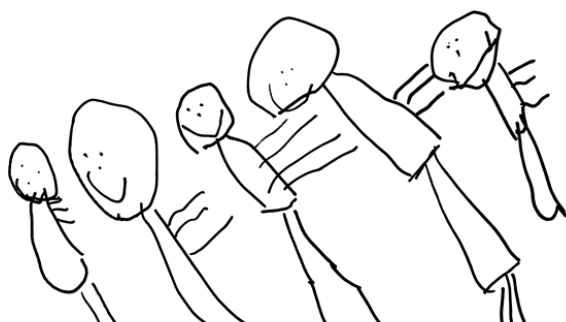
While we acknowledge the potential challenges in including all children in the scope of the NEEB, we contend that it is a vital requirement to ensure that those children who would most benefit from such a program are included. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) services are well-placed to collect this data, but it is important to note that Australia's current policy settings in this area work can exclude children at risk of experiencing vulnerability. The current "Jobs for Families" package that is being promoted by the Federal Government would further exacerbate this, requiring significant investment to include children who do not meet the criteria to attend an ECEC service.

We recommend that the Federal Government consult with the ECEC sector and with research professionals to determine the most appropriate and relevant starting age for data collection.

**Do you agree that the objective of a national education evidence base should be to improve education outcomes? Are there other objectives that should be included?**

Northside strongly agrees that the NEEB should improve education outcomes. We also contend that the NEEB should be a foundation for sound decision-making regarding investment and policy changes in all forms of education, but particularly ECEC.

The Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians<sup>4</sup> articulates the vision that "All young Australians become: Successful learners; confident and creative individuals [and]; active and informed citizens." The NEEB should provide key data and analysis to decision-makers on how this goal can be achieved through greater and more targeted investment in early childhood education.



<sup>2</sup> [http://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/PB1\\_Earlyhood\\_lifecourse.pdf](http://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/PB1_Earlyhood_lifecourse.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.rch.org.au/ccch/media/Professor\\_Frank\\_Oberklaid/](http://www.rch.org.au/ccch/media/Professor_Frank_Oberklaid/)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/National\\_Declaration\\_on\\_the\\_Educational\\_Goals\\_for\\_Young\\_Australians.pdf](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf)

## **What education outcomes do you see as relevant? For example, outcomes in traditional academic domains (such as literacy and numeracy), outcomes in non-cognitive domains (such as communication and interpersonal skills).**

Learning has to be seen as holistic, and contextual to each child, their family and their community. All education outcomes should be seen as relevant by the NEEB, including both cognitive and non-cognitive.

In the early years however, it is important that the skills necessary for life-long learning and success are given priority in data collection and analysis – particularly self-regulation, persistence and resilience. In the first five years, these indicators are far more important for early intervention than pre-literacy or pre-numeracy. Those cognitive skills are best developed on a strong foundation of core non-cognitive skills.

For children in at-risk categories, it is critical that these core non-cognitive skills are supported as early as possible.

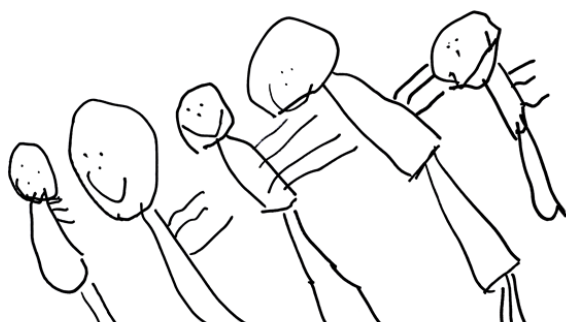
## **What data should be collected nationally?**

Given the importance of the core non-cognitive skills during the first five years, they should be the focus of the NEEB. While these can be difficult to measure and collect, the ECEC sector is well-placed to be supported to collect this information.

Data should also include specific information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children. Australia is performing poorly in educational targets within the Closing the Gap goals, and greater focus on early intervention could go a long way towards addressing that poor performance.

## **How would these data support the objective of improving educational outcomes?**

While the AEDI provides a snapshot of where children are when they turn 5, data should be collected prior to this that can support targeted early intervention strategies that will improve Australia's current AEDI results. In order to ensure that all children are best supported to be starting at school ready to learn and able to engage, we need to know more about them before they turn 5.



## About Northside Community Service

We are a community-based, not for profit organisation established in 1976 through the efforts of concerned people wanting to provide and develop support and services for residents of North Canberra.

Today we employ over 150 staff, along with an active volunteer program and operate an annual budget of over \$11 million. In responding to the needs of our community we currently deliver a diverse range of services, including:

- early childhood education (ECE)
- services for older people and people with a disability
- home support, transport and social programs for seniors
- support programs for young people and families
- women's housing and support for formerly homeless people
- venue hire for community activities

## About Northside Children's Services

Northside manages four Early Childhood Centres in the ACT located in Civic, Dickson, Turner and Harrison. All Northside Centres operate under the National Quality Framework, and are committed to supporting the Early Learning of young children through high-quality, play-based educational programs and professional practices in a safe and enjoyable environment.

Our Centres work with children from six weeks old to school-age, and are open 51 weeks a year. Each Centre is committed to working closely with children and their families to support every child's early learning and wellbeing.

Northside feels strongly about advocating for the importance of all children's birth right to high-quality early education, and actively works within the local and national community to improve understanding and knowledge of issues affecting children and Early Childhood.

Early Childhood Education can change lives. We know that giving children a love of learning, and supporting wellbeing at an early age can drastically improve the opportunities and life-long outcomes for every child – and in turn, the whole community.

