

# B4 Early Years Coalition Tasmania Co-Chairs Submission Productivity Commission's inquiry into early childhood education and care.

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## Overview B4

- The B4 Early Years Coalition (B4) was announced by the then Minister for Education in June 2016, as part of the Tasmanian Government's commitment to provide quality early learning and developmental experiences for all young children.
- In August 2021, the Government released "It takes a Tasmanian Village: Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy" (the Strategy) in which B4 has additional roles in improving the focus, actions and outcomes for the first 1000 days being the period pregnancy to 2 years.
- The name B4 represents the early years of a child's life from pregnancy to age four, the years 'before' a child begins full-time school. B4 also represents the time before birth, recognising the importance of this very early stage of development.
- B4 is led by the B4 Leaders Group with ourselves as Co-Chairs, 12 Leaders being influential individuals and/or organisational representatives from diverse backgrounds, and 3 Government representatives from the Department for Education Children and Young People, Department of Premier and Cabinet and Department of Health.
- B4, as a collective impact initiative, is driving social change in the early years through B4's vision and goals.

## B4 Vision

Every child in Tasmania is nurtured through the early years, no matter what.

## B4 Goals

1. **Tasmanians value the early years** – and are aware of and understand the importance now and for the future of healthy development during pregnancy up to 4 years of age.
2. **Tasmanians support the early years** – have the awareness, skills, knowledge resources and a role to support children during pregnancy to 4 years of age, their families, and communities.
3. **Tasmanians work together to improve outcomes for the early years** – families, services, businesses, and communities have the knowledge, skills and confidence to partner and ensure the best start for children during pregnancy to 4 years of age their families and communities.

## Recommendations

- I. Create the conditions nationally to enable all children universal access to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) from birth. In order of priority.
  - i. Resolve ECEC workforce issues including.
    - i. Pay equity
    - ii. Difficulties with Recruitment and retention
    - iii. Access to relevant and affordable training and professional development
    - iv. Resourcing ECEC services to actively integrate and collaborate with the broader early years sector.
    - v. Resolve quality issues across the ECEC workforce
    - vi. Resolve demand inequities across the states and territories for qualified ECEC Teachers
    - vii. ECEC fatigue
  - ii. Affordability for parents, carers, and families.
  - iii. Build the social and cultural value of ECEC outcomes delivered by ECEC professionals.
  - iv. Create a healthy ECEC sector
  - v. Ensure all ECEC services are accessible and inclusive by.
    - i. Removing barriers faced by some families and children.
    - ii. Increase culturally safe and appropriate ECEC services
2. Supplement universal access, through the provision of a universal proportionalism approach with wrap around services for children and families experiencing vulnerabilities risks, when and where they need it to thrive and grow.
3. Ensure the role and rights of the child are enshrined and enacted including.
  - i. Taking a child centered approach
  - ii. Consultation with children 0 -5 years in development and ongoing monitoring of the ECEC sector as per Article 12 United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child
4. Strong collaboration and governance across the ECEC sector facilitated by the Federal Government.

## Reshaping the ECEC sector 5 – 10 year plan

Refer Attachment A

### Tasmania's early years sector – Overview

The early years continues to be a key priority for the Tasmanian Government with significant funding and focus given to a range of programs for children and their families before they start school.

The government's most recent investment has been through, [It Takes a Tasmanian Village: Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy](#) (The Strategy) with key focus on the first 1000 days. The Strategy in response to a report delivered by the Tasmanian Commissioner for Children and Young People in February 2020, [Investing in the wellbeing of Tasmania's children and young people - CCYP \(childcomm.tas.gov.au\)](#). The Strategy has identified 52 actions and of these 11 are focused on the first 1000 days with associated funds. This is alongside a range of existing government programs including;

- Launching into Learning
- Child and Family Learning Centers
- Working Together - supporting early learning program
- Early Childhood Intervention Service
- Child Health and Parenting Services
- Midwifery and pregnancy services and supports
- Other allied health services and supports.

