



Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT

Phase Two
Evaluation
Report

May 2026



Acknowledgement of Country



The Education Directorate acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We also acknowledge and pay respect to the Wreck Bay peoples as traditional owners and custodians of the land on which Jervis Bay School is located.

We respect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and their continuing culture and contribution they make to the Canberra region and the life of our city.

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Foreword

**By Minister for Education
and Early Childhood,
Yvette Berry, MLA**

The ACT Government is committed to realising our vision for a high-quality, accessible and inclusive early childhood education and care system. We know that the early years lay the foundation for lifelong learning, wellbeing and success and that access to high-quality early learning ensures every child has the strongest possible start in life.

Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT (Set up for Success) was launched in 2020 with a bold and future focused vision: to create an early education system that is equitable, inclusive and connected. Phase One (2020–22) established the foundations for this vision, and Phase Two (2023–25) has built on that groundwork through significant progress across the strategy’s four foundations.

During Phase Two, we increased access to free, high-quality early learning for three-year-olds through the Three-year-old preschool program, continued to support children experiencing vulnerability through the 3 year-old initiative, strengthened culturally strong practice, enhanced transitions, and invested in our educators through the *Valuing Educators, Values Children: A Workforce Strategy for the ACT early childhood profession (2022–25)*. These efforts have helped more children access early learning, strengthened families’ role as their child’s first teacher, and built educator confidence and capability. Partnerships across government, the community, early childhood services and schools have deepened, creating more connected supports for children and families.

This Phase Two Evaluation Report highlights both the progress made and the work still ahead. Workforce pressures, the need for tailored supports for children with additional rights (or individual needs) and ensuring families feel fully supported during transitions remain key priorities. Insights from this report will guide the development of the Phase Three Implementation Plan and inform our continued efforts to strengthen the system.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the sector, educators, community partners and families who have contributed to our achievements throughout Phase Two. Your engagement is shaping a future where every child in the ACT can learn, grow and thrive.

While we have made strong progress towards our vision, there is still important work ahead. Our focus now turns to Phase Three, where we will build on this momentum with a strong emphasis on child safety, reflecting our shared responsibility to ensure every child is safe, supported and able to thrive. The actions we take today will shape the wellbeing and opportunities of generations to come.

Yvette Berry
Minister for Education and Early Childhood

Table of contents

Foreword	3
Overview	5
Executive summary	8
Key findings	9
Foundation: A fair start for every child	10
Outcome 1: Increased access, equity and affordability of early learning for all children.....	10
Outcome 2: Culturally safe and supported learning environments.....	12
Summary of outcomes.....	14
Foundation: Every child has a story	15
Outcome 3: Seamless transitions.....	15
Outcome 4: Inclusive learning practices and environments.....	17
Outcome 5: Recognising, supporting and valuing parents and carers.....	18
Summary of outcomes.....	19
Foundation: Valuing educators, values children	21
Outcome 6: Ensuring appropriate sector supports.....	21
Outcome 7: Supporting capability building.....	22
Outcome 8: Creating career pathways.....	24
Outcome 9: Enhancing professional recognition.....	25
Summary of outcomes.....	27
Foundation: Working together for children	28
Outcome 10: Connected services and systems.....	28
Summary of outcomes.....	31
Summary and areas for focus in Phase Three	32
Appendix: Theories of Change	33

Overview

Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT (Set up for Success) sets the long-term direction for early childhood education and care in the ACT. It is grounded in national and international evidence as well as feedback from children, families, experts and the early childhood sector about the importance of quality early childhood education in giving children the best opportunities in life. The strategy emphasises that the early years lay the foundation for lifelong learning, wellbeing and development.

Evaluation approach

This report evaluates the second Phase of *Set up for Success* (2023–25) under the *Set up for Success* Evaluation Framework. The Evaluation Framework is informed by the *Set up for Success* and [Valuing Educators Values Children: A Workforce Strategy for the ACT's early childhood education and care profession \(2022–25\)](#) theories of change which articulate how the intended impacts, outcomes and long-term goals are expected to be achieved (see Appendix A).

Given the strategy's 10-year horizon and staged initiatives across 3 phases, the evaluation considers:

- implementation and impact of Phase Two initiatives
- progress towards the overarching outcomes across each foundation
- implementation of universal access to preschool for all 3-year-olds
- implementation of *Valuing Educators, Values Children: A Workforce Strategy for the ACT's early childhood education and care profession (2022–25)*.

This report outlines the key actions and initiatives delivered throughout Phase Two (2023–25) and the impact of their implementation. The report assesses the strategy's progress towards realising the overarching outcomes under each of the 4 foundations, covering January 2023 to December 2025.

The findings of this evaluation will help guide future policy decisions that impact children, families, the education and care workforce and the sector in the ACT. Evaluation of Phase Two will help to inform the Phase Three Implementation Plan.

Evaluation questions

Progress was assessed against 10 long-term outcomes and related key questions (key questions are included under each foundation):

Outcome 1: Increased access, equity and affordability

Outcome 2: Culturally safe and supported learning environments

Outcome 3: Seamless transitions

Outcome 4: Inclusive learning practices and environments

Outcome 5: Recognising, supporting and valuing parents and carers

Outcome 6: Ensuring appropriate sector supports

Outcome 7: Supporting capability building

Outcome 8: Creating career pathways

Outcome 9: Enhancing professional recognition

Outcome 10: Connected services and systems.

Data sources

A mixed methods approach was used, drawing on qualitative and quantitative data at population and system levels. Key data sources include:

- ACT Education Directorate Annual Report
- Education Directorate Annual School Satisfaction and Climate Survey
- Education Directorate Enrolment Records
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Report on Government Services (ROGS) National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection
- National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census
- National Quality Standard (NQS) Assessment and Ratings
- anecdotal evidence collected from stakeholders involved in the delivery of key initiatives
- information obtained through the workforce survey and needs analysis of the ACT early childhood education (ECEC) and outside school hours care (OSHC) sector (ACT Workforce Survey)
- other Education Directorate internal records and reports.

Universal access to preschool for 3-year-olds

On 31 July 2018, the then Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development announced the ACT Government's commitment to delivering free, universal access to high-quality preschool for all 3-year-olds, known as the [Three-year-old preschool program](#).

Since 1 January 2024, every eligible 3-year-old child in the ACT is entitled to 300 hours of free preschool per year through a partnered ECEC service, referred to as a Partner Provider. In 2026, 88 providers representing 146 services are delivering the program. This provision builds on the success of the targeted 3 year-old initiative launched in Phase One (2020), which provides up to 2 days per week, 50 weeks per year of free quality early learning to children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage. The 3 year-old initiative is delivered by not-for-profit entities only, acknowledging the community connections and wrap-around supports provided by these providers.

Free universal access to preschool for 3-year-olds ensures that every child has the opportunity to participate in early learning, supporting improved educational outcomes, equity, and lifelong benefits. Data obtained through evaluation of these programs is provided throughout this report.

Valuing Educators, Values Children: A Workforce Strategy for the ACT early childhood profession (2022–25)

This [workforce strategy](#) was developed with the aim to support the recruitment, retention, sustainability and quality of the ACT education and care workforce. In 2022, a consultation process was held to seek input from the sector, families, educators, unions and the wider community on the development of the workforce strategy with the findings of the consultation reflected throughout its four focus areas:

- sector supports
- capability building
- professional recognition
- career pathways.

