



**Early Childhood Australia**  
A voice for young children

# ECA Strategic Plan 2021-2024

## OUR VISION: Every young child is thriving and learning.

To achieve this vision, we champion the rights of all children from birth to the age of eight to thrive, learn and play at home, in the community, within early learning settings and through the early years of school. Our work builds the capacity of our society, including families and early childhood professionals, so that every child—regardless of location, household income or individual needs—can be nurtured to achieve their potential.

ECA acknowledges the unique place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our society, the past and current injustices and realities for them across Australia, and the enduring strength of their cultures and identities. We commit to being at the forefront of achieving a reconciled nation that values, respects and celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and being.

## We have five Strategic Priorities for 2021–2024:



### 1. Speak up for young children

Be a courageous advocate that amplifies the voice of young children, their families and those who work with them.



### 2. Collaborate for impact

Work collaboratively with others to champion the importance of the early years and improve outcomes for all children, particularly those at risk of disadvantage.



### 3. Champion 'beyond quality' in early education

Strengthen the capacity of services to be ethical, inclusive and effective in amplifying the learning outcomes and wellbeing of all children.



### 4. Lead and inspire professional learning

Lead the provision of quality-assured resources and learning opportunities for early childhood professionals.



### 5. Be sustainable and effective

Increase our effectiveness through innovation and improvement that is socially, financially and environmentally responsible.

## OUR VALUES

**Equity:** We promote social empowerment\* and inclusiveness in how we work and what we do.

**Integrity:** Our work is based on evidence and expertise. It is always ethical and transparent.

**Leadership:** We are courageous in promoting the rights and interests of young children.

**Respect:** We value and esteem children, families, professionals and each other, always.

\*The [Governance and Social Development Resource Centre](#) explains that 'social empowerment' is the process of developing a sense of autonomy and self-confidence, and acting individually and collectively to change social relationships and the institutions and discourses that exclude poor people and keep them in poverty.

## Priority 1: Speak up for young children

**Be a courageous advocate that amplifies the voice of young children, their families and those who work with them.**

- 1.1 Actively support young children to know and exercise their rights.
- 1.2 Provide advice to decision-makers on significant policy, legislation and funding issues that impact young children and their families.
- 1.3 Support early childhood professionals to engage in advocacy and policy dialogues to promote the best interests of children, their families and their communities based on ethics and evidence.
- 1.4 Develop, support and disseminate evidence-informed guidance on areas of complexity or challenge for families raising young children.
- 1.5 Work with the media and use social media to advance our key advocacy messages:
  - Young children are valued citizens with the right to positive childhood experiences.
  - Everyone benefits from investment in early education and care delivered by a qualified, specialised workforce.
  - The foundations of lifelong mental health, physical health and wellbeing are laid in the early years.
  - No child should be left behind—child- and family-service systems must be inclusive and support early intervention for children at risk of social, economic or educational disadvantage.
  - Communities across Australia have diverse strengths and needs—rural, remote and complex environments need tailored, local policy options and programs.



## KEY RESULT AREAS

- Continue being a leading advocacy voice for young children in Australia, with a strong media and social media presence.
- Ensure that our work is informed by and has the support of children, families and early childhood experts.
- Strengthen our impact on government decisions and debate in Australian parliaments through our work.
- Produce authoritative resources and statements.
- Be a source of guidance for families on areas of complexity or challenge in raising young children.
- Engage early childhood professionals in our advocacy work.

## Priority 2: Collaborate for impact

**Work collaboratively with others to champion the importance of the early years and improve outcomes for all children, particularly those at risk of disadvantage.**

- 2.1 Recognise the leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and work with them to promote the interests and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, their families and communities.
- 2.2 Work in partnership with Beyond Blue, headspace and participating services to deliver Be You Early Learning, as part of the *National Mental Health in Education Initiative*, to enhance the mental health and wellbeing of all young children in education settings.
- 2.3 Work with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the Inclusion Support Program (ISP) and early-intervention professionals to support children with additional needs, and their families, to access inclusive and age-appropriate services.
- 2.4 Collaborate with members and others to raise the profile of the early years through Early Learning Matters Week as well as other campaigns and collaborative advocacy initiatives.
- 2.5 Foster partnerships with organisations and consortiums to reduce disadvantage across the lifespan, through appropriate investment in the early years and mitigation of risk factors such as family violence, drug and alcohol misuse, and financial hardship.



## KEY RESULT AREAS

- Fully implement ECA's Reconciliation Action Plan, which includes actions for collaboration and partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.
- Meet or exceed Be You Early Learning contract targets and continue to expand its impact, particularly in relation to improving quality, building protective factors and providing effective support to services in disadvantaged communities (mapping project).
- Ensure that NDIS and ISP contracts in the Northern Territory are delivered efficiently and effectively, while informing our advocacy and professional learning nationally.
- Grow the number of parliamentarians who have participated in one or more activities as part of the Early Learning Matters Week.
- Build more partnerships on significant research collaborations (such as the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child) and advocacy campaigns (such as Thrive by Five).



### Priority 3: Champion 'beyond quality' in early education

#### Strengthen the capacity of services to be ethical, inclusive and effective in amplifying the learning outcomes and wellbeing of all children.

