

Australian Early Development Census

2024 Results for the ACT





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Thank you to all the children who kindly gave their permission for us to use their artwork that is featured in this publication.

Acknowledgement of Country

The ACT Government 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 acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. In particular we thank the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and teachers who participated in the AEDC and strive to work with our local community as we share these data.

Since 2002, the Australian Government has worked in partnership with eminent child health research institutes, the Centre for Community Child Health at The Royal Children's Hospital and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, and The Kids Research Institute Australia to deliver the Australian Early Development Census program to communities nationwide. The Australian Government continues to work with its partners and with state and territory governments to implement the AEDC.

Visit the AEDC website www.aedc.gov.au

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Executive summary

The Australian Early Development Census

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a national measure of children's development as they enter their first year of full-time school. Data has been collected nationally every three years since 2009. This makes the AEDC one of the most comprehensive data collections on early childhood development in the world. The 2024 AEDC is the sixth national data collection.

AEDC results can help to identify and monitor trends in how children in Australia are developing by the time they begin their first year of full-time school. It highlights what is working well and what needs to be improved or developed to support children and their families. The regular collection of AEDC data enables governments, educators, researchers, and communities to better support the wellbeing of children and families.

Each successive collection provides unique insights into the early life experiences of cohorts of children and how these are changing over time. Together, the developmental outcomes of successive cohorts tell the story of how children's development over the first five years of life is influenced by local, state or territory, national and international circumstances.

When children thrive in their early years, they have a strong foundation for lifelong learning, health, development and wellbeing.

The AEDC reveals trends in early childhood development. It can indicate what is working well to support children, and where opportunities exist to take further action.

The 2024 AEDC ACT collection

The 2024 AEDC took place between 1 May 2024 and 31 July 2024. In the ACT 5,339 students (97.1%) and 320 teachers in 110 (100%) schools were included. The children captured in the 2024 AEDC were mostly born in 2018 and 2019.

Across Australia, around 300,000 children are included in each collection of the AEDC, totalling over 1.7 million children since the AEDC began.

2024 ACT AEDC results

Domains

The percentage of ACT children developmentally vulnerable has increased on four of the five AEDC domains.



13.8% of children are developmentally vulnerable on the **physical health and wellbeing** domain, a significant increase of 1.0 percentage point since 2021.



11.5% of children are developmentally vulnerable on the **social competence** domain, a significant decrease of 0.7 percentage point since 2021.



11.6% of children are developmentally vulnerable on the **emotional maturity** domain, a significant increase of 1.0 percentage point since 2021.



7.3% of children are developmentally vulnerable on the **language and cognitive skills (school-based)** domain, a significant increase of 0.8 percentage point since 2021. Despite this rise, the ACT figure remains below the national average of 7.7%.



10.7% of children are developmentally vulnerable on the **communication skills and general knowledge** domain, a significant increase of 1.5 percentage points since 2021. This represents the largest increase in developmental vulnerability of all domains.

Summary indicators

OT5

43.8% of children are **developmentally on track on five domains**, a decrease of 3.5 percentage points since 2021.

DV1

28.1% of children are **developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains**, an increase of 1.4 percentage points since 2021.

DV2

14.9% of children are **developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains**, an increase of 1.6 percentage points since 2021. This result is the highest level of developmental vulnerability on two or more domains across all six AEDC collections.

Priority groups



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

The percentage of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children developmentally on track on five domains (OT5)** decreased in 2024 with a non-significant decline of 3.2 percentage points from 27.3% in 2021 to 24.1% in 2024. The percentage of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children developmentally vulnerable** has risen significantly, with 52.0% developmentally vulnerable **on one or more domains (DV1)** and 37.6% **on two or more domains (DV2)**.



Language diversity

The percentage of children with a **language background other than English (LBOTE)** who are **developmentally on track on all five domains (OT5)** decreased from 42.3% in 2021 to 39.3% in 2024. The percentage of children with an LBOTE who are **developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains (DV1)** increased non-significantly from 30.0% in 2021 to 30.8% in 2024, and the percentage of children **developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains (DV2)** increased from 14.7% in 2021 to 16.3% in 2024.



Trends in development

The AEDC domains

The AEDC captures data on five key areas or 'domains' of early childhood development that have been shown to predict later mental health, wellbeing and educational outcomes. Figure 3 describes the AEDC domains.

Figure 3 – AEDC domain descriptions



Physical health and wellbeing

Children's physical readiness for the school day, physical independence and gross and fine motor skills.



Social competence

Children's overall social competence, responsibility and respect, approach to learning, and readiness to explore new things.



Emotional maturity

Children's pro-social and helping behaviours, and absence of anxious and fearful behaviour, aggressive behaviour, hyperactivity and inattention.



Language and cognitive skills (school-based)

Children's interest and skills in literacy and numeracy, and memory.



Communication skills and general knowledge

Children's communication skills and general knowledge based on broad developmental competencies and skills.

For more information
see the [About the AEDC
Domains fact sheet](#)



How children's scores are classified

Children receive a score (0–10) for each of the five AEDC domains. These domain scores are then classified into one of three groups using benchmarks that were developed from the first AEDC collection in 2009. These categories are: developmentally on track, at risk or vulnerable (Table 1).

Table 1 – Definitions of developmentally vulnerable, at risk and on track on the AEDC domains

	Developmentally on track Scores above the 25th percentile or in the top 75% of the 2009 scores	Children are developing well.
	Developmentally at risk Scores between the 10th and 25th percentile	Children are facing challenges in some aspects of their development.
	Developmentally vulnerable Scores below the 10th percentile or in the lowest 10% of the 2009 scores.	Children are facing some significant challenges in their development.



Understanding significant change

With the 2024 AEDC being the sixth collection since 2009, results can be compared to past collections to identify shifts in children's development over time. The AEDC uses 'critical difference' methodology to indicate whether changes in results between two collections represent a 'significant change' in children's development.

For more information
see the [Comparing
Results Over
Time fact
sheet](#)



ACT results

ACT AEDC children

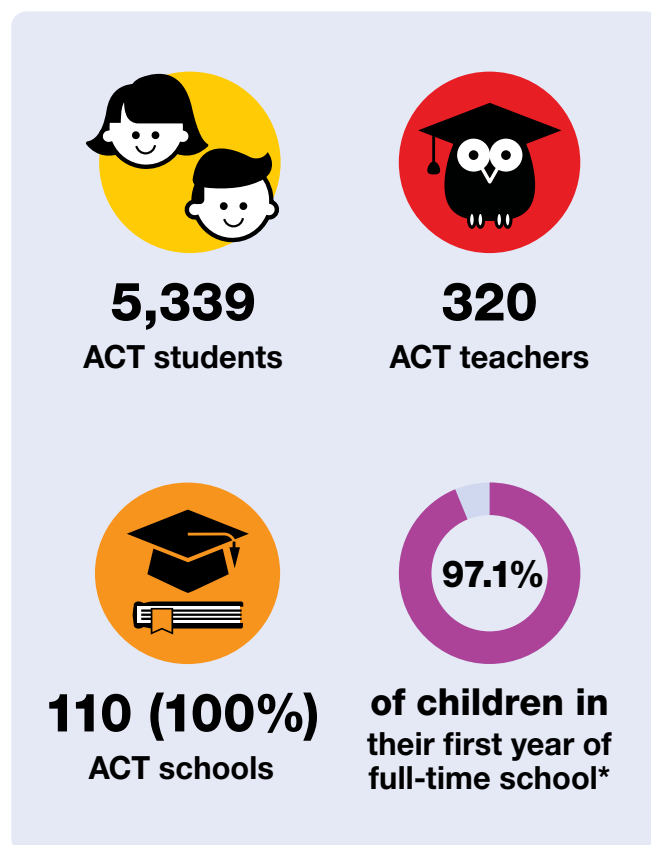
Participation in the AEDC

The AEDC is a national measure of children's development as they enter their first year of full-time school. Data has been collected nationally every three years since 2009.

Each cycle, data is collected on over 90% of Australian children in their first year of full-time school, making the AEDC one of the most comprehensive collections of early childhood development data in the world. Figure 1 provides a snapshot of the number of children, teachers and schools that contributed to the 2024 AEDC.



Figure 1 – 2024 AEDC participation in ACT

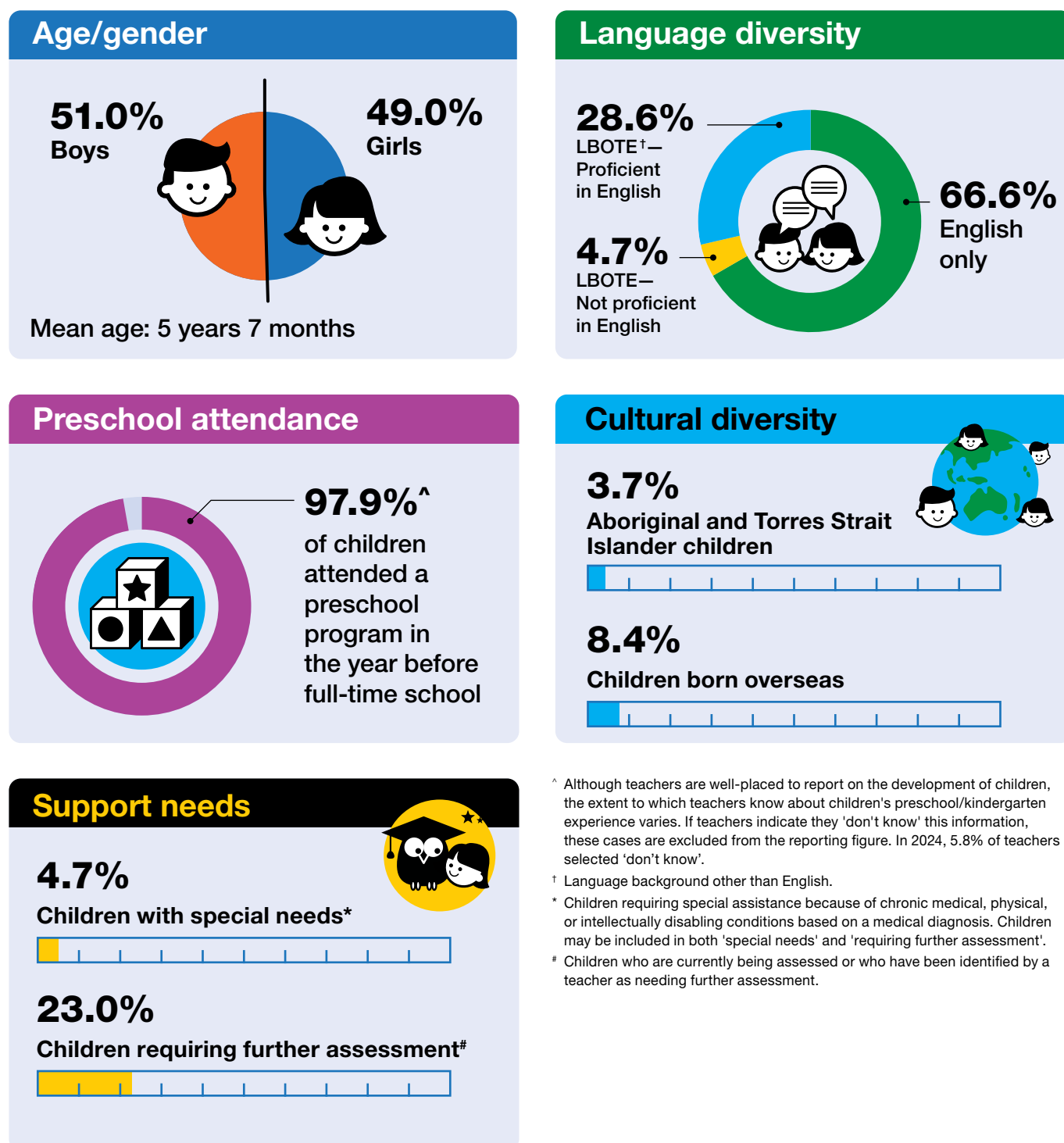


*97.1% of children from in-scope schools only.

ACT demographic snapshot

The AEDC provides important insights into the demographic characteristics of the children captured in the 2024 collection. Figure 2 highlights key demographic characteristics and the diversity of the population of children in ACT.

Figure 2 – Demographic characteristics of children who participated in the 2024 AEDC in ACT



ACT AEDC Results snapshot

In the ACT, between 2021 and 2024, there was a significant improvement in the social competence domain, with 0.7% fewer ACT children considered developmentally vulnerable than in 2021. All other domains showed an increase in developmental vulnerability.