A key initiative under the workforce strategy was to identify workforce capacity and needs through undertaking a comprehensive survey and review of the ACT's ECEC and OSHC workforce. In 2025, Nous Group Pty Ltd was engaged to undertake this work, resulting in the [Sector snapshot: ACT ECEC and OSHC Workforce Report](#) which provides an enhanced understanding of workforce needs, pressures and areas for future focus. The findings of this report have been incorporated into this evaluation.

The strategy was delivered from 2023–25, in line with Phase Two of *Set up for Success*. The actions in the strategy are evaluated through the *Set up for Success* Evaluation Framework under the Valuing Educators, Values Children foundation of *Set up for Success*.

Executive summary

Phase Two of *Set up for Success* (2023–25) focused on expanding access to early learning, strengthening transitions, deepening cultural safety, and building a capable and professionally recognised workforce. Across this period, participation in early learning increased, particularly for priority cohorts, while services strengthened their capacity to provide safe, inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments. Partnerships between families, schools, ECEC providers and government deepened, supporting shared responsibility for children’s learning and development.

Major system reforms were delivered, including the launch of the universal Three-year-old preschool program, expansion of Koori Preschool places, and implementation of the ACT-wide approach to effective transitions. Child safety was also central to Phase Two, with engagement in national reforms focused on ensuring child safety and wellbeing in early childhood settings.

Families consistently reported high satisfaction with preschool transitions and ACT participation in early childhood education remained above national levels. Culturally safe practice was strengthened through professional learning, On Country experiences and partnerships with Aboriginal community organisations.

Workforce capability and recognition grew through implementation of the ECEC Workforce Strategy, with strong uptake of targeted professional learning, expansion of coaching supports, increased access to scholarships and the introduction of ACT Teacher Quality Institute (TQI) registration for early childhood teachers. Cross-government and community partnerships progressed, supporting more coordinated services and alignment with national reforms.

While the ACT’s Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) results highlight rising developmental vulnerability, Phase Two has established stronger foundations for child development, safety and wellbeing through a more connected, culturally strong and professionally confident early childhood system. These foundations position the ACT for a Phase Three focus on safety and quality, early identification and intervention, workforce sustainability, culturally strong practice and strengthened wrap-around supports for children and families.

Key findings

Between 2023 and 2025 actions have been undertaken to support delivery of Phase Two. Highlights and key achievements include:

60%

increase
in **Koori
Preschool**
places available



12–13%

of **3 year-old initiative
enrolments** were **Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander
children** (vs 2% population)



1,182

children enrolled

in the targeted 3 year-old
initiative between 2023-25

Over

6,200

children

have **accessed
Three-year-old
preschool**

82

preschool
settings

participated in the
**Preschool Outcomes
Measure National
Applied Trial**



99% of children

exiting the 3 year-old initiative
had a **C&T Statement in 2025**

146

Services

were partnered
to deliver
**3-year-old
preschool**
in 2025



92%
of families

felt **supported** by
receiving preschool
**during their child's
transition**



268

early childhood teachers
registered with TQI

98%

of ECEC services
Meeting/Exceeding
NQS QA6 in 2025

5



**free professional
learning programs**
developed for the sector

253

ECEC Scholarships
awarded



Foundation: A fair start for every child

This foundation aims to improve access to quality early learning and development opportunities targeted to the individual needs of each child and providing culturally safe and supported learning environments. The focus of this foundation throughout Phase Two has been on increasing access, equity and affordability to ensure all children receive the benefits of quality education in the two years before formal school.

All Phase Two actions under this foundation are complete or ongoing.

Phase Two actions	Status
Provide universal access to one day per week, 300 hours per year, of free Three-year-old preschool	COMPLETE
Explore the introduction of formative assessments to assist with identifying the needs of children	COMPLETE
Explore flexible options for access to extended hours of ECEC	COMPLETE
Investigate mobile preschool and 'Families as First Teachers' models that could apply in the ACT	COMPLETE
Investigate providing meals at low or no cost to children in ECEC services and OSHC, focusing on families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage	COMPLETE

Phase One actions carried over to Phase Two	Status
Provide up to 100 additional places in Koori Preschool for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 3-year-olds	ONGOING
Recognise early childhood education in ACT law	COMPLETE

Outcome 1: Increased access, equity and affordability of early learning for all children

Are more children from priority cohorts accessing ECEC prior to preschool?

The targeted 3 year-old initiative has continued to show growth in participation throughout Phase Two. Since its inception, the number of children accessing this initiative has increased year on year (noting a slight decline in 2025) reflecting sustained demand and the ongoing effectiveness of the warm-referral model. Provider numbers have also remained stable throughout Phase Two. As of December 2025, 62% of not-for-profit providers in the ACT were engaged to deliver the program.

The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children accessing the 3 year-old initiative is substantially higher than the general population (2% according to ABS 2021 [Census Data](#)). This demonstrates the initiative's success in supporting equitable access for priority cohorts and contributes towards [Closing the Gap](#) Outcome 3: Children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years.

Table 1: Engagement in the targeted 3 year-old initiative

Program year	Number of providers	Number of referrals	Number of enrolments	Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
2023	57	309	369	51 (13%)
2024	55	335	403	51 (13%)
2025	57	320	386	46 (12%)

At Quarter 4 2025, approximately 58% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 3-year-olds in the ACT were accessing a government funded 3-year-old preschool program (based on 2024 population projections developed using the 2021 Census). Additionally, 22% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 3-year-olds were accessing a Koori Preschool program, however it is unclear whether these children were accessing a 3-year-old government funded program concurrently. Data relating to participation of this cohort in the Three-year-old preschool program and Koori Preschool is provided on pages 11 and 12.

Are more children accessing early learning prior to enrolling in preschool?

The [2025 Report on Government Services](#) (RoGS) confirms that the ACT continues to outperform national averages on participation, quality ratings and access indicators. The ACT continues to exceed the national average (50.4%) of children aged 0-5 attending ECEC services that are approved by the Australian Government's Child Care Subsidy Program. Throughout Phase Two, participation for this cohort remained stable at approximately 60%.

The Three-year-old preschool program was officially launched in Phase Two on 1 January 2024. Approximately 5000 children are eligible for the program, noting this is an estimate only due to accurate population data for this cohort being unavailable. There has been strong uptake in the first 2 years of implementation by both Partner Providers and families, as well as sustained partnerships with providers and services. Engagement in the program by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children was aligned to the relative general population.

Table 2: Three-year-old preschool program participation (2023-24)

Program year	Number of Partner Providers	Number of services	Number of enrolments*	Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander**
2023	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2024	87	143	3095	54 (1.8%)
2025	87	146	3121	68 (2.2%)

*Enrolment numbers are taken as an average of enrolments across each quarter.

**Partner Providers are asked to identify if a child is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This section is left blank if unsure.

In 2025 the ACT Government updated the funding model for both 3-year-old programs (commencing from 2026), supporting stable, equitable and sustainable access for families across the Territory. To streamline delivery and support service engagement, in 2025 the Education Directorate launched a Provider Portal, enabling Partner Providers to manage participation more easily and engage consistently with program requirements.

Are the educational outcomes of children improving from increased access to ECEC?

The 2024 results of the AEDC indicated national concerns around developmental vulnerability, with ACT results aligning to this broader national trend. In the ACT, a higher proportion of children are starting school with developmental vulnerabilities compared to the national average. Around 28.1% of ACT children were vulnerable in at least one domain, compared to 23.5% nationally, and 14.9% were vulnerable in two or more domains, above the national figure of 12.5%. Only 43.8% of ACT children were on track across all five domains, compared to 52.9% nationally.