Tasmania also has a strong non-government early years sector across ECEC, playgroups, family support, parenting and a range of other services, programs, and support.

The B4 Early Years Coalition supports this work as a social change initiative working to ensure all Tasmanians understand, take action and work together in the early years.

## Early Childhood Education and Care – Key Tasmanian Issues

### 1. Create the conditions nationally to enable all children universal access to ECEC from birth. In order of priority.

#### i. Pay equity

Remuneration creates disincentives to the workforce both to enter and be retained in the sector.

Tension also is present in the misalignment between the wages and working conditions for early years professionals. For example, the same Early Years Teaching degree provides very different conditions between the ECEC and Education environment who offer higher wages, opportunities for professional development, better work conditions etc. This often means those entering the ECEC sector have a Certificate III or Diploma level in education and care with significant barriers to upskill to a degree whilst working full time. For those that do upskill, they are often then lost to the ECEC sector transferring into the Education sector.

#### ii. Difficulties with Recruitment and Retention

This is a statewide issue facing Early Childhood Education and Care Services, as well as a range of supporting early years services such as Child Health and Parenting Services, allied health professionals.

Reasons for difficulties with recruitment and retention include:

- high regional, remote vacancy rates
- difficulty attracting staff to these areas,
- lack of suitably qualified applicants for positions
- access to quality VET training in rural areas
- cultural mental models that fail to acknowledge the value of early years
- early years educators are not acknowledged as professionals
- issues retaining staff is a very significant issue across the ECEC sector. So much of the work in the early years with children and families is relational and building those trusting relationships by professionals with families takes time. Families take on messages and information from people they trust.

The impact from workforce issues in allied health and other affiliated services has significant flow on effects to children and families who may require additional interventions. Often carers are alerted to development delays or challenges identified by ECEC services who are then unable to access in a timely manner the early interventions needed. Evidence shows interventions that early, are more economical and effective, than later treatment.

Tasmania has several local initiatives to tackle this issue, including

- the Workforce Coordination Project, as part of the Tasmanian Community Services Industry Plan released by the Tasmanian Government and Community Services industry led by TASCOS in which ECEC services are one of four key community services

identified for strategic workforce planning and intervention. Current funding concludes October 2024

- Early Years and School Age Care (EYSAC) Project funded through the Department for Education, Children and Young People, owned by ECA Tasmania Branch, and delivered by Lady Gowrie Tasmania. This project has focused on ways to increase pathways into the ECEC profession and retention strategies for existing professionals. For more information <https://eysac.com.au/> including the [EYSAC Strategy](#) Current funding concludes June 2024.

iii. **Lack of access to relevant and affordable training and professional development.**

Ongoing professional development and training is critical for ECEC workers to provide quality ECEC experiences and care. Too many services are unable to release staff to attend professional training opportunities held through the day, with the only time for training held after hours. B4 in partnership with Early Childhood Australia provide an annual Early Years forum and to necessitate ECEC professionals' attendance is held on a Saturday.

iv. **Lack of integration and collaboration across ECEC to broader early years sector.**

ECEC services do not have capacity or scope, because of workforce shortages, to dedicate resources to collaboration and integration across the broader early years sector. In recent Market Research undertaken by B4 the most common place parents, carers and families would seek information about the first 1000 days was ECEC services<sup>1</sup>. Providing a system wide approach to collaboration between ECEC and relevant services.

ECEC services are also a key point of connection for families with children in the early years with early years professionals. This is an untapped opportunity to value add and take advantage of this relationship and connection, and to facilitate additional supports and services children and families need to thrive and grow. Linking and connecting services to where the families are makes sense and is supported by evidence in wrap around models of care. Tasmania's Child and Family Learning Centres are an example of this.

## SPOTLIGHT

Tasmanian Child and Family Learning Centres (CFLCs) are places where families and carers with children from pregnancy to age 5 can access a range of free services.