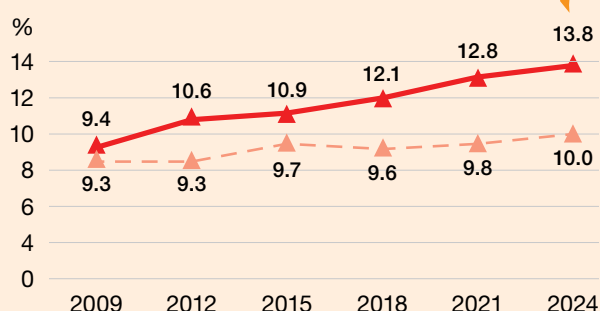
Compared to the 2024 national figures, the ACT has a higher percentage of children developmentally vulnerable in all domains except the language and cognitive skills (school-based) domain (ACT: 7.3%, Australia: 7.7%).

The percentage of ACT children whose development is on track on all five AEDC domains has decreased since 2021 (from 47.3% in 2021 to 43.8% in 2024) and is lower than the national percentage of 52.9%.

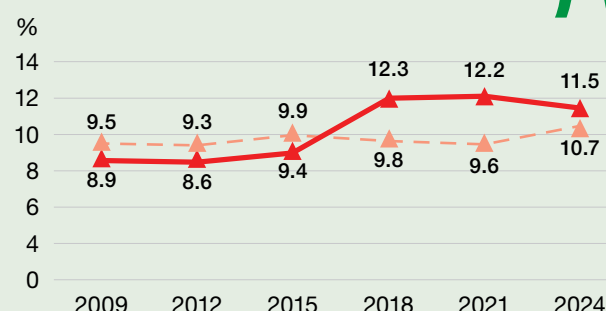
Over a quarter (28.1%) of children in the ACT are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains. This is increasing over time and is greater than the national rate of 23.5%.

Around one in seven ACT children (14.9%) are facing challenges in two or more domains, compared to 12.5% nationally.

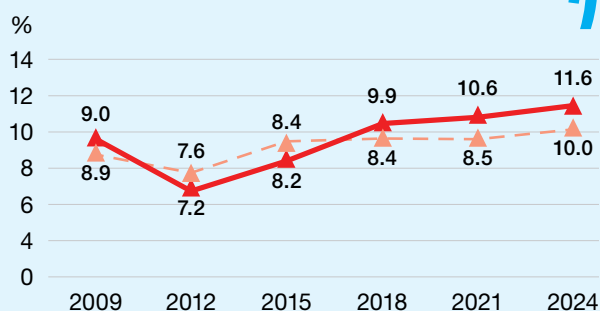
Developmental vulnerability – Physical health and wellbeing



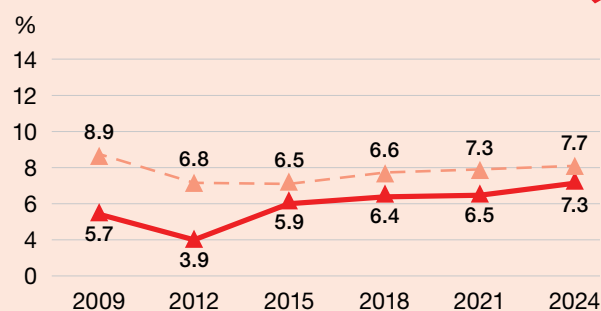
Developmental vulnerability – Social competence



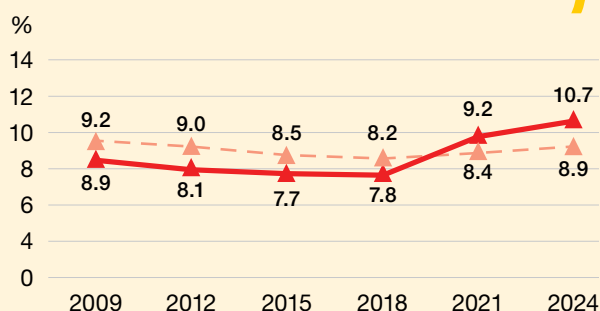
Developmental vulnerability – Emotional maturity



Developmental vulnerability – Language and cognitive skills (school-based)



Developmental vulnerability – Communication skills and general knowledge



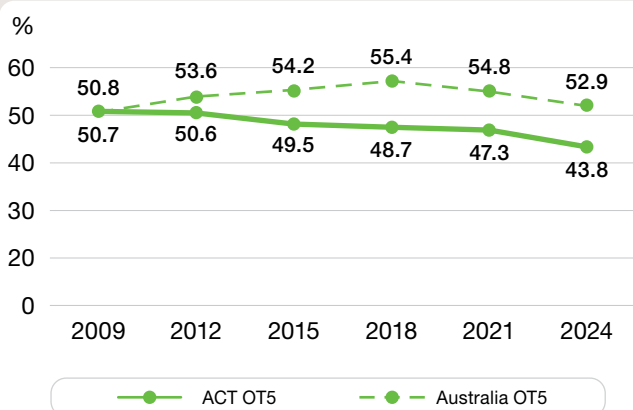
▲ ACT children ▲ Australia children



Summary indicators

OT5

The percentage of children who are developmentally on track on five AEDC domains.

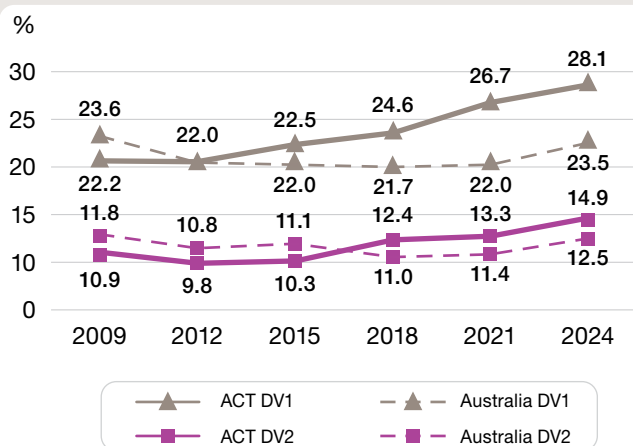


DV1

The percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more AEDC domains.

DV2

The percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable on two or more AEDC domains.



5,339
children



320
teachers



110
schools

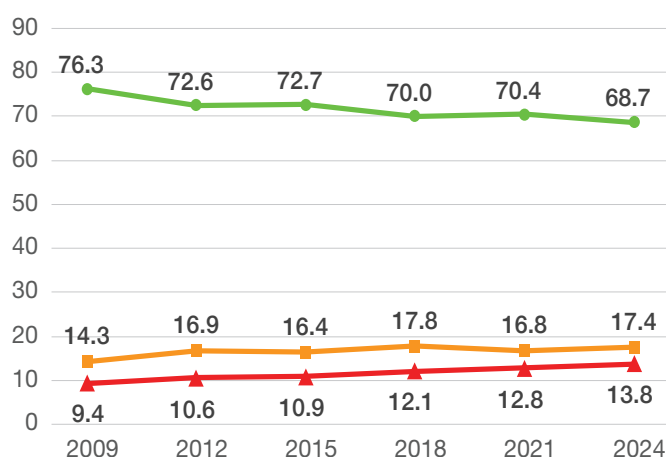
ACT trends: AEDC domains



Physical health and wellbeing

The percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on the physical health and wellbeing domain has progressively increased from 9.4% in 2009 to 13.8% in 2024. The percentage of children developmentally on track on this domain decreased significantly from 70.4 in 2021 to 68.7 in 2024.

Figure 4 — ACT trends/Physical health and wellbeing



Significant change*

	2009 vs 2024	2021 vs 2024
On track	Significant decrease	Significant decrease
Vulnerable	Significant increase	Significant increase

Developmentally on track

Children can **almost always** physically cope with the school day, are generally independent, have excellent motor skills, and have adequate energy levels.

Developmentally at risk

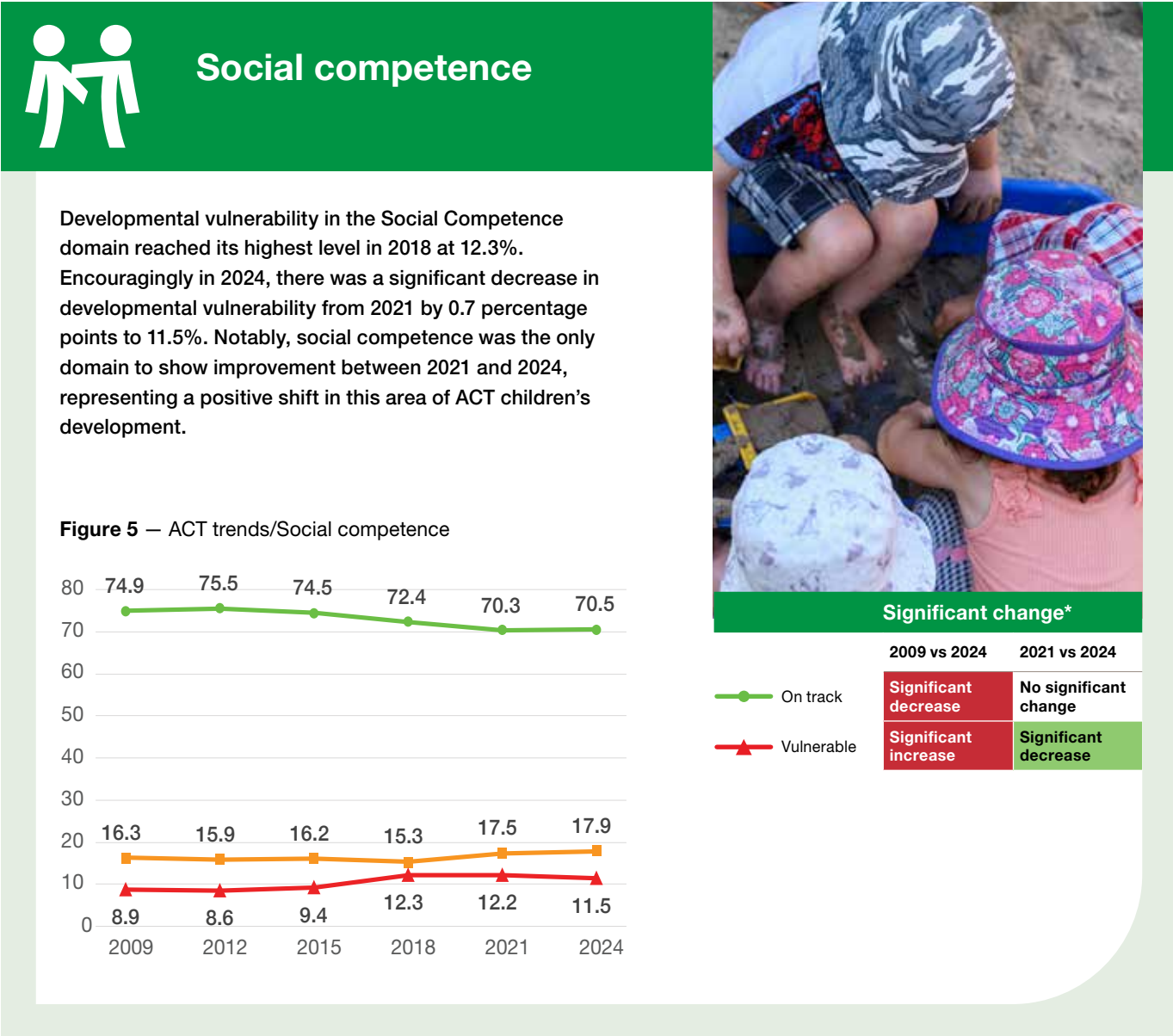
Children experience **some challenges** that interfere with their ability to physically cope with the school day e.g. dressing inappropriately, or frequently late, hungry or tired. Children may also show poor coordination, fine and/or gross motor skills, or poor to average energy levels.

Developmentally vulnerable

Children experience **several challenges** that interfere with their ability to physically cope with the school day e.g. dressing inappropriately, or frequently late, hungry or tired. Children are usually clumsy and may have fading energy levels.

* Significant change text is colour coded **in a green box** for a positive change and **in a red box** for a negative change.

ACT trends: AEDC domains



Developmentally on track

Children **almost never** have problems getting along with others, are respectful to adults, self-confident, can follow class routines, and can help others.

Developmentally at risk

Children experience **some challenges** in areas such as getting along with others (children or teachers), playing cooperatively with a variety of children, showing respect for others and for property, following instructions and class routines, taking responsibility for their actions, working independently, and exhibiting self-control and self-confidence.

Developmentally vulnerable

Children experience **several challenges** and have poor overall social skills e.g. regularly have challenges getting along with other children, do not accept responsibility for actions, and have difficulty following rules and class routines. Children may be disrespectful of others and their property, have low self-confidence and self-control, do not adjust well to change, and usually unable to work independently.

