

Best Start Phase One Action Plan

2023 – 2025

The Best Start for Canberra’s Children: The First 1000 Days Strategy (Best Start) aims to improve outcomes for Canberra’s children by establishing a supportive environment in the critical development time between conception and a child’s second birthday.

Best Start will be delivered in 3 phases. This Best Start Phase One Action Plan (the Action Plan) sets out the first steps of implementing Best Start and forms the first phase (years 1 - 2). The actions will evolve over time with the second and third action plans being refined and developed in partnership between government and the community. This work will continue to be subject to future funding decisions.

Best Start details 4 goals identified through the voices of parents, educators and frontline workers during lived experience consultations alongside the evidence of what works in practice. The actions have been grouped around these common goals:

1. Increase community awareness of the importance of the first 1000 days
2. Enable parents to be confident and supported
3. Provide services for everyone
4. Foster connected communities

Goal 1: Increase community awareness of the importance of the first 1000 days	
Description:	The early years are a crucial time in a child’s life, but the importance of the first 1000 days is not widely understood or communicated.
Why this goal?	Increasing awareness among the broader community of the importance of the first 1000 days helps build a shared understanding of why this period is so critical to long-term health and wellbeing. It also communicates what people in parenting, caregiving and frontline service delivery roles can do to make a difference in the first 1000 days and what services are available to support people.
Aim:	Increase health literacy and awareness among the broader community of the importance of the first 1000 days and available services.
Action:	
1.	Scope, design and deliver a First 1000 Days awareness campaign inclusive of diverse audiences.
2.	Scope, design and deliver a Health Literacy communications campaign inclusive of diverse audiences
3.	Highlight the importance of early childhood education in the Blue Book Personal Health Record.

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Goal 2:	Enable parents to be confident and supported
Description:	Parents want the best for their children and to do right by them. Supporting parents to have good health and wellbeing helps them to feel confident and supported in providing the best start for their child.
Why this goal?	Parents are a child’s first teacher and play a key role shaping their child’s development during the first 1000 days that can set them up for lifelong health and wellbeing.
Aim:	Parents’ health and wellbeing is prioritised so they can feel confident and supported as parents.
Action:	
	4. Use a phased approach to recruit new allied health staff to support parents and families in all their diversity during the first 1000 days and beyond.
	5. Undertake a co-design process to respond to local infant and child (0-12 years) (and family) mental health service system gaps to improve access to multidisciplinary care for children, in line with National Head to Health Kids Hub model.
	6. Deliver the Birth of a Child program to reduce the burden of parents needing to tell the government they have had a baby. This program will simplify the process of Medicare Enrolment, proof-of-birth for Centrelink and birth registration for the newborn.

Goal 3:	Provide services for all families
Description:	Families and their support networks are diverse. We need a connected and collaborative service system that is strengths based, inclusive, accessible, restorative, therapeutic and works with children in the context of their families.
Why this goal?	Fostering a more collaborative and connected service system that responds to emerging needs will make it easier for families to navigate and access services.
Aim:	Build collective capacity through shared language, consistent practice and skills.
Action:	
	<p>7. Establish an ACT Community of Practice that advocates and champions the first 1000 days, driving and supporting shared language and consistent principles of practice. Also,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Connect the ACT Community of Practice with other existing networks and initiatives, including a new Child and Family Continuous Improvement Network that is across the ACT's health services. ○ Bring together the ACT Community of Practice and other interested stakeholders annually to share information, practice and new initiatives in the first 1000 days.
	8. Investigate ways primary practitioners can share information about parenting with disabilities, reasonable adjustment needs and providing advice to support families.
	9. Continue to enable programs that are inclusive and build capacity to support children and families through Healthy Canberra Grants funding opportunities.
	10. Scope opportunities to improve cultural integrity and inclusivity of mainstream services to provide greater choice for families.
	11. Enhance and expand provision of early intervention therapy services for children in their early years.
	12. Deliver improvements across child and adolescent health services to support children and families through the implementation of actions in the Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Plan.
	13. Expand outpatient services for families and children including early support for neurodevelopmental and behavioural issues to reduce waiting times in community and developmental paediatrics.
	14. Work collaboratively to enhance digital capture and reporting of perinatal mental health data from public antenatal and postnatal care settings. This commitment also extends to identifying and addressing gaps in perinatal mental health screening.

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| 15. Develop with CIT Yurana and the Community Services Directorate a culturally appropriate parenting program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and kinship carers. |
| 16. Deliver better public maternity services to support women, pregnant people, babies and families through the implementation of actions in the Maternity in Focus: First Action Plan 2022-2025, including working with consumers to identify opportunities to strengthen information and informed decision-making. |
| 17. Investigate options for every child becoming a library member from birth. |

Goal 4:	Foster connected communities
Description:	Families need opportunities to make connections with people in their community and build strong support networks.
Why this goal?	Through building on existing initiatives, strengthening community networks and creating new opportunities for connection, families can be supported to give their child the best start.
Aim:	Diverse families have many opportunities to foster informal support networks and learn more about the first 1000 days.
Action:	
18. Investigate enrolment from birth in local schools to ensure that service providers work together to set children on a strong path from their first moments of life.	
19. Research and consider the impact of expanding parenting group eligibility to all parents, not just those with their first child.	
20. Explore opportunities to establish parenting groups and playgroups for parents and children with diverse needs and experiences.	
21. Plan, design and explore ways to enhance public spaces to better meet the needs of children and families in the first 1000 days.	
22. Develop a framework for partnering with Playgroups, Playschools and Nature Playgroups to increase access to these services for families experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage.	
23. Improve connections between MACH, the Child Development Service, Child and Family Centres, Community Paediatrics, primary care and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services to share knowledge of children and families.	