- 3.1 Continue to support and evaluate the ECA *Code of Ethics* to build a deeper, shared understanding of the ethical and complex nature of early childhood professionals' work with children, families, communities and colleagues.
- 3.2 Champion continuous improvement in early education, both within the sector and in the broader social discourse, looking beyond regulatory or managerial approaches to quality and with respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.
- 3.3 Support, publish and translate research about the efficacy of early education, through our publications (the *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* [AJEC], *Every Child* magazine, the *Everyday Learning Series* and the *Research in Practice Series* [RIPS]) as well as our communication platforms (social media, website and app).
- 3.4 Through Be You Early Learning, support early childhood professionals to better understand mental health—including children's social and emotional development and self-regulation—trauma-informed practice and ways to help families navigate related service systems.
- 3.5 Through the delivery of the NDIS and ISP projects in the Northern Territory, build the capacity of the early childhood sector to support young children with additional needs and their families.
- 3.6 Work with researchers and educators to articulate contemporary Australian pedagogies in early education that:
  - are play-based and developmentally appropriate for young children
  - respond to the social-cultural context of the local community
  - incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to teaching and learning
  - support the inclusion of children with diverse strengths and needs.
- 3.7 Work with early childhood professionals to raise the status of their work, and strengthen the professional identity of educators, teachers and service leaders across setting types.



#### KEY RESULT AREAS

- Provide leadership on the future of quality improvement in early education in Australia.
- Support strong representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contributors (authors, speakers and participants) through ECA channels.
- Build the 'Every Educator' web platform as a professional identity initiative (by 2022).
- Distil the key elements of Australian early childhood pedagogies (for the 2022 National Conference) and expand our international profile.
- Ensure that Be You Early Learning has a positive impact on practice and mental health literacy in the early childhood profession.
- Maintain and grow the standing of our research publications: AJEC and RIPS.
- Improve our support to educators, teachers and service leaders working in rural, remote and complex environments.



## Priority 4: Lead and inspire professional learning

### Lead the provision of quality-assured resources and learning opportunities for early childhood professionals.

- 4.1 Continue delivering learning events trusted by the early childhood sector—including our flagship ECA National Conference, Reconciliation Symposium, AJEC Symposium and the ECA Colloquia on Leadership and Ethics (starting in 2021).
- 4.2 Grow the ECA Learning Hub into Australia's leading source of online learning for early childhood professionals, with authoritative, quality-assured and well-regarded content that is hosted on a user-friendly platform.
- 4.3 Through the delivery of the NDIS and ISP projects in the Northern Territory, gain a better understanding of the professional learning needs of early childhood professionals to support inclusion and early intervention, and learn about the challenges faced in rural, remote and complex environments.
- 4.4 Extend our capacity to create inspiring content and address knowledge gaps by actively pursuing project opportunities and partnerships with leading experts (local and international) who have a particular interest in:
  - identifying and articulating Australian pedagogies
  - strengthening ethical leadership
  - building management capability.
- 4.5 Produce publications and resources that support professional dialogues and ongoing engagement in professional learning at all career stages—from students to sector leaders.



### KEY RESULT AREAS

- Our events are well attended, sustainable and impactful.
- The ECA Learning Hub meets the needs of learners and continues to grow in size and scope.
- Deliver the ECA Colloquia on Leadership and Ethics for leaders from both practice and research disciplines.
- Review the impact of the ECA *Code of Ethics* and develop resources to strengthen engagement.
- Produce the *Professional Learning Guide* twice a year.
- Develop resources that support the implementation of the ECA *Code of Ethics* and ECA statements on children's rights and inclusion.



## Priority 5: Be sustainable and effective

**Increase our effectiveness through innovation and improvement that is socially, financially and environmentally responsible.**

- 5.1 Implement a new contemporary governance structure to strengthen and diversify our National Board, reshape our relationship with members and enhance the role of each State/Territory Branch Committee.
- 5.2 Review ECA's operations, procurement practices and supply chains to identify and respond to risks associated with modern slavery, support environmentally responsible sourcing and ensure that we meet or exceed our Reconciliation Action Plan commitments related to purchasing from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers (individuals, businesses and NGOs).
- 5.3 Continue to invest in technology, online platforms and cybersecurity to ensure members and customers can interact with ECA confidently and with satisfaction.
- 5.4 Strengthen ECA's financial position by achieving realistic targets across membership, events, sales revenue and projects—while also improving our efficiency in how we deliver products and services.
- 5.5 Maximise the individual and collective effectiveness of our people through enhanced communication across teams and investment in professional development.



## KEY RESULT AREAS

- Ensure a smooth transition to our new corporate governance structure—where all branches become affiliated (dual or integrated).
- Refresh ECA's logo and website to mark the transition.
- Review our procurement practices and reporting (by 2022).
- Make a voluntary statement against the *Modern Slavery Act 2018* (Commonwealth).
- Collect feedback from members and customers to ensure growing confidence and satisfaction with our products and services.
- Improve employee satisfaction with communication across teams as well as individual and collective effectiveness.
- Fully and appropriately spend budgeted funds for professional development across all ECA teams.