* Significant change text is colour coded in a green box for a positive change and in a red box for a negative change.

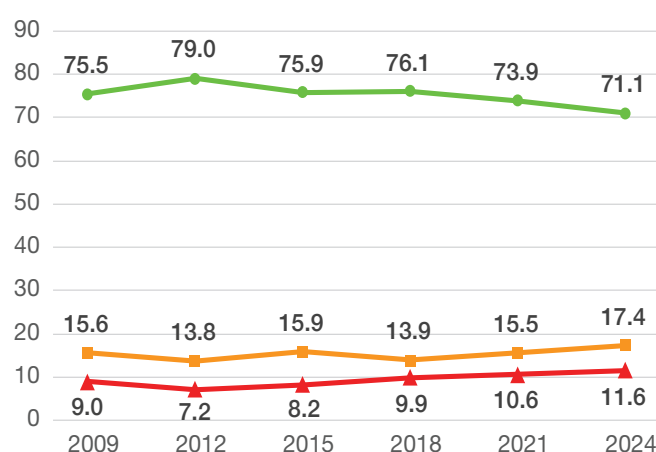
ACT trends: AEDC domains



Emotional maturity

The percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on the emotional maturity domain has been increasing steadily since 2012, from 7.2 to 11.6% in 2024. In 2024, developmental vulnerability increased by 1.0 percentage point, from 10.6% in 2021 to 11.6% in 2024. The percentage of children who were developmentally on track has varied over time, reaching a peak of 79.0% in 2012. However, by 2024, this figure had declined to 71.1%, marking the lowest rate of ACT children developmentally on track in the emotional maturity domain across all six AEDC data collections.

Figure 6 — ACT trends/Emotional maturity



Significant change*

	2009 vs 2024	2021 vs 2024
On track	Significant decrease	Significant decrease
Vulnerable	Significant increase	Significant increase

Developmentally on track

Children **almost never** show aggressive, anxious or impulsive behaviour. Children have good concentration and will often help other children.

Developmentally at risk

Children may **sometimes** experience problems with anxiety, aggression, temper tantrums, or problems with inattention or hyperactivity.

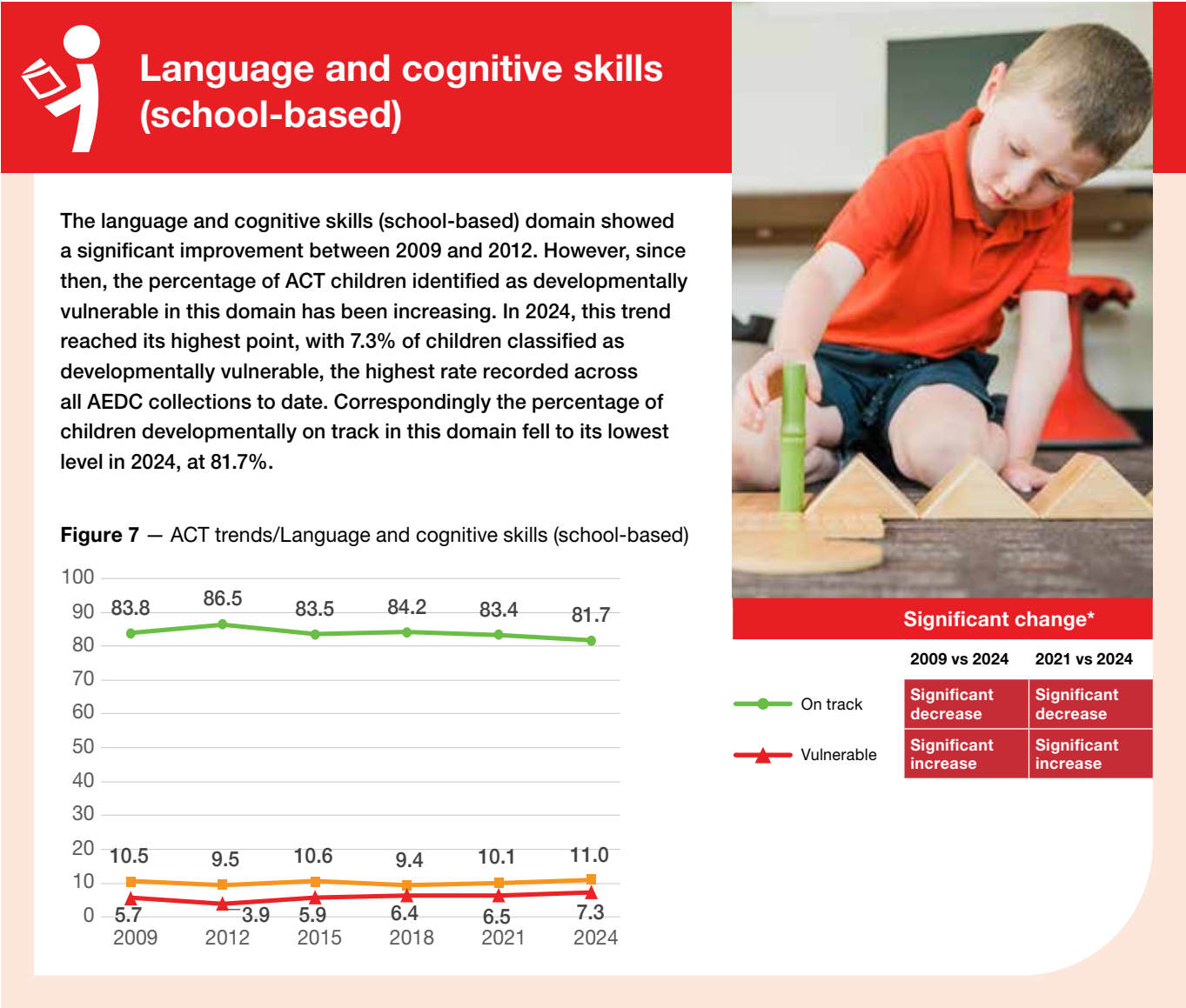
Children experience **some challenges** in areas such as helping others who are hurt, sick or upset, inviting others to join in, being kind to others, and turn-taking.

Developmentally vulnerable

Children experience **several challenges** in emotional regulation e.g. aggression, prone to disobedience, easily distracted, inattentive, and impulsive. Children usually do not help others and are sometimes upset when left by their caregiver.

* Significant change text is colour coded **in a green box** for a positive change and **in a red box** for a negative change.

ACT trends: AEDC domains



Developmentally on track

Children **are interested** in books, reading and writing, and basic math. Children **can read and write** simple sentences and complex words, and **can count** and recognise numbers and shapes.

Developmentally at risk

Children have **mastered some** literacy and numeracy skills but not all e.g. identify and attach sounds to some letters, aware of rhyming words, knows writing directions, able to write their own name, count to 20, recognise shapes and numbers, compare numbers, sort and classify, and understand simple time concepts. Children may have memory difficulties, are disinterested in books, reading and numbers, and may not have mastered more advanced literacy skills such as reading and writing simple words or sentences.

Developmentally vulnerable

Children experience **several challenges** in reading/writing and numbers e.g. unable to read and write simple words, often unable to attach sounds to letters, difficulties with memory, counting to 20, recognising and comparing numbers, disinterested in reading and numbers.

* Significant change text is colour coded **in a green box** for a positive change and **in a red box** for a negative change.

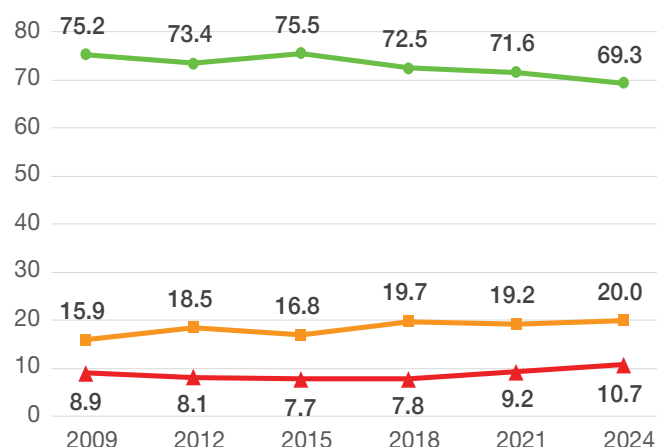
ACT trends: AEDC domains



Communication skills and general knowledge

Developmental vulnerability in the communication skills and general knowledge domain declined steadily between 2009 and 2015. However, this trend reversed in 2018, with developmental vulnerability rates beginning to rise and reaching a peak of 10.7% in 2024. The increase between 2021 and 2024 represented the largest increase in developmental vulnerability across all domains in the ACT. In 2024, the percentage of children who were developmentally on track decreased by 2.3 points (from 71.6% in 2021 to 69.3%).

Figure 8 — ACT trends/Communication skills and general knowledge



Significant change*

	2009 vs 2024	2021 vs 2024
On track	Significant decrease	Significant decrease
Vulnerable	Significant increase	Significant increase

Developmentally on track

Children have **excellent communication skills**, can tell a story and communicate easily with both children and adults, and have **no problems with articulation**.

Developmentally at risk

Children have **mastered some** communication skills but not all e.g. listening, understanding and speaking effectively in English, clear articulation, able to tell a story and to take part in imaginative play. Children **may not have some basic general knowledge** about the world e.g. leaves fall in autumn, an apple is fruit, dogs bark.

Developmentally vulnerable

Children have **poor communication skills and articulation**. They may have limited command of English (or the language of instruction), difficulties talking to others, understanding, and being understood, and have **poor general knowledge**.

* Significant change text is colour coded **in a green box** for a positive change and **in a red box** for a negative change.

The AEDC summary indicators

The AEDC has three summary indicators that collectively can be used to monitor trends in children's development.

Developmentally on track on five AEDC domains (OT5) reflects children's developmental strengths and recognises the importance of holistic development. It can help identify where things are working well to support children's development.

Developmentally vulnerable on one or more AEDC domains (DV1) and developmentally vulnerable on two or more AEDC domains (DV2) can be used to identify trends in children's developmental vulnerability over time, and indicate where additional support might be needed at a community level.

The summary indicators can be used to help evaluate the impact of policies and programs over time (Figure 9).

Figure 9 – AEDC summary indicators

OT5

The percentage of children who are developmentally on track on five AEDC domains.

DV1

The percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more AEDC domains.

DV2

The percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable on two or more AEDC domains.

OT5 has been selected as an indicator in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Outcome 4: Children thrive in their early years.

For more information see the [AEDC Summary Indicators fact sheet](#)



ACT AEDC summary indicators

OT5

DV1

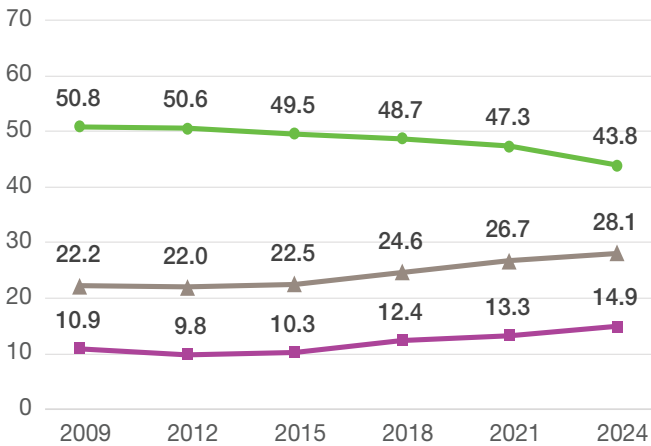
DV2

The percentage of ACT children who were developmentally on track on five domains has steadily declined from 2009 to 2024, reaching its lowest level of 43.8% in 2024. This includes the most significant single-cycle drop of 3.5 percentage points between 2021 and 2024, highlighting a concerning downward trend in overall developmental outcomes.

At the same time, developmental vulnerability has been rising since 2015. From 2015 the proportion of children developmentally vulnerable on one or more, and two or more domains has increased with each cycle. In 2024, these figures reached their highest levels across all six AEDC collections, with 28.1% of children developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains, and 14.9% developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains, approximately 1 in 7 children.



Figure 10 — ACT trends/Summary indicators



Significant change*

	2009 vs 2024	2021 vs 2024
OT5	Significant decrease	Significant decrease
DV1	Significant increase	Significant increase
DV2	Significant increase	Significant increase

* Significant change text is colour coded in a green box for a positive change and in a red box for a negative change.

Priority groups

First Nations children

The AEDC data provides insight into the developmental outcomes of First Nations children. This data is vital for identifying whether national and local initiatives are contributing to improving First Nations children's development over time.

Improving early development for First Nations children is a priority of the National Closing the Gap partnership. By identifying the percentage of children who are developmentally on track on five domains, AEDC data contributes to measuring progress against Outcome 4 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years.