Communication skills and general knowledge saw the biggest decline, while social competence improved slightly. Results also indicated a growing need for children to undergo further assessment, with about 23% of children flagged for additional evaluation. Work is underway to understand the drivers of the ACT's declining AEDC results to ensure the ACT Government's efforts and investments to arrest the trends are targeted and effective.

Measurement of long-term educational outcomes for children accessing the 3 year-old initiative requires the development of baseline data. The inaugural 3 year-old initiative cohort commenced in 2020 and completed Kindergarten in 2022. Analysis of learning outcomes for this cohort is underway and will contribute to a preliminary analysis of learning and development outcomes via a cohort study.

Outcome 2: Culturally safe and supported learning environments

Are more three- and four-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children accessing Koori Preschool or early entry?

In 2024, 3 Koori Preschool sites (Ngunnawal, Richardson and Narrabundah) were expanded to include an additional preschool session, providing an additional 66 places for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and increasing available places from 110 to 176 (60% overall increase). Enrolments in the program have increased by 30% in Phase Two as outlined in the table below.

Table 3: Availability and enrolment in Koori Preschool (2023-25)

Year	Number of available places	Number of enrolments at census date	3-year-old enrolments	4-year-old enrolments
2023	110	90	36	54
2024	176	114	41	73
2025	176	117	44	73

Enrolments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in ACT public preschools have also increased, rising from 271 in 2023 to 325 in 2024 and remaining stable in 2025 at 312 enrolments. This represents a 15% increase of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolling in ACT public preschools since 2023.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children can access Koori Preschool and 4-year-old preschool concurrently (including through Early Entry to Preschool) providing up to 30 hours per week of quality early learning. In 2023, 46 children held a dual enrolment, increasing to 63 in 2025 (37% increase).

There was a 37% increase in dual enrolments in Koori Preschool and 4-year-old preschool between 2023 and 2025.

Are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families reporting they are experiencing cultural safety at Koori Preschool?

Feedback gathered from Koori Preschool educators and families demonstrates that Koori Preschools are providing a culturally safe, welcoming, and community-connected environment where children confidently engage with Aboriginal culture and carry this learning into their homes and daily routines.

Families report feeling included and comfortable, demonstrated through strong attendance at events, expressions of gratitude, and growing relationships among parents at drop-off and pick-up. Community partnerships such as visits from Wiradjuri Echoes, ACT Libraries, Uniting Care, and Elders are enriching children's cultural learning through storytelling, dance, art, language, and shared experiences. Educators are highly valued for their dedication, cultural responsiveness, and ability to build trust with children and families, with some families describing the impact as exceptional. Children show pride and deepening cultural understanding, applying symbols, stories, and language beyond the classroom.

Overall, this evidence, alongside increased enrolment numbers for this cohort, indicates a culturally strong program where Aboriginal identity is celebrated, families feel a sense of belonging, and community connections are actively nurtured.

Are culturally safe and inclusive practices being implemented at ECEC services and Koori Preschools?

In 2025, 98% of ECECs and 100% of Koori Preschools were rated as Meeting or Exceeding in QA6.

Overall, there has been improvement amongst ECECs, OSHC and preschools against National Quality Standard 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities, Standard 6.1.2 Collaborative partnerships. In 2023, 235 services were Meeting or Exceeding this standard, increasing to 244 services in 2024 and further increasing to 356 services in 2025 (98% of all services).

In 2024, the Culturally Inclusive and Response Early Childhood Educational Practices professional learning program was

launched. The program aims to increase culturally inclusive practices and has received strong engagement and positive feedback, with 86% of participants Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing that the program improved their confidence to deliver culturally inclusive and responsive learning experiences (refer to page 22 for further information).

86% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the program improved their confidence to deliver culturally inclusive and responsive learning experiences.

As part of this program, access to 'Connection to Country' excursions for preschool aged children at Birrigai Outdoor School (Birrigai) was offered throughout 2024 and 2025. The excursions were funded through the Australian Government Preschool Reform Agreement's long day care sector allocation. Birrigai hosted 22 long day care services with educator feedback indicating that this experience fostered sustained engagement with Indigenous perspectives and strengthened their commitment to caring for Country. Educators reported that they had increased confidence to embed culturally inclusive and responsive practices into their daily programs, including conducting Acknowledgements of Country, incorporating Nggunawal language and symbols, and using storytelling and art inspired by Indigenous traditions.

Summary of outcomes

Across Phase Two, strong progress has been made towards expanding access to early childhood education, particularly for priority cohorts. Participation in the targeted 3 year-old initiative has continued to grow through sustained partnerships with not-for-profit providers and warm referrers, while the launch of the universal Three-year-old preschool program marked a major milestone, achieving strong uptake across its first two years.

Early childhood participation for children aged 0-5 remained above national levels, and engagement among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children increased significantly. The expansion of Koori Preschools further strengthened access, with additional places driving higher enrolments and participation surpassing ACT targets. Families and educators consistently describe Koori Preschools as culturally strong, safe and welcoming, and there is evidence of deep community engagement and broader sector improvements in cultural safety capability. These efforts are contributing towards [Closing the Gap](#) and [Our Boori's Our Way](#) objectives.

While outcomes data for children participating in ACT Government-funded 3-year-old preschool programs is still emerging, rising developmental vulnerability identified in the ACT's 2024 AEDC results highlights the continued importance of high-quality early childhood supports. It reinforces the need to determine the drivers of increased vulnerability, to ensure targeted supports are provided and that all children enter school with a strong foundation for learning.

SPOTLIGHT ON BEST PRACTICE

The online professional learning program in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culturally inclusive and responsive early childhood educational practices was launched in 2024 and was developed in collaboration with Community Early Learning Australia (CELA).

CELA established an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Expert Panel who provided input on the content and design of professional learning, to ensure it reflected local culture and met the community's needs, particularly around cultural safety and integrity. Feedback was also gathered from local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations including the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, Yerrabi Yurwang Family and Community Corporation and Winanggaay Ngunnawal Language Aboriginal Corporation.



LaToya Kennedy of Kalari Art was commissioned to produce a digital artwork to complement the program. The artwork (pictured), titled *Sharing Knowledge*, depicts the strong connections and learning pathways that our educators provide.

To complement the program, free 'Connection to Country' excursions at Birrigai Outdoor School were offered to preschool groups from long day care services. These excursions offered children and educators the chance to connect with and explore Ngunnawal Country and Ngunnawal perspectives through storytelling, natural art, campfire cooking, guided bush walks and self-directed exploration.

'It just contained so much that would support all teachers and educators to better understand and consider how they introduce Indigenous perspectives.'

– Educator

Foundation: Every child has a story

This foundation focuses on acknowledging and meeting the needs of each child and supporting seamless transitions between settings, in which children’s stories travel alongside them and are acknowledged and valued from one setting to the next. The focus throughout Phase Two has been on expanding and enhancing information sharing and transitions processes and supports across the ACT, ensuring alignment between ECEC services and schools.

All Phase Two actions under this foundation are complete. One action ‘Empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and kinship carers as their child’s first teacher’ was rescoped with consideration of the importance in ensuring supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are developed and delivered by the local community.