The purpose of the CFLCs is to support the health, wellbeing, and lifelong learning of our youngest Tasmanians. Each Centre has safe indoor and outdoor play spaces that help families build connection and belonging within their local community. CFLCs support government and non-government services working together to provide a continuum of care to children and families.

<sup>1</sup> Myraid Research 2023. Commercial in Confidence Market Research report B4 early years Coalition – Pre test campaign research

There are 18 Tasmanian CFLCs, with 13 fully operational and 5 to open in 2023-24. The Tasmanian Government is also developing an outreach model to support children and families to connect and access early years services in areas outside the footprint of existing CFLCs.

#### v. Quality of ECEC Workforce

The evidence is clear, it is quality ECEC experiences and care that make a difference for children's development, learning and wellbeing. Quality ECEC is delivered by qualified educators. We also know children experiencing a range of risk factors benefit the most from high quality ECEC programs<sup>2</sup>

An emerging issue is the level of skill many newly qualified staff are joining the profession with. Findings from the E4Kids study at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education showed Educators scored highly on routine care tasks but more poorly on the wellbeing and development aspects of their role<sup>3</sup>. A comprehensive review and where required redevelopment of ECEC training and qualifications with a specific emphasis on ensuring wellbeing and developmental in the early years is given sufficient focus.

One area that requires a minimum competency base are the qualifications for cooks and chefs in the ECEC sector, in addition to ECEC educators.

#### vi. Demand for ECEC qualified teachers from interstate

Current universal access initiatives for 3 year old's across various states and territories has seen an acute demand for qualified early years professionals which has led to some aggressive recruitment strategies. This only further exasperates the workforce issue and creates inequity across the states and territories.

For example, the following financial incentives are currently on offer from the Victorian Government to study and work in Victoria.

- Individual incentives of \$9,000 are available for eligible qualified early childhood teachers working outside the Victorian early childhood sector to take up a teaching role at any service delivering, or planning to deliver, free Three-Year-Old Kindergarten in 2023.
- Location incentives of between \$9,000 to \$50,000 are available for qualified early childhood teachers who secure a teaching role at selected services. Services will be notified if they are pre-approved for a location incentive.
- A relocation supplement of between \$2,000 and \$8,000 will be available to any eligible incentive recipient who relocates more than 200km from their current place of residence.

#### vii. Ongoing Workforce fatigue

Since COVID where ECEC were acknowledged as essential front line workers, coupled with the ongoing workforce issues, too many ECEC services are understaffed, with staff overwhelmed, working in survival mode and at risk of leaving the industry.

<sup>2</sup> Source <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/VAELReportAugust2017.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Source: [E4Kids \(unimelb.edu.au\)](https://www.unimelb.edu.au/e4kids)



a. Affordability for parents, carers and families.

The cost of ECEC is a known barrier to children participating and for many, as highlighted in The Sydney Morning Herald's 9 April 2023, article "*Motherhood penalty*" stops full-time work for women", creates a perverse disincentive for many women to reenter or join the workforce full time.

Rising costs of living, as seen in the data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, shows Hobart's Consumer Price Index now sits at 6.5%, well above the national average of 6.1%<sup>4</sup>. Only create further pressure on the affordability of ECEC for many.

b. Prevailing cultural models held regarding the value of and need for ECEC in the early years.

Australian research undertaken by The Frameworks Institute in partnership with Telethon Kids Institute and the Minderoo Foundation found there was a significant gap in understanding the importance of the early years between the experts and public<sup>5</sup>. Gaps included the general population seeing early development as a natural process requiring little intervention rather than needing to be supported. If parents and carers do not see the value for their child in ECEC especially in the very early years 0-2 years for their development and wellbeing demand will not be created.