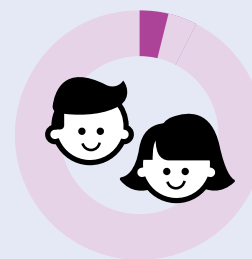
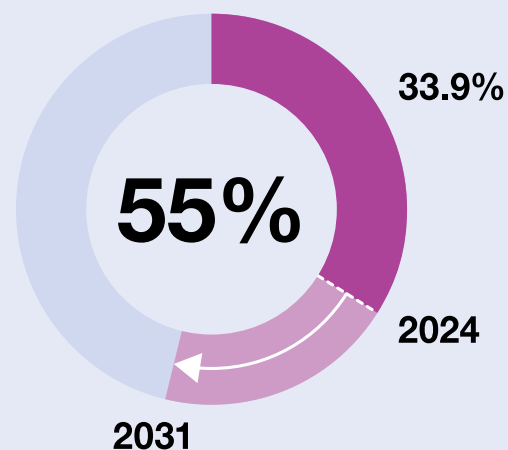
AEDC data is available to First Nations communities and researchers to empower them to lead the national research agenda for First Nations children.



For more information
on the AEDC and First
Nations children visit the
[AEDC website](#)



The Australian state and territory governments, through the Closing the Gap initiative, have set a target to increase the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are developmentally on track on five domains to 55% by 2031



3.7%

of ACT children
in the 2024 AEDC
are First Nations
children

OT5

The percentage of
ACT First Nations children
**developmentally on track
on five domains** decreased
from 2021 to 2024.

2021: 27.3%



2024: 24.1%



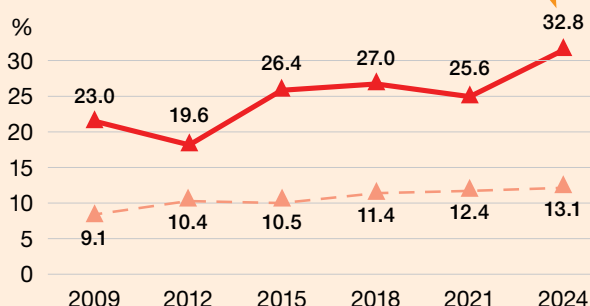
Note: The 2024 Australian version of the Early Development Instrument (AvEDI) and its supporting materials use the term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children' when referring to First Nations children.

ACT First Nations children

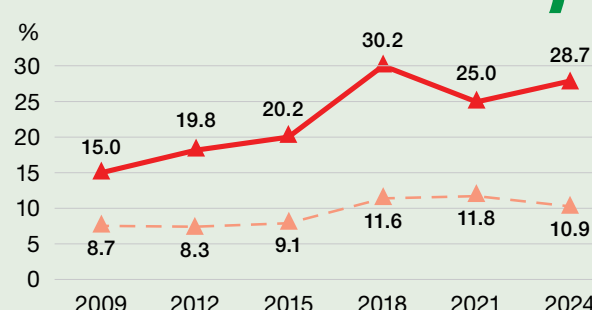
In 2024, 192 (3.7%) ACT children in the AEDC identified as Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander. The ACT has seen this population increase every cycle since 2012. The ACT First Nations results need to be interpreted with caution due to small numbers which are prone to fluctuation between cycles.

ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children remain much more likely to be developmentally vulnerable across all domains than their non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers. In 2024 this gap was largest on the physical health and wellbeing domain.

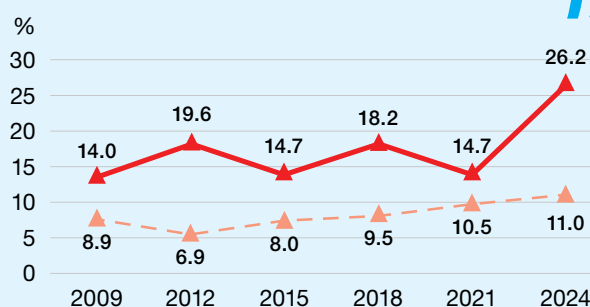
**Developmental vulnerability –
Physical health and wellbeing**



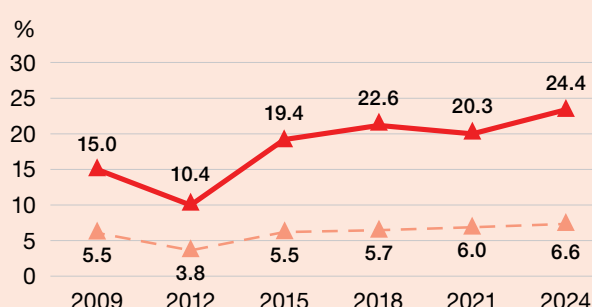
**Developmental vulnerability –
Social competence**



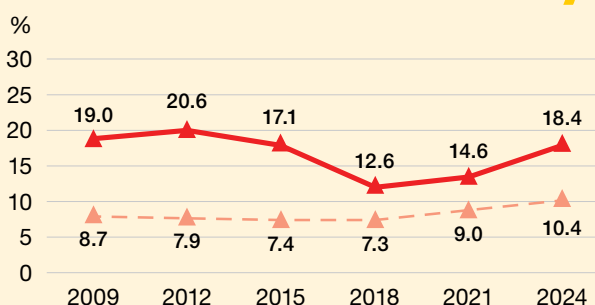
**Developmental vulnerability –
Emotional maturity**



**Developmental vulnerability – Language
and cognitive skills (school-based)**



**Developmental vulnerability –
Communication skills and general knowledge**



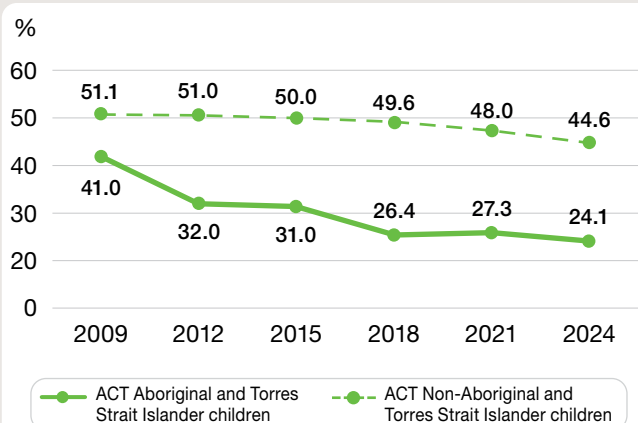
ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
 ACT Non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children



Summary indicators

OT5

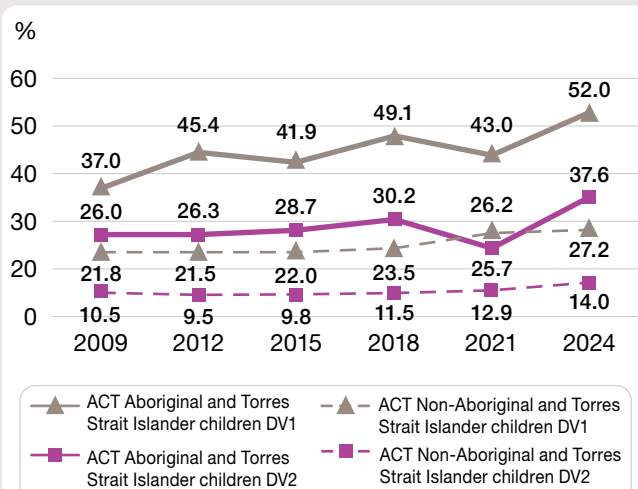
The percentage of children who are developmentally on track on five AEDC domains.


DV1

The percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more AEDC domains.

DV2

The percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable on two or more AEDC domains.



**192 (3.7%)
children**

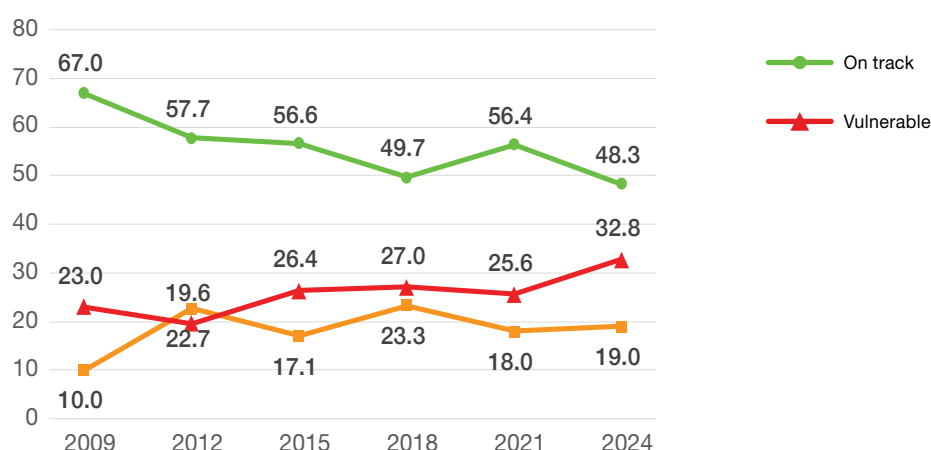
ACT First Nations children



Physical health and wellbeing

The percentage of First Nations children who were developmentally on track in the physical health and wellbeing domain declined from 67.0% in 2009 to 48.3% in 2024. Although there was a temporary improvement between 2018 (49.7%) and 2021 (56.4%), this progress was not sustained, with a significant decline to 48.3% of children developmentally on track in 2024. Between 2021 and 2024, the percentage of First Nations children developmentally vulnerable on the physical health and wellbeing domain increased significantly with an increase of 7.2 percentage points, reaching a high of 32.8%.

Figure 11 — First Nations children/Physical health and wellbeing



Significant change*

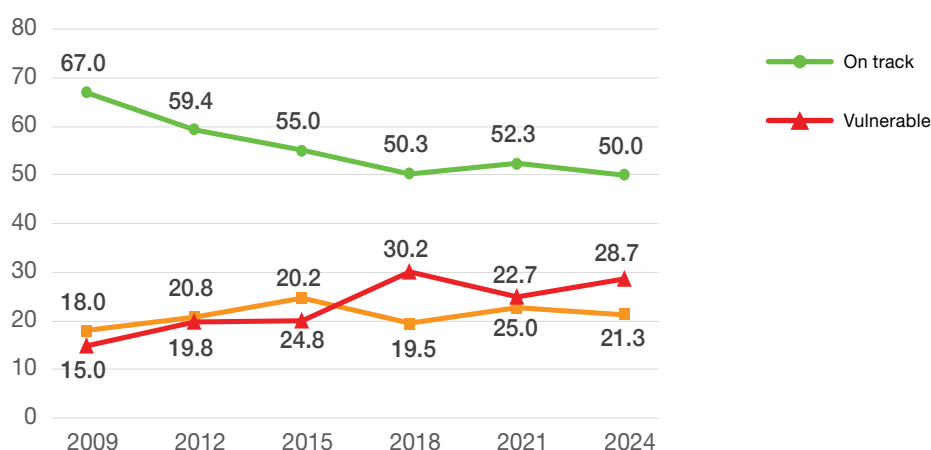
2009 vs 2024	2021 vs 2024
Significant decrease	Significant decrease
Significant increase	Significant increase

Social competence



Since 2009, when 67.0% of ACT First Nations children were developmentally on track in the social competence domain, there has been a general downward trend in children being on track. Although the proportion declined again slightly from 52.3% in 2021 to 50.0% in 2024, this change was not statistically significant. While there was a temporary improvement in the percentage of First Nations children developmentally vulnerable on the social competence domain between 2018 (30.2%) and 2021 (22.7%), this trend did not continue, with a significant increase to 28.7% observed in 2024.

Figure 12 — First Nations children/Social competence



Significant change*

2009 vs 2024	2021 vs 2024
Significant decrease	No significant change
Significant increase	Significant increase

* Significant change text is colour coded **in a green box** for a positive change and **in a red box** for a negative change.