Phase Two actions	Status
Investigate enrolment in learning and development from birth	COMPLETE
Examine the alignment between funding and child-needs	COMPLETE
Increase capacity for differentiated practice through training on play-based learning with intentionality	COMPLETE
Empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and kinship carers as their child’s first teacher	COMPLETE

Phase One actions carried over to Phase Two	Status
Develop and implement an ACT-wide approach to effective transitions between services for children through expansion of the Continuity and Transitioning Framework	COMPLETE
Develop enhanced supports for ACT public schools and OSHC providers to support delivery of OSHC in the preschool environment and to encourage effective partnerships and communication	COMPLETE
Enhance delivery of Early Years Learning Framework focused on respectful relationships and gender diversity	COMPLETE

Outcome 3: Seamless transitions

Are partnered ECECs using the ACT-wide transitions methodology and framework for children transitioning out of their service?

The ACT-wide approach to effective transitions was launched in 2024. The approach includes a Continuity and Transitioning (C&T) Statement aimed at supporting children aged 0-5 who are transitioning between early childhood services or settings. All children accessing the targeted 3 year-old initiative are required to have a C&T statement in place, which is then shared with their child’s receiving school. All children exiting the Three-year-old preschool program are required to provide a C&T statement, or similar statement, to families who are exiting their ECEC service to attend a 4-year-old public preschool.

In 2024 and 2025, all ACT ECEC (long day care) Providers were offered a one-off payment to engage in the ACT-wide approach to effective transitions, including use of the C&T Statement (or a similar statement) for all 3-year-old children exiting the service to attend a 4-year-old public preschool program. In 2024, 70 providers representing 136 services opted in to receive the one-off payment. Numbers were similar again in 2025 with 70 providers representing 134 services opting in to receive the one-off payment. In 2024–25, 80% of services indicated that they used the C&T Statement as part of their transition processes.

Transitions processes for children exiting the 3 year-old initiative are supported by 2 Early Childhood Community Coordinators. Since the introduction of a formalised transition process in Phase One, there has been a consistent increase in the number of children transitioning out of the 3 year-old initiative who had a C&T Statement in place, as well as increased quality of information provided, and family and child input into development of the statements.

Table 4: Use of the C&T Statement for children from the 3 year-old initiative who exited to attend a 4-year-old preschool program

Year	Number of children	Number of statements received	Family input received	Child input received
2023	230	218 (95%)	77%	88%
2024	273	266 (97%)	94%	93%
2025	252	251 (99%)	95%	97%

Are children and families being engaged through the transition process?

School Satisfaction and Climate Survey (SSCS) results show a consistently strong level of satisfaction among parents and carers regarding their child’s transition to preschool. Throughout Phase Two, families have continued to report high satisfaction with how well their children were prepared for the transition, as well as the support provided by their child’s receiving school. Slightly lower levels of satisfaction were reported against the supports provided during the transition by the child’s sending school (ECEC).

Table 5: Family satisfaction with support through their child’s transition into preschool (P-2 parents who Agree or Strongly Agree with the statements provided)

Question	2023	2024	2025
My child was well prepared for this transition	89%	90%	88%
My child and I were supported during the transition by my child’s sending school (ECEC)*	N/A	N/A	79%
My child and I were well supported during the transition by my child’s receiving school (ACT public preschool)	92%	92%	92%

* Question was added to SSCS from 2025

Four Preschool Pathway Partners (PPPs) provide transition support for children with a disability or diverse learning needs who are transitioning to preschool. Throughout Phase Two, 73 children were provided with targeted support to transition to an ACT public preschool (further information on the PPPs is provided on page 17).

In addition to the collection of family and child reflections through C&T Statements, the ECCCs also conduct Children’s Workshops to gather authentic insights relating to children’s experiences in the 3 year-old initiative and their transition to preschool. In these sessions, children can reflect on their learning and growth throughout the program, and their experiences visiting their new school and making new connections with other children and educators.

Are more schools providing OSHC for preschool aged children?

In 2023, the Education Directorate consulted stakeholders involved in the OSHC for preschool aged children trial (conducted during Phase One) to explore workload and delivery challenges associated with this offering. This consultation resulted in the development of [Providing Outside of School Hours Care for Preschool Children in ACT Public Schools](#) (published in April 2024) which offers guidance on governance and compliance, strategies to strengthen communication between schools and OSHC providers and promotes engagement in delivery of OSHC for preschool children, ideally in the preschool environment.

In 2025, out of 59 ACT public preschools, 40 sites offered OSHC for preschool children (68%). Data was not available in 2023 or 2024.

The ACT Government has committed to working with the sector to increase supervised before and after care at public preschools by 2028. Delivery of this commitment will involve supporting best-practice delivery in the preschool environment or a similar NQF approved environment where this is not currently being achieved.

In 2025, 68% of ACT public schools offered OSHC for preschool aged children.

Outcome 4: Inclusive learning practices and environments

Are ECEC services and schools equipped to support the diversity needs from the community?

The Education Directorate’s Early Childhood Education Branch delivers a range of coaching supports to ECEC services and ACT public preschools to support educators to meet the diverse needs of 3- and 4-year-old children. Coaching supports are provided by:

- 2 ECCCs who work with priority families and services involved in the 3 year-old initiative to deliver pedagogical practice and transitions support;
- 4 PPPs who focus on building educator capability, confidence and understanding of inclusive practices, and supporting transitions for children with a disability or learning difficulty
- 4 Preschool Practice Coaches who support professional development and pedagogical practice supports for educators in long day care settings, to support improvement under the National Quality Standard.

Table 6: Services engaged in EDU coaching supports (2023–25)

Coaching Support	2023	2024	2025
Early Childhood Community Coordinators (ECCCs)	N/A	10	10
Preschool Pathways Partners (PPPs)	16	24	30
Preschool Practice Coaches (PPCs)	1	22	46

* Two additional PPCs were engaged in 2025.

The sustained growth in engagement in coaching supports reflects strengthened sector capability, broader access to inclusive practice coaching, and improved support for high-quality transitions. Professional learning in inclusive practices has also been developed for and accessed by educators across the sector throughout Phase Two (refer to page 22 for further information).

Outcome 5: Recognising, supporting and valuing parents and carers

Are parents/carers engaged in their child’s learning as their child’s first teacher?

SSCS data demonstrates strong and stable engagement of parents and carers in their child’s early learning. Family engagement is measured through a range of questions included in the SSCS as outlined in the table below. The results show high levels of trust and belonging and stable school-family connection. They are indicative of broad but not yet universal engagement with families, providing a solid foundation for deeper partnerships to be created.

Table 7: Family engagement in their child’s early learning (P-2 parents who Agree or Strongly Agree with the statements provided)

Question	2023	2024	2025
My child feels safe at this school	90%	91%	89%
My child is happy at this school*	89%	90%	N/A
School identification Domain**	91%	90%	91%
School and Family Connections Domain**	67%	67%	68%
Overall I am satisfied that my child is getting a good education at this school	86%	85%	87%

* Question not included in 2025 SSCS.
** Domain comprises multiple questions.

Family engagement has been further supported through ECEC services and schools using C&T Statements as part of the transition to preschool.

Summary of outcomes

Phase Two has delivered clear system-wide improvements in how children are supported through transitions, driven by the ACT-wide approach to effective transitions and widespread use of the C&T Statement. Near universal completion of statements for children in the 3 year-old initiative and high uptake of transitions payments reflects strong sector engagement and a shift toward more child-centred, family-driven transition planning. These practices are strengthening information sharing and supporting smoother transitions for children.