A national campaign aimed at shifting the current cultural models of ECEC for children's development, wellbeing, and learning is critical. Creating the demand to ensure all Australian children get a great start to life by supporting all parents/ carers and families understand the importance of the early years and the value of ECEC services and the professionals working there.

**SPOTLIGHT**

B4 is currently developing a community communication campaign using Big Screens and other highly visible display areas in communities. The campaign is aimed at supporting a shift in these mental models held around the early years. Using key local community communicators to share the key early years messages and resources with parents and carers raising awareness of the first 1000 days, its importance, and the simple actions everyone can take as part of the Tasmanian Village to support all Tasmanian children to thrive and grow.

<sup>4</sup> Source <https://tascoss.org.au/cost-of-living-pressures/>

<sup>5</sup> Source; <https://colab.telethonkids.org.au/SysSiteAssets/media-docs---colab/colab-map-the-gaps-report-2019-final.pdf>



### c. Create a Healthy ECEC Sector

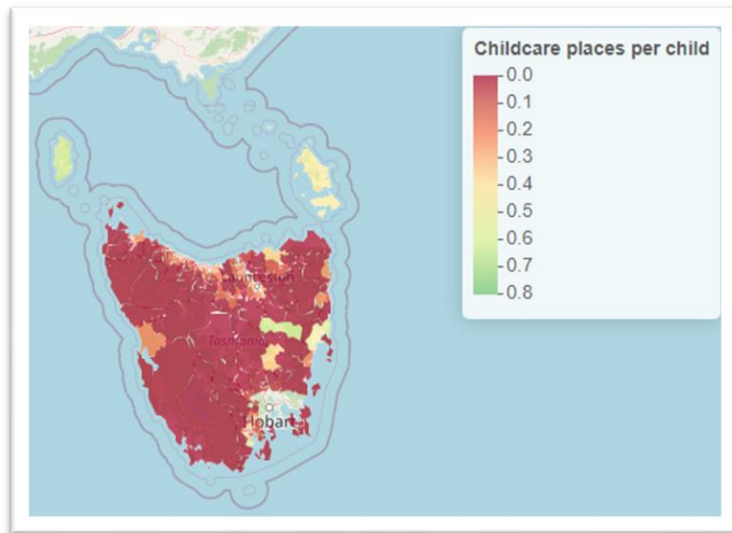
The ECEC sector needs to have strategies to address the rising rates of food insecurity with recent research finding that ECEC services in low SES areas were less likely to provide food and ask parents to bring food from home. This presents multiple challenges for ECEC services and families including an additional financial burden on parents to provide food. It is recommended that children in ECEC receive at least 50% of their daily nutritional needs whilst attending care but this may be severely impacted in some communities. Whilst cost is a major barrier to meal provision in ECEC services consideration of apportioning some of the childcare subsidy for food provision in ECEC would allow services to provide food to children in areas of disadvantage.

Strengthening healthy food environments and increasing the capabilities and capacity of the ECEC sector to support families and children with the provision of adequate and healthy food supports Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - 'Children have the right to the best health care possible, clean water to drink, healthy food and a clean and safe environment to live in. All adults and children should have information about how to stay safe and healthy'. Prioritising funding interventions to support ECEC food environments and food provision, particularly in areas of disadvantage. By improving food provision and eating environments we positively impact on child development outcomes.

### d. Accessibility

#### 1. Removing barriers for some families and children.

The Mitchell report in 2022 clearly showed access to ECEC is not universal. Tasmania has a highly dispersed population with many smaller regional and remote areas having insufficient numbers of children to enable ECEC service viability. This results in areas who have market viability having high numbers of places for children while areas where market viability is less secure, the service is often provided through small, not for profit community management models who struggle to maintain services and have less resources from which to draw on to support ECEC delivery.



Map of childcare access across Tasmania <sup>1</sup>

Other barriers for many families to accessing existing ECEC services can include:

- Social, cultural and individual value given by parents/carers to ECEC for their children
- Lack of transport,
- Other life issues that reprioritise parents and carers focus, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, financial distress etc.