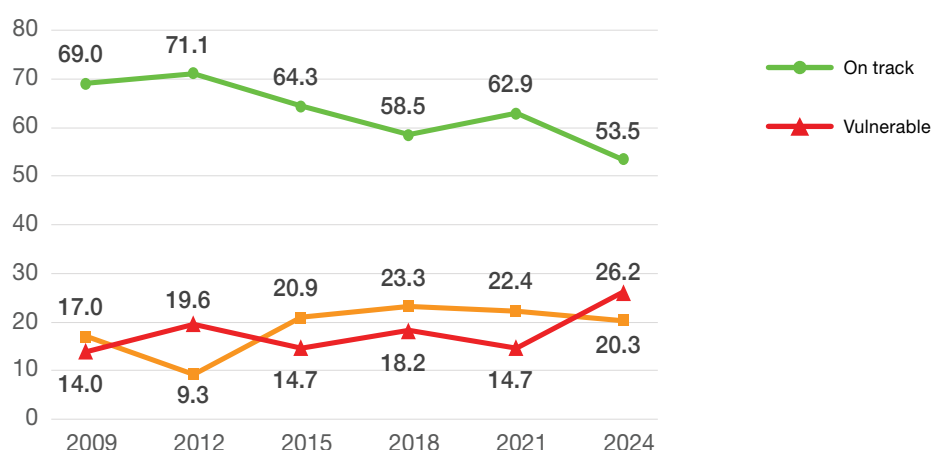
ACT First Nations children

Emotional maturity



Between 2021 and 2024 the percentage of First Nations children developmentally vulnerable on the emotional maturity domain increased significantly by 11.5 percentage points, reaching an all-time high of 26.2%. This was accompanied by a 9.4 percentage point decrease in the proportion of First Nations children who were developmentally on track in this domain, falling to 53.5%.

Figure 13 — First Nations children/Emotional maturity



Significant change*

2009 vs 2024 2021 vs 2024

Significant decrease Significant decrease

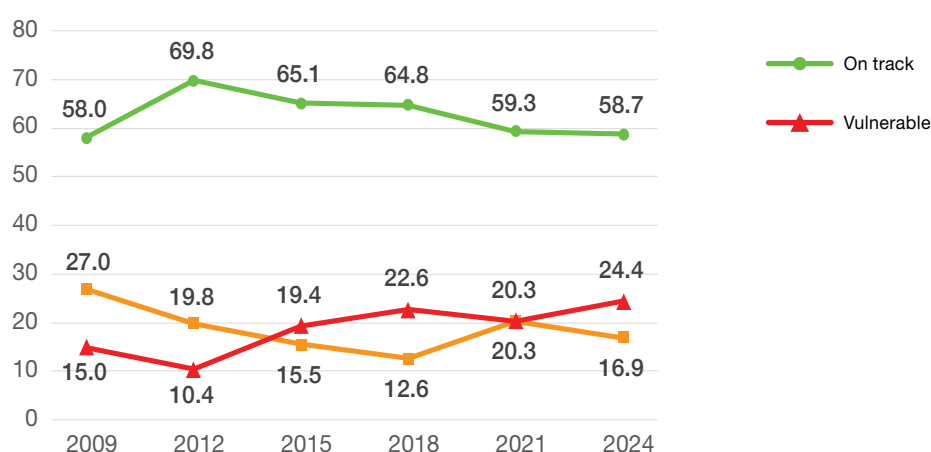
Significant increase Significant increase

Language and cognitive skills (school-based)



The percentage of First Nations children who were developmentally on track in the Language and Cognitive Skills (school-based) domain saw a sharp increase between 2009 and 2012 and has been in decline since, reaching 58.7% in 2024. There was a significant increase in the percentage of First Nations children developmentally vulnerable on this domain between 2021 and 2024, rising from 20.3% to 24.4%.

Figure 14 — First Nations children/Language and cognitive skills (school-based)



Significant change*

2009 vs 2024 2021 vs 2024

No significant change No significant change

Significant increase Significant increase

* Significant change text is colour coded **in a green box** for a positive change and **in a red box** for a negative change.

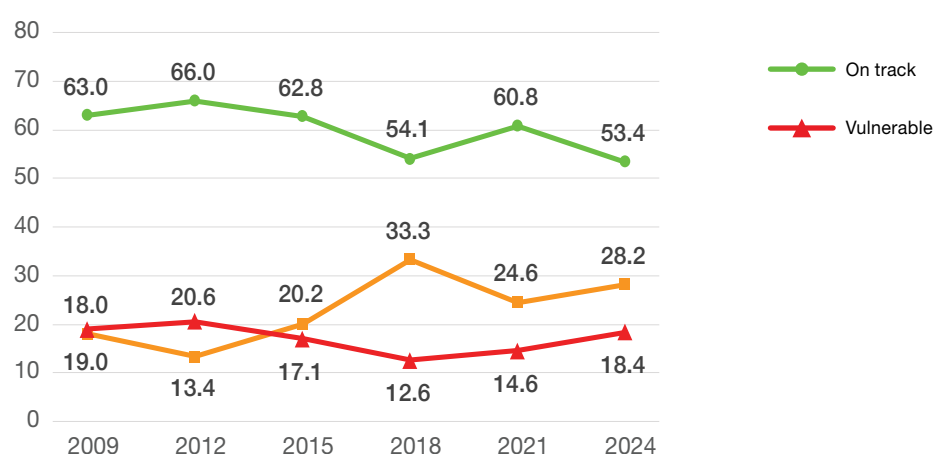
ACT First Nations children

Communication skills and general knowledge



The percentage of First Nations children developmentally vulnerable on the communication skills and general knowledge domain has fluctuated across the AEDC cycles, with no statistically significant changes between 2009 and 2024, or more recently between 2021 and 2024. The percentage of First Nations children who were developmentally on track on this domain has also demonstrated fluctuations over time. While there was an improvement from 54.1% in 2018 to 60.8% in 2021, this progress was not sustained with a significant decline to 53.4% developmentally on track observed in 2024.

Figure 15 — First Nations children/Communication skills and general knowledge



Significant change*

2009 vs 2024	2021 vs 2024
Significant decrease	Significant decrease
No significant change	No significant change

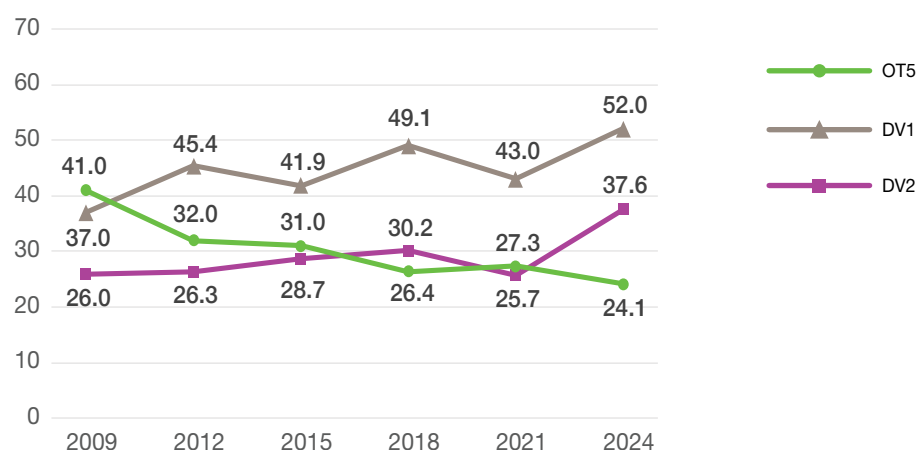
Summary indicators



OT5 – The percentage of First Nations children who were developmentally on track across all five AEDC domains (OT5) has continued to decline, falling from 41.0% in 2009 to an all-time low of 24.1% in 2024.

DV1 and DV2 – There have been some fluctuations in developmental vulnerability since the AEDC began in 2009, consistent with the broader ACT trend. There was a significant increase in developmental vulnerability among ACT First Nations children between 2021 and 2024, reaching a record high of 52.0% for DV1 and 37.6% for DV2.

Figure 16 — First Nations children/Summary indicators



Significant change*

2009 vs 2024	2021 vs 2024
Significant decrease	No significant change
Significant increase	Significant increase
Significant increase	Significant increase

* Significant change text is colour coded in a green box for a positive change and in a red box for a negative change.

Language diversity in the ACT

The ACT population is growing in cultural and linguistic diversity and this is reflected in the children included in the AEDC.

In the AEDC, children are considered to have a language background other than English (LBOTE) if they speak a language other than English at home or if they have English as a second language (ESL) status.

Children who begin school with limited English proficiency can face additional challenges in keeping pace academically while simultaneously learning the English language.

In communities where many children speak a language other than English at home, there are important considerations when working to understand and interpret AEDC results. AEDC data can tell us about the skills and competencies that children demonstrate in English and in their school setting. The results do not capture the language capacities children display at home or in other contexts where their first language and literacy skills may be stronger. The top five non-English language backgrounds in the ACT in 2024 were Mandarin, Arabic, Punjabi, Hindi and Vietnamese.

OT5

The percentage of children with a language background other than English (LBOTE) who are **developmentally on track on five domains** decreased significantly from 2021 to 2024.

2021: 42.3%



2024: 39.3%



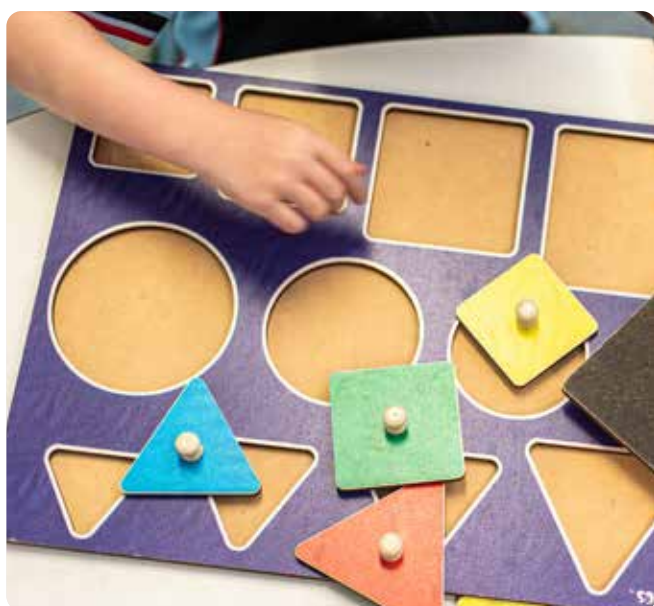
你好
Mandarin

مرحبا
Arabic

Xin chào
Vietnamese

नमस्ते
Hindi

ਸਤ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ
Punjabi



For more information see the [Language Diversity](#) and the [AEDC fact sheet](#)

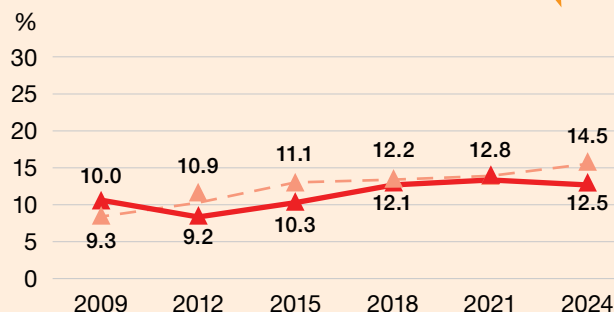


Language diversity in the ACT

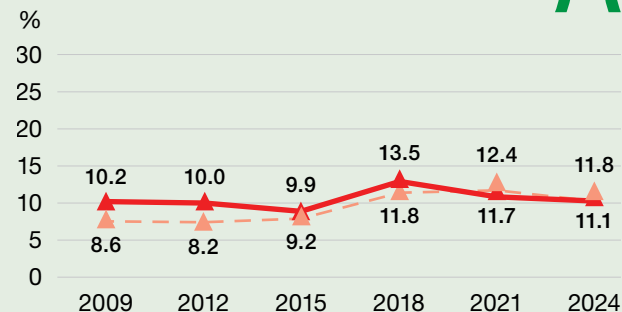
In 2024, 1,735 (33.4%) ACT children included in the AEDC had a language background other than English (LBOTE). The ACT has seen this population increase every cycle since the AEDC began in 2009.

ACT children with an LBOTE remain less likely to be developmentally on track on five domains than their peers from an English-only background. The gap is largest in the communication skills and general knowledge domain, followed by the language and general knowledge domain, followed by the language and cognitive skills (school-based) domain.