Sector capability in inclusive education has also grown, with increasing uptake of coaching and professional supports across ECEC services and public preschools. This expanded coaching capacity is enhancing educator confidence and quality of practice for priority children.

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Access to OSHC for preschoolers remains limited, with a third of families unable to access this offering, though the ACT Government's commitment signals future system-level expansion to ensure more consistent support for families during the preschool year. Parent engagement and satisfaction remain strong and stable, with high levels of school identification and positive views of early learning, while also highlighting opportunities to deepen partnerships with families as their child's first teacher.

These strengthened foundations position the ACT to move from establishing system processes to deepening quality and impact, particularly by building 'transition capability', improving OSHC accessibility, and advancing universal family engagement across early childhood settings.

SPOTLIGHT ON BEST PRACTICE

The ACT-wide approach to effective transitions emphasises collaborative relationships and recognises that effective transitions rely on schools, educators and families working together throughout the transition process.

The C&T Statement functions as a holistic record of each child’s learning story, combining educator insights, the child’s own reflections and meaningful contributions from families. Importantly, the inclusion of child voice is a central feature of this approach that ensures that children are active participants in shaping how their strengths, interests and perspectives are understood and carried forward into their new learning environment. By capturing what children say about their learning, interests, worries and hopes, children are placed at the centre and acknowledged as capable contributors.

This collaborative, child-centred approach ensures receiving preschools are equipped with a nuanced understanding of each child’s identity and needs, enabling more responsive, strengths-based and culturally informed practice. Ultimately, it supports schools to be ready to support all children from day one. Sample child reflections from a 2025 C&T statement are provided below.

CHILD REFLECTIONS

These reflections do not need to be collected one session and should be developed over time

Name of person documenting:

Relationship to child: Educator

What would you like your new teacher to know about you? What would you like to know about Preschool?

I live with my mum, dad, and brother. On weekends, I like going to my cousin’s house. I really like bugs and dinosaurs, and my favourite book is about bugs.

I like to play with LEGO and find dinosaurs in the sandpit. Sometimes like quiet time and reading books with my teacher.

What do you enjoy doing most at [ECEC]? What are you good at?

I like building things with LEGO and painting with lots of colours. I am good at colouring, finding bugs, and playing with sand.

What do you find hard? What do you need help with at (ECEC)?

I find it hard when it is too noisy or when people do not share with me. I get upset sometimes, but my teachers help me calm down.

What makes you feel happy and safe?

I feel happy when I sit with my teacher and read books. I feel safe when my teachers help me when I get frustrated or upset.

Foundation: Valuing educators, values children

This foundation recognises that quality interactions with children drive their development and that the ECEC workforce must be professionally recognised in rewarding, empowering, and sustainable ways. The focus of this foundation throughout Phase Two has been on implementing a range of workforce initiatives through delivery of Valuing Educators, Values Children: Workforce Strategy for the early childhood education and care profession (2023–25) (the ECEC Workforce Strategy). Efforts have focused on ensuring the sector is supported through capability development, professional learning and networking across the sector, and clearer career pathways into and through the profession.

All Phase Two actions under this foundation are complete or ongoing.

Phase Two actions	Status
Establish a program in culturally inclusive and responsive early childhood educational practices	COMPLETE
Amend the ACT teacher professional regulatory framework to include qualified early childhood teachers	COMPLETE
Establish a professional learning and resource portal for educators	ONGOING
Establish professional learning network to share professional expertise	COMPLETE
Offer scholarships to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators working in Koori Preschool	COMPLETE

Phase One actions carried over to Phase Two	Status
Develop a cross-sector ACT ECEC workforce strategy	COMPLETE

Outcome 6: Ensuring appropriate sector supports

Are ACT Government efforts being appropriately directed to ensure workforce strategy actions are implemented effectively?

The Valuing Educators Reference Group (VERG) was established in 2024 to support the implementation of the ECEC Workforce Strategy. The group is comprised of representatives from across the education and care sector reflecting informed, diverse perspectives.

‘This group felt like a genuine collaboration. I felt as though our experience was valued and listened to’

– VERG member

Feedback gathered from VERG members highlighted that the group provided an authentic forum for collaboration and peer-to-peer learning where experience was genuinely valued and listened to. All (100%) members reported being Satisfied or Very Satisfied with the delivery of initiatives under the ECEC Workforce Strategy and members expressed that they felt they had played a substantial role in shaping the design and delivery of initiatives. 70% of members rated the extent to which the ECEC

Workforce Strategy had addressed the needs and priorities of educators in the ACT as Significantly, with 30% rating this as Moderately. Members indicated that the group has played a substantial role in shaping the design and delivery of initiatives. At the end of 2025, VERG was extended for a further 12 months to ensure ongoing collaboration with the sector on workforce matters.

Outcome 7: Supporting capability building

Do early childhood educators feel better equipped to deliver inclusive educational practices?

Findings of the [Sector snapshot: ACT ECEC and OSHC Workforce Report](#) (the ACT Workforce Survey) indicate strong engagement across the sector in professional learning, with 83% of respondents indicating that they engaged in professional learning in the past year. Barriers to professional learning include cost, time and inconsistent support from leadership in accessing these opportunities.

Throughout Phase Two the Education Directorate offered a range of free online and in-person professional learning opportunities in inclusive practices. These programs were targeted towards feedback provided by the workforce in Phase One on their professional learning needs. Engagement in the programs was considerably high throughout Phase Two and yielded positive feedback from program participants as outlined below.

Table 8: Number of educators who engaged in early childhood professional learning programs provided by the Education Directorate (2023–25)

Program	2023	2024	2025
Play-based learning and intentionality	N/A	158	320
Culturally-inclusive and responsive early childhood educational practices	N/A	5	264
Key Word Sign - Level 1 and Level 2	N/A	146	N/A
Anti Bias: A project approach	N/A	66	112
Gender equity for early years education	N/A	6	39

The [Play-based learning and intentionality](#) professional learning was launched in August 2024 and was developed in collaboration with CELA. The program is TQI Accredited for 8 hours and is designed to support educators across a range of experience levels and settings to implement intentional play-based practices in line with the Early Years Learning Framework v2.0. Evaluation results indicate that 96% of participants Agreed or Strongly Agreed that the program improved their confidence to deliver intentional play-based learning experiences.

‘Beautifully structured and effortlessly clear, your delivery hit all the right notes. Massive respect for the thoughtful execution and the quality of work. Truly impressive!’

– Play-based learning and intentionality participant

The [Culturally inclusive and responsive early childhood educational practices](#) program was launched in March 2025 and was developed in collaboration with CELA. The program is TQI Accredited for 8 hours. Feedback on the program has also been very positive with 86% of participants Agreed or Strongly Agreed that the program improved their confidence to deliver culturally inclusive and responsive learning experiences.

Throughout 2024 Key Word Sign professional learning was made available to the long day care sector providing educators with an opportunity to build their skills in alternative and augmentative communication. Anecdotal feedback indicated that participants enjoyed and appreciated the dynamic and engaging delivery approach, the relevance of the sign vocabulary taught, and the activities tailored to early childhood contexts.