## 2. Lack of culturally safe and appropriate ECEC services.

The cultural competence of ECEC providers and services needs to meet the National Quality Framework guiding principle on valuing Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. There is a need to prioritise investment in quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled integrated early learning and family focused services<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. Universal Proportionality

For some children and families a regular and fixed number of hours per week of ECEC provided through a universal model will not be sufficient for their needs due to a range of factors. At times additional access to ECEC is needed for those children experiencing vulnerabilities or a range of other adverse life events affecting their development, wellbeing, and learning. For these children and their families ECEC may not be the only additional support required during a period of vulnerability or crisis. The wrap around model of care, where services are integrated child focused and can provide a range of services and supports to families to support their child to thrive and grow. A recent study by Monash University of the Doveton Model, at Doveton College found

*"Attending early-learning within a high-quality, wrap-around service model may have significant academic benefits for disadvantaged children"*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Source: [Early Childhood - SNAICC](#)

<sup>7</sup> Source: <https://research.monash.edu/en/publications/does-an-integrated-wrap-around-school-and-community-service-model>

The other consideration for additional access for families to ECE is to of course support workforce participation.

## SPOTLIGHT

The Tasmanian Government's Working Together - supporting early learning program, supports three-year-old children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage to access early learning through partner Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services in their year before Kindergarten.

The program provides additional development, holistic and service supports to the child and family to promote their wellbeing, build capacity and address barriers to the child's access and participation in early learning. The model also provides onboarding and ongoing professional learning for ECEC involved and provides for provision for early childhood intervention services to provide timely and at the shoulder support for children, families and the educators.

The Working Together model has been externally assessed by TasCOSS and Clear Horizons as being able to provide the supports and improvements the model is designed to achieve.

The program currently supports 120 children annually through 19 ECEC service partners across Tasmania, with the next phase of implementation to increase the number of children supported through Working Together to 240 in 2024 and 360 in 2025.

## 3. The role and rights of the of the child

### a. Child Centered

Ensuring the ECEC sector moves forward with the needs of the child at the center of all decision making processes and service responses.

ECEC services are provided across a range of Local Government, NGO not for profit and for profit organisations, with a range of additional stakeholders invested in the sector. This is largely a result of historical policies and market influences over previous decades. This results in the delivery of ECEC services by a complex and diverse set of drivers.

### b. Consultation with Children

Following our face to face meeting with the Commissioners B4 Co-Chairs raised the need for Commissioners to act on and upkeep Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

*Children have the right to have their opinions heard and their views respected in decision-making that affects them"*

As part of the consultation work for the Strategy, the Tasmanian Children's Commissioner was tasked with gathering the voices of children and their families under 5 years of age. The result of this consultation was a book "*When I wake up I smile: A book of WELLBEING by 156 children across Tasmania*"<sup>8</sup>. A hard copy of this publication will be sent to the Commissioners to hear, listen, and reflect on the voices of Tasmanians children and see the many approaches that were taken to support children's voices being heard and be part of the development of the Strategy.

B4 is a strong advocate in ensuring the voices of children and their families are provided the places and spaces needed, to be heard and affect change. B4 through its Making Marks Project developed a range of resources to support adults hear and record the voices of children in the early years through the arts and can be accessed at [Making Marks Visible \(education.tas.gov.au\)](http://education.tas.gov.au).

#### 4. Strong Collaboration and Governance facilitated by Federal Government

In a new model there is a key role for the Federal Government to take a strong lead and build a governance model through collaboration with key partners and stakeholders, with the aim of delivering better outcomes for children and families and value for money for taxpayers.

It will require all of us to work together to ensure every child in Australia thrives and grows.

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<sup>8</sup> Source; [Wellbeing-Consultation-Report-We-Call-It-Happy.pdf \(childcomm.tas.gov.au\)](http://childcomm.tas.gov.au)