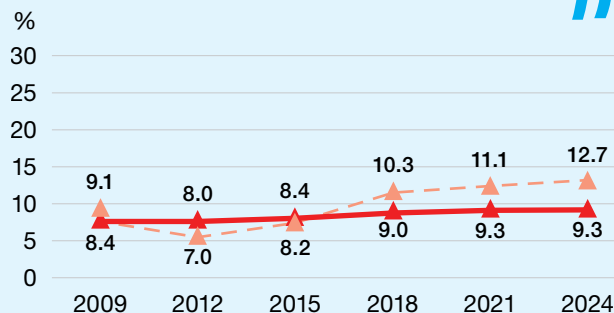
**Developmental vulnerability –
Physical health and wellbeing**



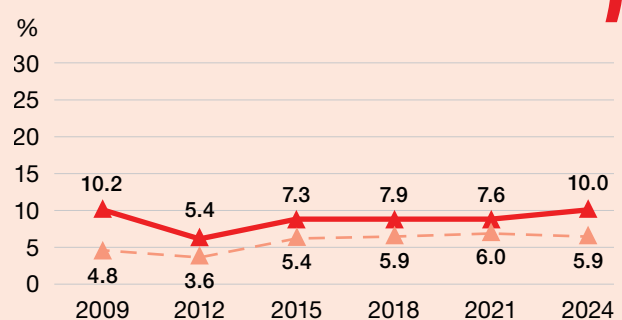
**Developmental vulnerability –
Social competence**



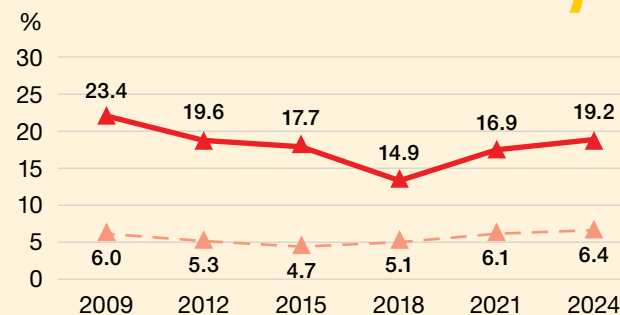
**Developmental vulnerability –
Emotional maturity**



**Developmental vulnerability – Language
and cognitive skills (school-based)**



**Developmental vulnerability –
Communication skills and general knowledge**



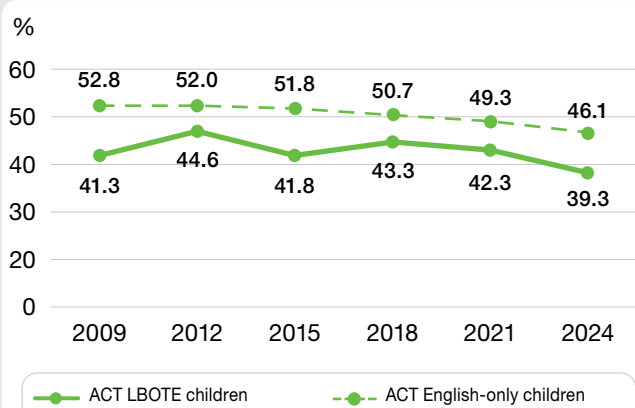
▲ ACT LBOTE children ▲ ACT English-only children



Summary indicators

OT5

The percentage of children who are developmentally on track on five AEDC domains.

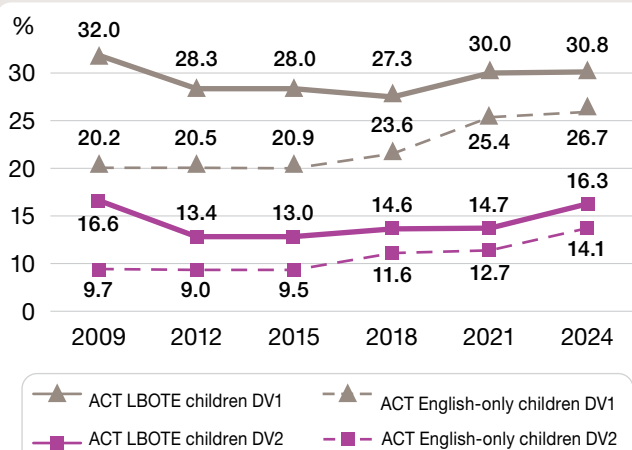


DV1

The percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more AEDC domains.

DV2

The percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable on two or more AEDC domains.



**1,735 (33.4%)
children**

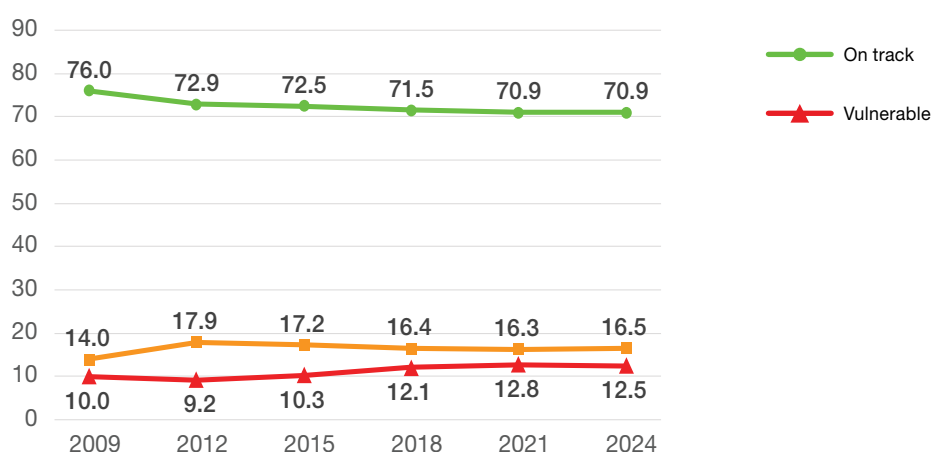
ACT language diversity

Physical health and wellbeing



The percentage of children with an LBOTE who were developmentally on track in the physical health and wellbeing domain declined gradually from 2009, before plateauing in 2021. The percentage of children with an LBOTE who were developmentally vulnerable in this domain increased between 2012 and 2018 but has remained relatively stable at around 12% since then.

Figure 17 — Language diversity/Physical health and wellbeing



Significant change*

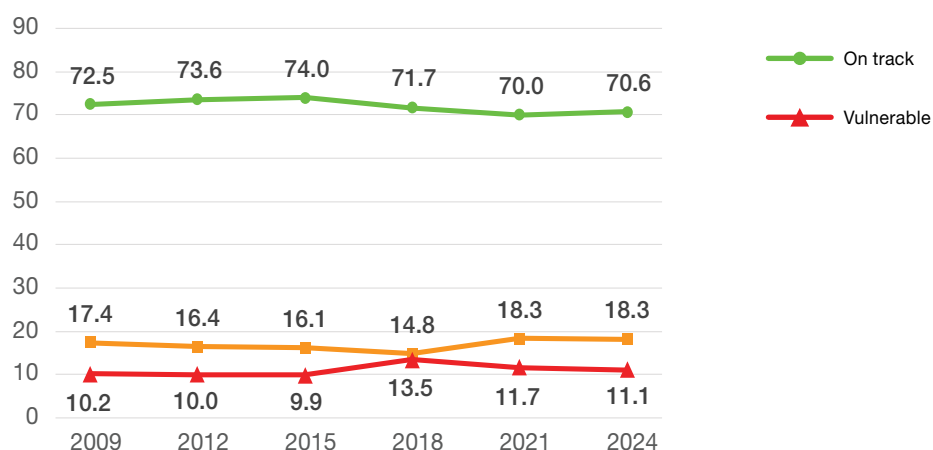
2009 vs 2024	2021 vs 2024
Significant decrease	No significant change
Significant increase	No significant change

Social competence



The percentage of children with an LBOTE who were developmentally on track in the social competence domain has remained fairly stable, following a 2.3 percentage point drop between 2015 and 2018. After decreasing from 13.5% in 2018 to 11.7% in 2021, the percentage of LBOTE children who were developmentally vulnerable in this domain stabilised at 11.1% in 2024.

Figure 18 — Language diversity/Social competence



Significant change*

2009 vs 2024	2021 vs 2024
No significant change	No significant change
No significant change	No significant change

* Significant change text is colour coded **in a green box** for a positive change and **in a red box** for a negative change.

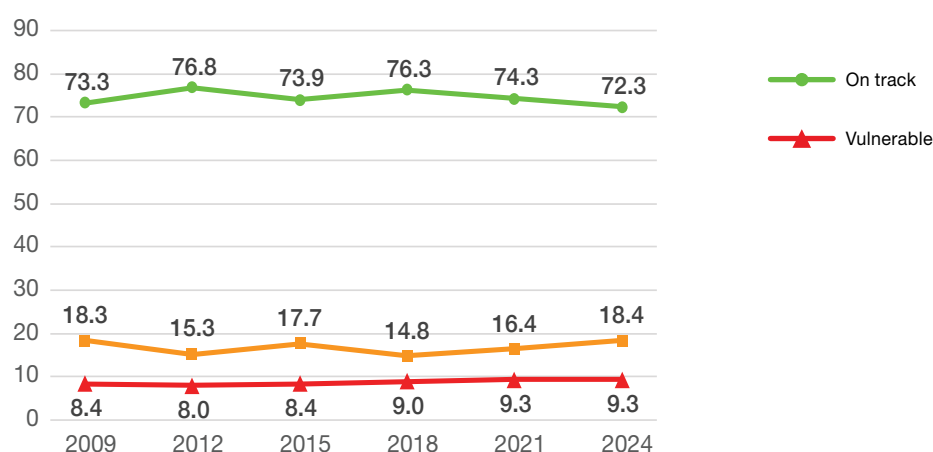
ACT language diversity



Emotional maturity

Developmental vulnerability on the emotional maturity domain has remained consistent for children with an LBOTE across AEDC cycles. However, the percentage of children with an LBOTE who are developmentally on track on this domain decreased significantly by 2 percentage points in 2024.

Figure 19 – Language diversity/Emotional maturity



Significant change*

2009 vs 2024 2021 vs 2024

No significant change

Significant decrease

No significant change

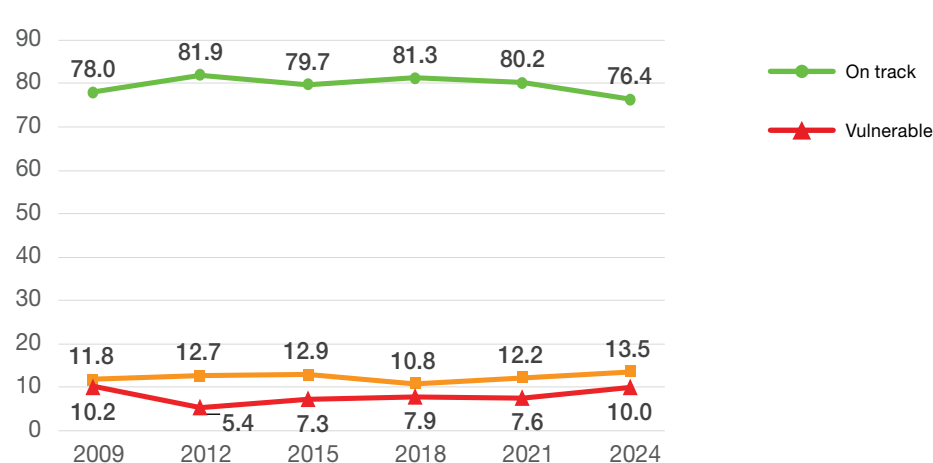
No significant change

Language and cognitive skills (school-based)



Following small fluctuations, the percentage of children with an LBOTE who were developmentally on track in the language and cognitive skills (school-based) domain decreased significantly by 3.8 percentage points in 2024. This was accompanied by a corresponding significant increase of 2.4 percentage points in the proportion of LBOTE children who were developmentally vulnerable in this domain between 2021 and 2024.

Figure 20 – Language diversity/Language and cognitive skills (school-based)



Significant change*

2009 vs 2024 2021 vs 2024

No significant change

Significant decrease

No significant change

Significant increase

* Significant change text is colour coded **in a green box** for a positive change and **in a red box** for a negative change.

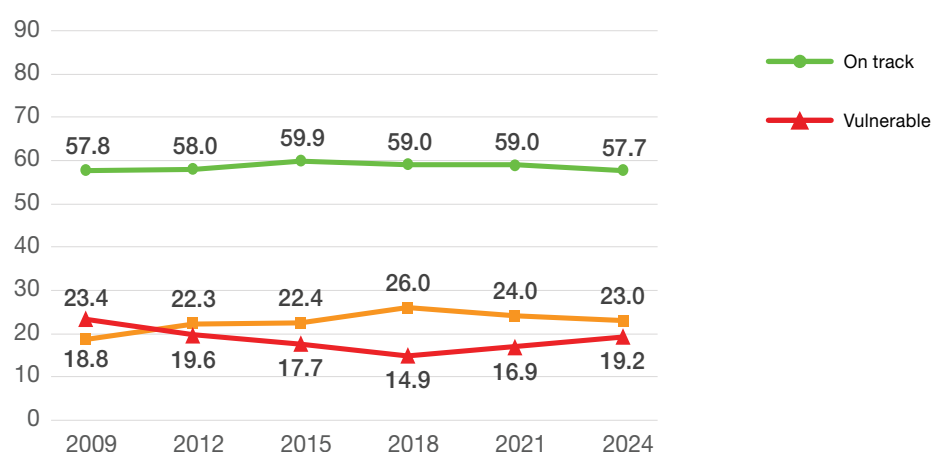
ACT language diversity

Communication skills and general knowledge



Since 2009, there have been relatively few changes in the percentage of children with a language background other than English (LBOTE) who were developmentally on track in the communication skills and general knowledge domain. However, the percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on this domain has increased since 2018, reaching 19.2% in 2024.