Anti-Bias: A project approach was launched in June 2024 and was developed in collaboration with Dr Ruby Red Scarlet. It aims to support educators to understand anti-bias approaches in ECEC and to create learning environments where all children, educators and families have a sense of belonging. The program is TQI Accredited for 5 hours. Participants have reported deepened awareness of personal and cultural bias and a strengthened commitment to creating anti-bias learning environments.

‘This PL made me really think about how we all have bias and how we need to be aware of how that comes across in our classrooms and teaching.’

– Anti-bias participant

‘This course provides a strong understanding of how to provide more inclusive environments and encourage diversity of gender expression.’

– Gender equity participant

The Gender Equity for early years education program was launched in December 2024 and focuses on gender equity and the prevention of gender-based violence in early childhood settings. The program is TQI Accredited for 4 hours and aims to support educators to understand gender-based violence and how gender inequality shapes children’s early learning experiences. Participants have reported strengthened ability to create more inclusive environments, particularly by supporting diverse gender expression and motivation to continue to improve and refine their practice.

Are early childhood professionals accessing professional learning networks and resources?

The ACT Early Childhood Education and Care Network was established in August 2025 in partnership with Empower, Learn Motivate (ELM). The Network brings together ACT ECEC providers, service leaders and educators to share expertise, reflect on practice, and promote the adoption of high-quality approaches. More than 400 educators were consulted to identify sector priorities and ensure the Network is positioned to meet current and emerging needs. In 2025, 6 Network sessions were delivered on child safeguarding, educator wellbeing and building connections. Enrolment demand for these sessions was generally strong, with several sessions reaching or exceeding capacity.

Two new professional networks were established in Phase Two to support educators across the sector, including a targeted network for Aboriginal educators established by Yerrabi Yurwang.

The Strong Beginnings Aboriginal Educator Network was established in 2025 as part of the Aunty Agnes Shea Early Childhood Scholarships Program (further information on the program is provided on pages 24–25). The network provides a space for Aboriginal early childhood educators from across the ACT to connect, share knowledge and strengthen professional practice in a culturally safe and empowering space. One gathering was held in 2025, with 12 educators in attendance. The network will continue in 2026.

To further support collaborative professional learning, in 2024 the Education Directorate released the Peer Support, Coaching and Mentoring Toolkit to support ECEC providers to embed these approaches in their setting. Complementary to this work, educators and leaders working in long day care settings were offered the opportunity to access free Bring on the Coach training, delivered by Semann & Slattery. This 12-week program provided participants with coaching sessions, coaching circles and collaborative tools and resources. A total of 134 educators participated in one or more of these sessions.

Outcome 8: Creating career pathways

Are pathways into and through ECEC careers supported? Are more individuals commencing and completing pathways into the profession?

Nationally, the sector continues to experience significant workforce shortages, driven by increased workloads, complex child needs, media scrutiny and retention challenges. Findings of the ACT Workforce Survey indicate that between 2021 and 2024, the ACT workforce grew by only 2%, compared with 11% nationally.

Concurrent to this trend, the number of degree-qualified educators in the ACT ECEC sector has shown a steady upward trend over recent years. In the 2021 National ECEC Workforce Census, only 7% of educators were reported as holding a bachelor's degree or higher. By 2024, this figure had increased to 12%, bringing the ACT into alignment with the national average for degree-qualified educators. More recent data collected through the ACT Workforce Survey indicates that this upward trajectory has continued. According to the survey, 17% of educators in the ACT ECEC sector now hold a bachelor's degree or higher. This suggests a growing pipeline of higher-qualified professionals entering the sector and reflects ongoing efforts to strengthen the capability and professionalism of the ACT's workforce.

Throughout Phase Two, a range of scholarship opportunities were made available to the sector to support people entering the sector to gain their initial qualifications, as well as to assist existing educators who wished to further develop or upgrade their qualifications. Scholarship opportunities available were:

- **Early Childhood Degree Scholarship Program:** supports individuals working in non-government ECECs to gain a degree qualification (16 scholarships available per year)
- **Aunty Agnes Shea Early Childhood Scholarship Program:** delivered in partnership with Yerrabi Yurwang, the program supports Aboriginal individuals to study towards or enhance their early childhood qualification, including wrap-around supports (up to 10 scholarships available per year)
- **Early Learning Connection Program:** Delivered in partnership with Baringa Early Learning, the program supports individuals to study towards or enhance their early childhood qualification, including coaching and wrap-around supports.

Engagement in these programs is outlined in further detail below.

Table 9: Early Childhood Scholarships Awarded (2023–25)

Program	2023	2024	2025
Early Childhood Degree Scholarship Program	16	22	19
Aunty Agnes Shea Early Childhood Scholarship Program	N/A	N/A	Total: 5
Certificate III			3
Diploma			0
Degree (Bachelor)			2
Early Learning Connection Program		Total: 88	Total: 103
Certificate III		23	30
Certificate III (Boori Educator Connections)		N/A	18
Diploma		18	17
Degree (Bachelor)		19	21
Coaching Only		28	16

In addition to the above programs, in 2024 the Education Directorate launched the [ACT Education and Care Capability Framework](#) which outlines professional standards for early childhood educators and supports capability development and the establishment of career pathways. The framework is aligned to the National Quality Framework and the Principles and Practices outlined in the EYLF v2.0 and My Time Our Place v2.0.

Are more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people pursuing a career in early childhood education?

Findings from the ACT Workforce Survey indicate a comparative representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators across the education and care sector in relation to the general population of 2%. There is an ongoing opportunity to continue to support and grow this workforce to increase cultural responsiveness across the system.

5 scholarships have been awarded to Aboriginal people through the Aunty Agnes Shea Early Childhood Scholarship Program since its commencement in December 2024.

In December 2024, a formal partnership was established between the Education Directorate and Yerrabi Yurwang Child and Family Aboriginal Corporation to deliver the Aunty Agnes Shea Early Childhood Scholarships Program. This program is designed to support up to 40 Aboriginal individuals to undertake study towards a Certificate III, Diploma, or Degree qualification in early childhood education. The initiative aims to increase the skills and qualifications of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, with a particular focus on those working in Koori Preschools and early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings.

In 2025, 2 Boori Educator Connections Stream participants secured permanent employment at Koori Preschools, and 3 secured employment at an ECEC service.

In February 2025, the Early Learning Connection program introduced the Boori Educator Connections stream tailored specifically for First Nations participants to provide a culturally safe learning pathway to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the sector. In 2025, 18 participants successfully commenced the program to begin their studies towards a Certificate III in ECEC.

Outcome 9: Enhancing professional recognition

Are there more professionally registered early childhood teachers in the ACT?

During Phase Two amendments were made to the ACT teacher professional regulatory framework to include qualified early childhood teachers. This reform enabled degree-qualified early childhood educators to voluntarily register with TQI (registration commenced on 1 April 2024), with registration fees waived for the first two years to encourage uptake. By the end of 2024, 101 educators had successfully registered, and this number grew to 268 in 2025 reflecting strong uptake and sector engagement.

Is the perception of early childhood education and care improving in the ACT?

The Three-year-old preschool campaign delivered throughout 2024 and 2025 aimed at contributing towards stronger public understanding of the importance of early childhood education and care and elevating the profile of the ECEC profession. Post-campaign survey results showed a marked shift in public awareness, with a 20% increase in awareness of the program and very high recognition (96%) among families with eligible children, indicating growing public engagement with early learning and greater visibility of the ECEC sector.