Figure 21 — Language diversity/Communication skills and general knowledge



Significant change*

2009 vs 2024	2021 vs 2024
No significant change	No significant change
Significant decrease	Significant increase

Summary indicators

OT5

DV1

DV2

OT5 — The percentage of children with an LBOTE who were OT5 has been declining since 2018 and dropped to 39.3% in 2024.

DV1 and DV2 — The proportion of children with an LBOTE who were classified as DV1 remained relatively stable between 2021 and 2024. In contrast, the percentage classified as DV2 rose significantly, increasing by 1.6 percentage points to 16.3%.

Figure 22 — Language diversity/Summary indicators



Significant change*

2009 vs 2024	2021 vs 2024
No significant change	Significant decrease
No significant change	No significant change
No significant change	Significant increase

* Significant change text is colour coded **in a green box** for a positive change and **in a red box** for a negative change.

Three-Year-Old Check Pilot: Supporting early identification and intervention

Developmental concerns in children are often not identified until they start school, resulting in missed opportunities for early support. In the ACT, participation in three-year-old development checks remains low, particularly among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

To address this gap, in 2025 the ACT Government piloted a Three-Year-Old Check in selected early childhood education centres (ECECs) and Koori Preschools in Gungahlin and Tuggeranong. The pilot aimed to identify developmental needs earlier and connect children and families with appropriate supports and services.

Parents and carers were invited to complete a brief questionnaire about their child's development and health. Based on their responses, they received tailored referral information and resources. Overall, parents reported that the three-year-old check increased their awareness of child and family services. They found completing three-year-old check questionnaires in their child's ECEC helpful and would recommend the check to other parents.

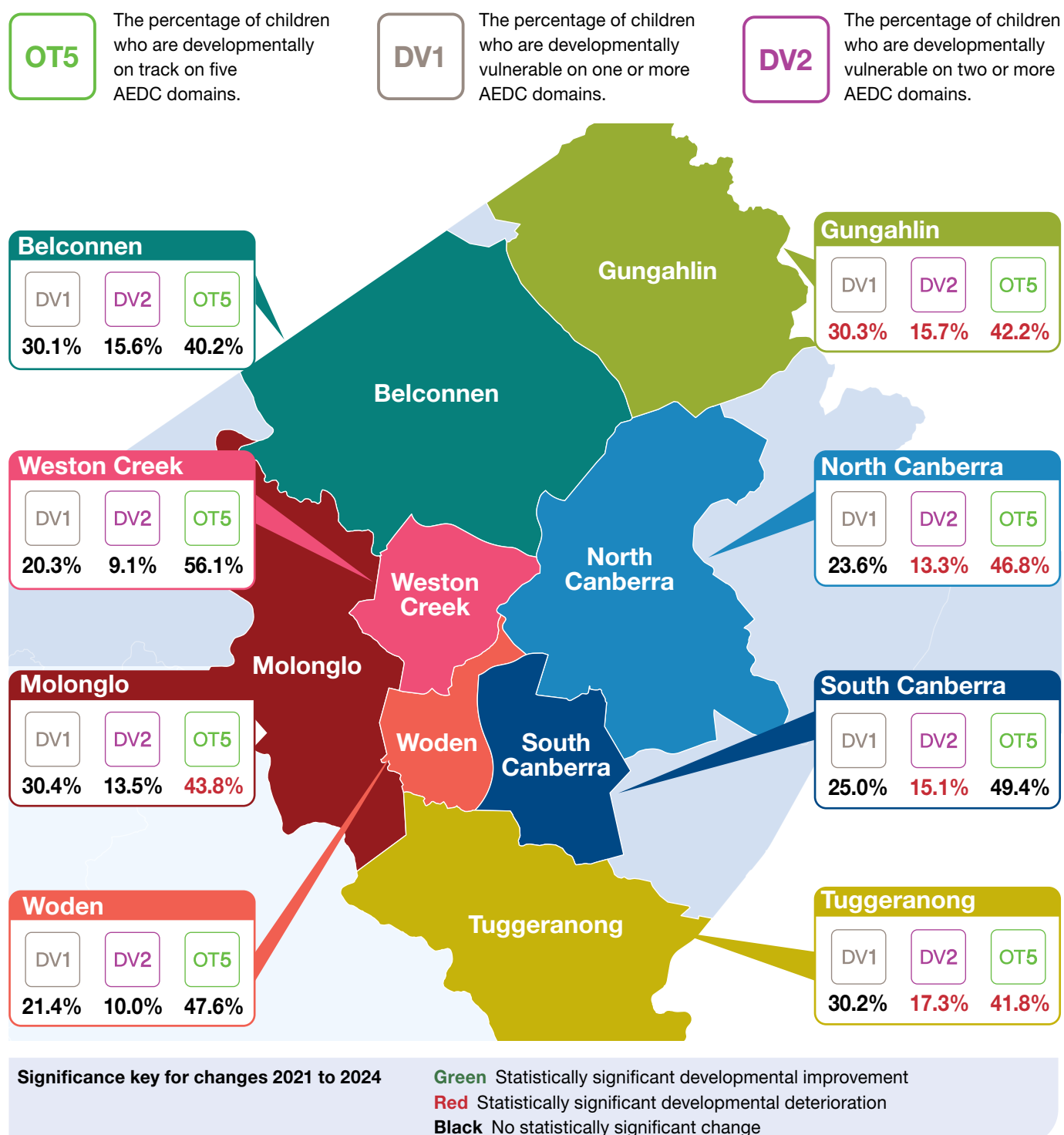
This initiative aligns with the **ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement** and the **National Agreement on Closing the Gap**, which aims to increase the proportion of children developmentally on track by 2031.

The pilot responds to rising developmental vulnerability in the ACT, as highlighted by the AEDC and seeks to ensure children receive the support they need, when they need it most.



ACT regional overview: Summary indicators by AEDC Community (region)

Figure 23 — Summary indicators by ACT region, 2024





The AEDC reports data for 8 regions of the ACT: Belconnen, Gungahlin, Molonglo, North Canberra, South Canberra, Tuggeranong, Weston Creek and Woden. AEDC publications refer to the ACT regions which are geographic areas, usually equivalent to a Local Government Area (LGA), as AEDC communities (e.g., on the AEDC website and national report). AEDC data is also collected for children living in the ACT but outside the eight ACT regions in 'Regional ACT'. Due to small numbers, data for 'Regional ACT' is not provided in this report. The Molonglo region is a growing area with the population expected to continue increasing across the next AEDC cycles. Further information on the local communities (suburbs or small area localities) within these ACT regions/AEDC communities can be found in community profiles and online maps on the AEDC website www.aedc.gov.au.

The 2024 AEDC data shows that Molonglo, Gungahlin, Tuggeranong and Belconnen had the highest percentages of children developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains, over 30% in each region. Tuggeranong had the highest percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains at 17.3%, followed by Gungahlin (15.7%), Belconnen (15.6%) and South Canberra (15.1%).

Between 2021 and 2024 Gungahlin was the only region that saw a significant increase in the percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains. Over the same period, the proportion of children vulnerable on two or more domains rose significantly in Tuggeranong, Gungahlin, South Canberra, and North Canberra. Additionally, there was a significant decline in the percentage of children developmentally on track on five domains in Tuggeranong, Gungahlin, North Canberra, and Molonglo.

ACT children with special needs

Children requiring special assistance because of chronic medical, physical or intellectually disabling conditions based on a diagnosis/diagnoses (e.g., autism, cerebral palsy, down syndrome) are defined in the AEDC as having 'special needs'. Teachers complete the AEDC for children with special needs but these children's results are not included in calculations of domain scores or summary indicators. The 2024 AEDC data show that the percentage of children in the ACT who had a special needs diagnosis increased by 0.3 percentage points from 2021. The percentage of children with special needs in 2024 was lower in the ACT (4.7%) than the national figure (6.7%).

Figure 24 — Percentage of children with special needs in the ACT and Australia

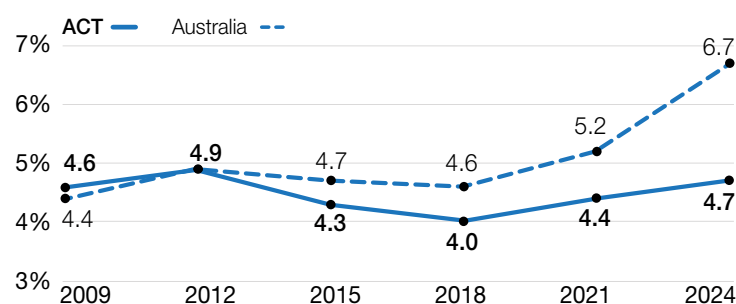


Table 1 — Children with special needs in the ACT and Australia

	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021	ACT 2024	Australia 2024
No.	204	238	234	229	258	242	19,376
%	4.6	4.9	4.3	4.0	4.4	4.7	6.7



ACT children needing further assessment

Children identified by teachers as 'needing further assessment' are children that are currently being assessed or need further assessment (e.g., medical and physical, behaviour management, emotional and cognitive development) based on information provided to the teacher by a parent/carer, professional or through teacher observation. This group may also include children who are already assessed as having special needs. Children requiring further assessment are significantly more likely to be developmentally vulnerable.

In 2024, 23.0% (1,129) of ACT children were identified as needing further assessment, this is approximately five children in every kindergarten class. Of the 1,129 children needing further assessment in 2024, only a small number (81) of children already had a special needs diagnosis.

The 2024 AEDC data show a continued rise in the percentage of children in the ACT identified as needing further assessment by their teachers, consistent with the national trend. Compared to 2021, the ACT figure increased by 5.4 percentage points, reaching 23.0%, higher than the national figure of 20.5%, and the highest rate since the beginning of the AEDC collection.

Figure 25 — Percentage of children needing further assessment in the ACT and Australia

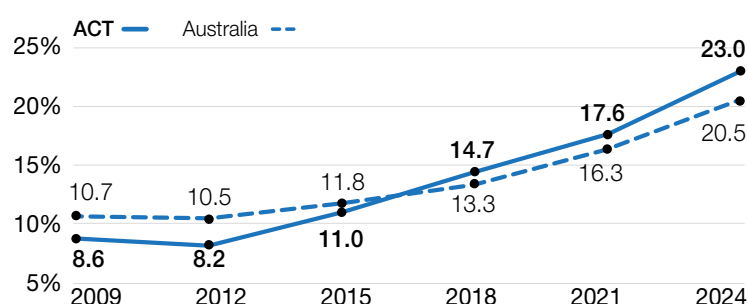


Table 2 — Children needing further assessment in the ACT and Australia

	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021	ACT 2024	Australia 2024
No.	373	394	581	816	989	1,129	56,334
%	8.6	8.2	11.0	14.7	17.6	23.0	20.5



Preschool attendance

Schools and teachers completing the AEDC are asked to report, to the best of their knowledge, whether children attended a preschool program in the year prior to starting full-time school. This includes programs delivered in both school-based and childcare settings. According to AEDC data, preschool attendance in the ACT remains consistently high, with 97.9% of children recorded as having attended in 2024 (Table 3). The proportion of children who, to the knowledge of their school or teacher, did not attend a preschool program has steadily declined from 6.1% in 2009 to 2.1% in 2024. AEDC 2024 data also show that children who did not attend preschool continue to be more likely to be developmentally vulnerable compared to those who did (Table 3).

Table 3 – Preschool attendance in the ACT and Australia

		2009	2012	2015	2018	2021	2024
Attended a preschool	Number	3,720	4,314	4,743	5,137	5,309	4,764
	%	93.9	97.8	96.9	97.0	97.3	97.9
	DV1	20.6	21.0	21.1	23.6	26.0	27.1
	DV2	10.1	9.4	9.6	11.8	12.8	14.3
	OT5	52.7	51.5	50.8	49.6	48.2	44.8
Didn't attend a preschool	Number	242	98	151	160	147	102
	%	6.1	2.2	3.1	3.0	2.7	2.1
	DV1	29.5	34.1	42.4	46.7	44.4	59.1
	DV2	16.7	13.3	25.4	29.3	31.1	38.0
	OT5	48.5	47.3	36.0	33.3	27.4	22.0



Transition to school indicators

In 2024, the majority of children (74.5%) included in the ACT AEDC collection had parents or caregivers who were viewed by their child's teacher as actively engaged with the school in supporting their learning. This marks a slight increase from 72.2% in 2021 (Table 4a), contributing to a stable long-term trend in parental engagement across the ACT. Meanwhile, 68.6% of children were considered to be regularly read to or encouraged in their reading at home, a modest decline from 69.9% in 2021, continuing a downward trend since 2009 when the figure stood at 77.8%. Additionally, nearly three-quarters (73.6%) of ACT children were reported by their teachers to be adapting well to school in 2024.