Other initiatives delivered throughout Phase Two contributed significantly towards elevating public visibility and perceptions of the profession including the availability of TQI registration for early childhood teachers (as outlined above) and amendments to the Education Act 2004 in 2024 where the right for children to access free, quality early learning in the 2 years before formal schooling was enshrined, formally recognising that early childhood education and care is a right for all children. The ACT was the first jurisdiction to do this.

Alongside these positive advances, adverse media coverage related to child safety in ECEC settings has contributed to more negative public perceptions around ECEC. Child safety is a shared, system-wide responsibility and a foundational element of *Set up for Success*. To counter this negative narrative, the ACT Government has responded with strengthened regulatory oversight, targeted supports for services and clear communications reinforcing the professionalism and safety standards underpinning early childhood provision in the ACT.

Findings of the ACT Workforce Survey also highlight that community perceptions of ECEC and the value of educators remains mixed. Educators reported feeling deeply valued by children, families and their immediate communities, yet they continue to experience low public recognition and limited understanding of the complexity of their work more broadly. The ACT Workforce Survey highlights that this misalignment is reinforced by increasing media scrutiny and persistent misconceptions about the purpose of ECEC, which some educators say affects morale and retention.

Summary of outcomes

Across Phase Two, the ECEC Workforce Strategy has been the core mechanism through which the ACT Government has strengthened workforce capability, sector collaboration and professional recognition. The establishment of structures, such as the VERG, played a pivotal role in shaping workforce initiatives and ensuring they were grounded in sector experience.

The ECEC Workforce Strategy also drove significant growth in capability building across the sector, with strong uptake of targeted professional learning programs and the establishment of new professional networks that strengthened access to high-quality practice support. These initiatives have contributed towards building educator confidence in key areas including inclusive practice, cultural responsiveness and anti-bias approaches and have helped create a more skilled and connected workforce.

Career development pathways have been strengthened through increased access to scholarships, attracting individuals to the sector and supporting existing educators to upgrade their qualifications. Targeted streams and networks for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators have begun to address longstanding under-representation and are supporting culturally safe pathways into the profession. These efforts support the advancement of the Our Boori's, Our Way principles of cultural safety, identity and belonging.

Reforms to teacher registration and amendments to the Education Act 2004 have elevated the professional status of early childhood teachers, reinforcing the ECEC Workforce Strategy's overarching aim of recognising and valuing the profession and the notion that a teacher is a teacher, no matter where they teach.

The ECEC Workforce Strategy has provided a strong, coherent foundation for workforce reform, delivering measurable improvements in sector capability, professional recognition and diversity. These foundations position the ACT early childhood workforce for ongoing growth and system-wide quality improvement.

SPOTLIGHT ON BEST PRACTICE

Early Learning Connection participant feedback

Jessie first engaged with Early Learning Connection (ELC) as a Certificate III Stream participant. She worked casually at an ELC partner service and successfully completed her qualification at the end of 2025. Here is what she has to say about her time with ELC:

'I wouldn't have gone into early childhood education without ELC's knowledge, support and guidance. They always show up for us, and I've always loved how interested they are in how we're going with everything.

Reminding us that we can always come to them for support or advice, I've always felt acknowledged and part of the group. ELC meant I could get my Cert III in early childhood in a safe, friendly, understanding environment with amazing teachers and support in a flexible, consistent way that worked for me.

I never would have gone into early childhood if it weren't for ELC. The encouragement, support and guidance they have given me in my studies and in my job as an educator in an early childhood service has been life changing, and I will be forever grateful to them for giving me this opportunity.'

Foundation: Working together for children

This foundation recognises that children derive the most benefit when education, health and community services work together. Connected services support connected communities, which wrap around children and families, helping them to recognise that they belong and are safe. The focus of this foundation throughout Phase Two has been about building on the partnerships developed in Phase One to support the delivery of enhanced wrap-around supports for children.

All Phase Two actions under this foundation are complete or ongoing.

Phase two actions	Status
Develop a whole of government measurement framework for early childhood development 0-8	ONGOING
Work towards incrementally expanding the ECEC offer in ACT public preschools	ONGOING
Improve connections between Maternal and Child Health, Child Development Service, Child and Family Centres, and ECEC services	COMPLETE
Amend the Education Act 2004 to incorporate early childhood, including encouraging information sharing between schools and other services, including ECEC and OSHC	COMPLETE

Phase One actions carried over to Phase Two	Status
Explore how a government funded preschool service could provide a full day of ECEC for children	ONGOING
Finalise a structured capacity planning framework to better manage long-term development of ECEC service provision across the Territory	ONGOING

Outcome 10: Connected services and systems

Are there partnerships between ECEC services and schools, ACT Government services, and community organisations?

Partnerships across ECEC services, schools, ACT Government agencies and community organisations have continued to strengthen throughout Phase Two. The Placement Pathway Group (PPG) grew in activity, increasing from 13 meetings in 2023 to over 20 annually in 2024 and 2025. The group plays a key role in coordinating placements for priority 3-year-olds based on family needs. The network of warm referrers also remained strong, expanding to 138 referrers in 2024 and maintaining broad engagement in 2025, demonstrating sustained cross-sector commitment to supporting families into early learning.

Since 2023, 113 warm referrer information sessions have been held, providing information on the 3 year-old Initiative and how to refer a child into the program.

Partnerships were further reinforced through the partnerships with ECEC services (Partner Providers) to deliver the free Three-year-old preschool program. Provider participation increased from 80 in the first year to 87 by the end of 2025, reflecting strong sector engagement. C&T Statements provided to schools for children exiting the program are further strengthening collaboration between settings.

Feedback gathered from Partner Providers throughout Phase Two contributed to enhancements to partnership arrangements with service providers. This included combining funding agreements for the targeted 3 year-old initiative and 3-year-old preschool which has minimised duplication and streamlined administrative processes. Sector supports were further strengthened through the development of a new Provider Portal giving services a central, accessible platform to manage program delivery, improve data accuracy, and reduce administrative complexity. In 2025 the funding model for both programs was enhanced to ensure ongoing sustainability and financial viability for services. These improvements reflect the strong collaboration with providers and demonstrate the ACT Government's commitment to ongoing improvement and strengthening partnerships with the sector.

During Phase Two the ACT Government committed to ensuring that all new ECEC services on ACT public school sites will be delivered by a not-for-profit organisation. In 2025, procurement for the Early Learning Centre and OSHC service at Strathnairn Primary School resulted in the appointment of YMCA Canberra as the service provider.

Are strategic linkages between ACT Government Directorates on 0–8 work increasing?

The ACT Government has continued to engage extensively across directorates as well as with key external stakeholders and sector representatives to support and advance early childhood reform priorities including through mechanisms such as the Early Years Working Group. This group brings together directorates to coordinate policy, program design and system-level responses for children and families. In addition, the Village for Every Child Leadership Group and Working Groups, facilitate shared leadership, collective problem-solving, and partnership approaches with community organisations.

In parallel with this, the ACT Government also progressed initiatives designed to strengthen early identification and support for young children and families. This has included ongoing work related to implementing a 3-year-old health and development check, ensuring children receive timely developmental screening and access to early supports. In 2025, the Education Directorate supported ACT Health and Community Services Directorate to deliver a pilot of this program including at 2 Koori Preschools. This collaboration reinforces a focus on coordinated approaches that support children's wellbeing and development.

Is the ACT engaged in supporting delivery of key National early childhood reforms?

The ACT Government has continued to engage actively in key national early childhood policy and reforms, contributing ACT insights and ensuring alignment between local implementation and broader national directions. Key national engagements have included:

Child Safety Reform: building on commitments made by Education Ministers, the ACT has progressed significant elements of the national Child Safety Reform agenda. This has included enacting legislative changes to strengthen child safety in the Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations, implementing new mandatory child safety training requirements, preparing for the introduction of an early childhood workforce register and implementing changes relating to the appropriate use of digital devices in early childhood settings.

Early Childhood Policy Group (ECPG): active representation on the ECPG has enabled the ACT to maintain a clear and influential presence in national policy discussions relating to early childhood reform. Through this forum, the ACT has contributed to deliberations on workforce, quality, regulatory changes and broader

system-level reforms, ensuring that ACT priorities and practical implementation considerations are reflected in national decisions.

Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP): the Education Directorate, in collaboration with the Health and Community Services Directorate, has represented the ACT in this cross-portfolio policy partnership under Closing the Gap. This work has focused on shaping national recommendations aimed at improving early childhood outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. ACT contributions have helped to ensure that national proposals reflect local contexts and that ACT efforts are aligned with ongoing reforms under Closing the Gap.

Preschool Reform Agreement (PRA) and Preschool Outcomes Measure (POM): the ACT was active in national negotiations regarding the extension of the PRA in 2025 to December 2027, advocating for continuity of funding for the ACT early childhood sector. The ACT has also provided substantial input into the development and trial of the POM, to support formative assessment in preschool settings. 82 preschool settings across the ACT participated in the POM National Applied Trial in 2025, providing valuable feedback and insights from local service contexts that will inform the refinement of the national tool, learning progressions and professional learning materials.

Summary of outcomes

Across Phase Two, the ACT continued to build a more connected and coordinated early childhood system, with partnerships across ECEC services, schools, government directorates, and community organisations. Collaborative mechanisms such as the PPG have continued to strengthen support for priority 3-year-olds, while the warm referrer network maintained strong, cross-sector engagement and shared responsibility for supporting families to access early learning.

Partnerships with the sector were also strengthened and expanded through the rollout of Three-year-old preschool, with provider participation increasing since the program's launch. The program has continued to be refined and improved based on feedback, including updates to administrative processes and the program funding model.

Cross-government collaboration has continued, with directorates working together to deliver coordinated early childhood policy responses, laying the foundation for strengthened early identification and streamlined supports. The ACT's active involvement in national reform processes has ensured the Territory's perspectives contributed to national decisions and initiatives, particularly in relation to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Collectively, these developments show clear progress toward a more integrated, responsive, and collaborative early childhood system in the ACT.

SPOTLIGHT ON BEST PRACTICE FOR THIS FOUNDATION

The Building Early Education Fund (BEEF) is a major Australian Government initiative that has allocated \$1 billion in capital funding to build or expand ECEC services in areas of greatest need. BEEF prioritises high-quality, not-for-profit and government providers, offering targeted capital grants and supporting the development of ECEC services co-located on or near school sites. This ensures new infrastructure is aligned with evidence-based priorities and contributes to broader reforms aimed at achieving universal access to ECEC.

The ACT was an early partner in this initiative, negotiating a Federation Funding Agreement schedule in December 2025 to secure \$10 million in Australian Government funding, alongside a \$3 million ACT Government contribution, to build a new early learning service at Whitlam School. The project will create 130 new ECEC places by 2028, co-located with the P-6 school designed for 780 students, strengthening continuity of learning and providing families in the growing Molonglo Valley with improved access to high-quality early education.

By leveraging this national policy initiative, the ACT has strengthened support for the not-for-profit ECEC sector, while also expanding access to quality early learning for ACT children and families.

Summary and areas for focus in Phase Three

This impact evaluation will inform development of the Phase Three Implementation Plan. Initiatives already committed to in Phase Three of *Set up for Success* will be refined based on the evaluation findings.

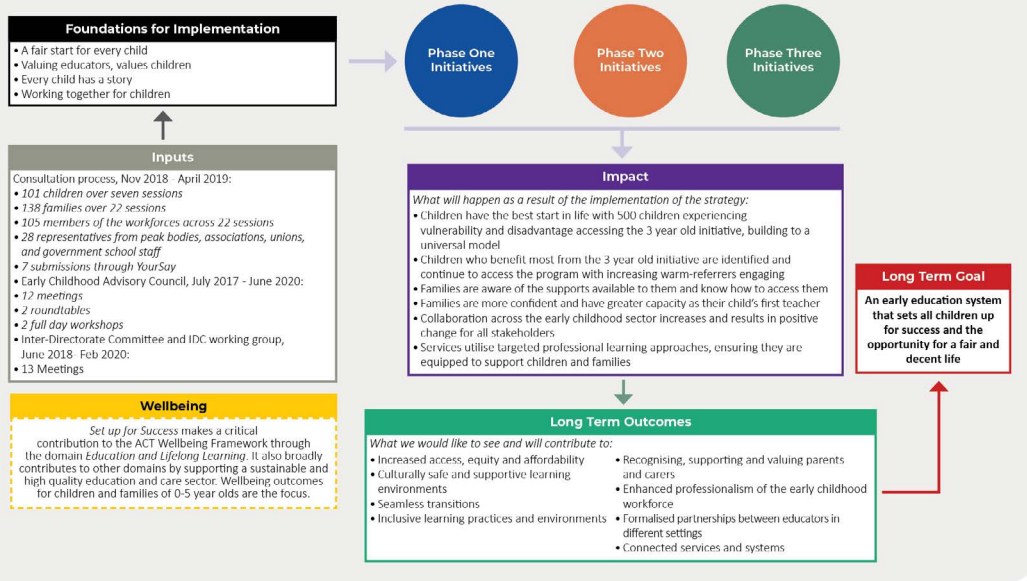
Phase Three will focus on deepening the quality and consistency of implementation across the early childhood system, moving from building foundations to embedding strong, equitable and culturally safe practice in every setting. This includes strengthening targeted supports, improving the capability of the workforce through continued investment in professional learning and Aboriginal workforce pathways, and continuing to enhance transitions.

The evaluation has identified the following areas for future focus to ensure every child and family experiences a high-quality early learning journey from birth to formal schooling:

- Continue to expand access to both 3-year-old programs.
- Expand access to OSHC for preschoolers, with a focus on best-practice delivery.
- Deliver workforce supports to lift capability and support retention across the sector.
- Continue to strengthen cultural safety across the system.
- Strengthen early support systems to address developmental vulnerability.
- Continue to build partnerships across the sector.
- Increase engagement with families in their child's learning.
- Ongoing advocacy at the local and national level.
- Continued focus on supporting quality and child safety in early childhood settings.

Appendix: Theories of Change

Set up for Success: Theory of Change



THEORY OF CHANGE

Valuing Educators, Values Children: A Workforce Strategy for the ACT Early Childhood Education and Care Profession 2023-2025

Because...

We know experienced, qualified and passionate educators are the single most important contributor to quality in early childhood education

So we deliver...

Actions under the Strategy's key focus areas:

- Sector supports
- Capability building
- Professional recognition
- Career pathways

And that leads to...

An early education system that sets all children up for success and the opportunity for a fair and decent life



We believe...

Valuing children and investing in their learning and development requires governments and the community to value and invest in educators

That results in...

A well-supported, valued and highly skilled early childhood education and care workforce





ACT
Government