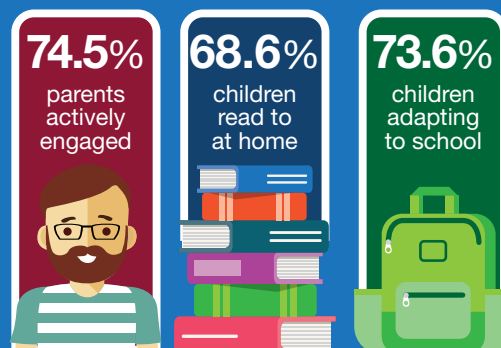


Table 4a — Child has parent(s)/caregiver(s) who are actively engaged with the school in supporting their child's learning (%)

	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021	2024
Very true	73.9	75.5	73.7	73.4	72.2	74.5
Somewhat true	20.2	18.5	20.6	21.1	22.0	20.2
Not true	5.0	4.9	4.9	4.8	4.9	4.4
Don't know	0.9	1.0	0.8	0.6	0.9	0.9

Table 4b — Child is regularly read to/encouraged in his/her reading at home (%)

	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021	2024
Very true	77.8	77.0	75.0	72.6	69.9	68.6
Somewhat true	15.7	16.3	16.9	18.4	18.8	19.3
Not true	2.5	4.0	4.8	5.7	5.8	4.8
Don't know	3.9	2.7	3.3	3.2	5.5	7.3

Table 4c — Child is making good progress in adapting to the structure and learning environment of the school

	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021	2024
Very true	78.0	78.2	77.6	74.9	72.1	73.6
Somewhat true	20.4	19.4	20.0	21.4	24.3	22.8
Not true	1.6	2.0	2.3	3.4	3.2	3.4
Don't know	<=0.1	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.3

Note: In previous reports, figures included responses marked as either 'somewhat true' or 'very true'. For the 2024 report, only responses marked 'very true' were counted as the child achieving the transition indicator, reflecting a more focused approach to data interpretation.

Socio-economic advantage

AEDC data was compared with the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to rank regions across Australia based on relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage. These indexes draw on data from the five-yearly Census of Population and Housing. The 2024 AEDC results show that children in more advantaged ACT suburbs had higher percentages of developmental vulnerability across one or more and two or more domains than previous years (Table 5). However, overall patterns indicate that children living in socio-economically advantaged areas tend to show lower rates of developmental vulnerability compared to those in disadvantaged suburbs. This trend is also reflected in the proportion of children developmentally on track across all five AEDC domains, with fewer children meeting this benchmark in the more disadvantaged quintiles.

Table 5 — Summary indicators and Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)

	SEIFA quintile					
	Most disadvantaged				Least disadvantaged	
	1–3		4		5	
	2021	2024	2021	2024	2021	2024
Number	1,447	1,296	1,627	1,433	2,720	2,402
DV1	32.3%	33.1%	28.3%	28.2%	22.8%	25.3%
DV2	17.0%	18.1%	13.6%	16.3%	11.1%	12.3%
OT5	40.2%	38.9%	45.1%	43.5%	52.5%	46.9%





Best Start for Canberra's Children: Supporting families from the beginning

The **Best Start for Canberra's Children: The First 1000 Days Strategy** (Best Start) outlines the ACT Government's commitment to supporting families from pre-conception through the early years of a child's life. Developed in collaboration with families, community organisations, and frontline workers, the strategy recognises the first 1000 days as a critical window for shaping lifelong health, wellbeing and development.

Best Start promotes a more coordinated approach across government and community services, helping families feel confident, connected and supported. The strategy is being delivered in three phases, with the first action plan focusing on practical steps such as improving access to playgroups and strengthening links between maternity and child health services.

Under Best Start, the ACT Government expanded the Child Development Service in 2023. This included delivering specialist early intervention therapy for children aged 24 to 36 months. These services support children with developmental vulnerabilities to support positive trajectories and build strong foundations for improved long-term outcomes.



3-Year-Old Preschool

On 1 January 2024, the ACT Government launched free three-year-old preschool as part of its **Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT**. This initiative gives ACT families access to 300 hours of free, play-based preschool each year, delivered by qualified Early Childhood Teachers. More than 140 early childhood education and care services across Canberra are participating.

The program supports children's learning, wellbeing and development through quality play experiences. Through play, children build essential social, language and physical skills that help prepare them for school and life. Research shows that children who attend quality early learning programs are more likely to transition successfully to school, stay engaged in education longer, and participate fully in employment and community life as adults.

Three-year-old preschool is aligned with the national **Early Years Learning Framework**, ensuring a consistent, evidence-based approach to early childhood education across the ACT.

Resources

About the AEDC

Australian Early Development Census

A fact sheet summarising the AEDC.

www.aedc.gov.au/aedcsumm

About the AEDC Data Collection

A fact sheet with information about how the AEDC collects data on children in their first year of full-time school.

www.aedc.gov.au/abtdata

About the AEDC Domains

A fact sheet summarising the key characteristics of each AEDC domain.

www.aedc.gov.au/abtdom

AEDC Summary Indicators

A fact sheet providing an overview of the three summary indicators used to describe children's development - OT5, DV1 and DV2.

www.aedc.gov.au/abtsumm

Definition of AEDC Terms

A fact sheet defining the key terms used in the AEDC program and resources.

www.aedc.gov.au/defterm

Introduction to the AEDC

A short video explaining the AEDC.

www.aedc.gov.au/vidintro

For more resources to help understand and use the data visit the
[AEDC website](http://www.aedc.gov.au)



Accessing AEDC data

Community Data Explorer

The Community Data Explorer is a searchable online data tool available through the AEDC website. Data from each AEDC collection can be viewed at four different levels: local community, community, state/territory and national. Data is available to download in report, table, chart and map formats.

www.aedc.gov.au/cde

Public data tables

Time series data tables are available for download for all AEDC data collections by Local Government Area (LGA), Statistical Area Levels 2, 3 and 4 (SA2, SA3, SA4), Greater Capital City Statistical Areas (GCCSA), Remoteness and SEIFA.

www.aedc.gov.au/dataproducts

Community Profiles

Community Profiles present AEDC results from geographic areas, usually equivalent to an LGA (in the ACT these are commonly referred to as regions). They also include information that provides context for the AEDC results such as demographics and the characteristics of children in the area.

www.aedc.gov.au/communityprofiles

Data Guidelines

The principles and protocols governing the management, access, use, disclosure and dissemination of AEDC data are outlined in the AEDC Data Guidelines. This includes the process for accessing data that is not publicly available.

www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/aedc-data-guidelines

Using AEDC data

User Guides

AEDC User Guides are designed to help educators, communities, policymakers, and researchers understand and use AEDC data effectively. The user guides outline the principles and practices for local action and solutions that work for the children and families that make up communities and jurisdictions.

www.aedc.gov.au/userguides

Informing Your Planning

A video describing how the AEDC can be used to improve the provision of services and supports to children and families.

www.aedc.gov.au/vidinform

Understanding the Data

A video explaining how the AEDC data is collected and used to calculate AEDC results at a community level.

www.aedc.gov.au/vidunders

Community Stories

A series of stories developed to showcase how communities across Australia are using AEDC data to support early childhood development.

www.aedc.gov.au/commstories

School Stories

A series of stories developed to showcase how schools are using the AEDC to inform curriculum planning and support children's development.

www.aedc.gov.au/schoolstories

Glossary

AEDC domains

The AEDC measures five key areas, or domains, of early childhood development:

- physical health and wellbeing
- social competence
- emotional maturity
- language and cognitive skills (school-based)
- communication skills and general knowledge

These areas have been shown to predict later mental health, wellbeing and educational achievement.

Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)

The AEDC is a population measure of early childhood development. Teachers of children in their first year of full-time school complete an instrument, the Australian version of the Early Development Instrument (AvEDI), for each child in their class. The instrument collects data relating to five key areas of early childhood development referred to as 'domains' (see **AEDC domains**). Data is collected for individual children and then reported for groups of children at a community, state/territory and national level. Prior to 1 July 2014, the AEDC was known as the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI).

Australian version of the Early Development Instrument (AvEDI)

The AvEDI is an adaptation of the Canadian Early Development Instrument (see **Early Development Index**).

Baseline

Results from the first national collection in 2009 are considered 'baseline'.

Closing the Gap	All Australian governments are working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their communities, organisations and businesses to implement the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap at the national, state and territory, and local levels. The objective of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the National Agreement) is to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments to work together to overcome the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and achieve life outcomes equal to all Australians (National Agreement on Closing the Gap). Access to culturally safe and responsive early childhood education is essential for the holistic development and identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (SNAICC 2022; SNAICC et al. 2023). The Coalition of Peaks recognised the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) as a valuable dataset to track how well Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families were supported in the early years and selected a summary indicator with a strengths-based focus, the percentage of children on track on five domains of development. Target 4 of the National Agreement, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years, aims to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the AEDC to 55% by 2031 (Productivity Commission).
Community	AEDC Communities are a geographic area, usually equivalent to a Local Government Area (LGA). They are made up of 'Local communities' (see Local community).
Community Profiles	Community Profiles are data products that report AEDC results at community and local community levels.
Critical difference	The critical difference is the minimum percentage point change required between two collection cycles for the change to be considered significant. Results beneath the critical difference may be attributed to factors other than changes in children's development. For more information see the Comparing AEDC Results Over Time fact sheet.
Cut-off scores	When the AEDC was first completed in 2009, a series of cut-off scores for each AEDC domain were established. The cut off scores provide a reference point against which later AEDC results can be compared.
Developmentally on track on five domains (OT5)	OT5 is one of three summary indicators. OT5 represents the percentage of children who are classified as developmentally on track on five AEDC domains. It was first introduced as a strengths-based national AEDC summary indicator in 2021.
Developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains (DV1)	DV1 is one of three summary indicators. DV1 represents the percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more AEDC domains.
Developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains (DV2)	DV2 is one of three summary indicators. DV2 represents the percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable on two or more AEDC domains.
Early Development Instrument (EDI)	The Early Development Instrument (EDI) was developed in Canada by Magdalena Janus and Dan Offord at the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University (Janus & Offord, 2007) to measure the developmental health and wellbeing of young children. The AEDC uses an Australian adaptation of the EDI (see Australian version of the Early Development Instrument [AvEDI]). Janus, M., & Offord, D. R. (2007). Development and psychometric properties of the Early Development Instrument (EDI): A measure of children's school readiness. <i>Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science</i> 39(1), 1.

English as a Second Language (ESL)	Children are considered to have ESL status where English is not their first language, they are either conversational but not yet proficient in English, and/or require additional instruction in English.
Further assessment	‘Further assessment’ is an item in the AvEDI which allows teachers to identify a child who needs further assessment, or if a child is currently being assessed.
Language background other than English (LBOTE)	Children are considered to have an LBOTE if they speak a language other than English at home, or if they speak English at home but are still considered to have ESL status.
Local community	A Local community is small area locality, usually a suburb or town. For results to be reported, a Local community must have a minimum of 15 children and two teachers. Results are not reported if more than 20% of children are identified as having special needs.
Proficient in English	For the AEDC, children are considered proficient in English if teachers answered ‘average’ or ‘good/very good’ to the AvEDI question: ‘How would you rate this child’s ability to use language effectively in English?’
Quintiles	Quintiles are five equal groups dividing a population. They are used for the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) (see SEIFA) to divide the population into five categories of socio-economic disadvantage. Quintile 1 represents the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Quintile 5 represents the least socio-economically disadvantaged areas.
Remoteness Areas	Geographic location for the AEDC is based on the Australian Statistical Geographical Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Areas classification. This was developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to classify places of geographical remoteness.
Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)	The AEDC classifies socio-economic status according to the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) developed by the ABS. The AEDC uses the Index for Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (ISRDI), which considers Census information such as income, educational attainment and employment. Every geographical area in Australia is given a SEIFA score that ranks the disadvantage of an area, compared with other areas in Australia.
Summary indicators	Summary indicators combine information from all five domains to provide a summary of children’s strengths and vulnerabilities. The AEDC has three summary indicators: • Developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains (DV1) • Developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains (DV2) • On track on five domains (OT5).

For more information
see the **Definition of
AEDC Terms fact sheet**





 Australian
Early
Development
Census
An Australian Government Initiative

To learn more about the AEDC and
access results and resources visit
www.aedc.gov.au.