



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

**OUR
VISION:
EVERY
YOUNG
CHILD IS
THRIVING
AND
LEARNING**

A National Vision for Early Childhood Education and Care

Early Childhood Australia Submission
April 2023

About us

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) is a not-for-profit, membership-based organisation that was first incorporated in 1938. We work at both the national and local level, with active State and Territory Committees in each Australian jurisdiction and a National Board of Directors. Our membership includes early childhood professionals, services, schools and organisations that share a commitment to the rights and wellbeing of young children.

Our vision is that every young child is thriving and learning. To achieve this, we champion the rights of young children to thrive and learn at home, in the community, within early learning settings and through the early years of school.

Our work builds the capacity of our society and the early childhood sector to realise the potential of every child during the critical early years from birth to the age of eight. ECA particularly acknowledges the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, and the past and current injustices and realities for them around Australia.

Find out more at: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Or contact: Samantha Page, CEO, Early Childhood Australia

Phone: 02 6242 1800

Email: SPage@earlychildhood.org.au

Or

Dr Daniel Leach-McGill, Policy & Government Relations Exec

Phone: 0487 500 077

Email: DLeach-McGill@earlychildhood.org.au

Acknowledgement of Country

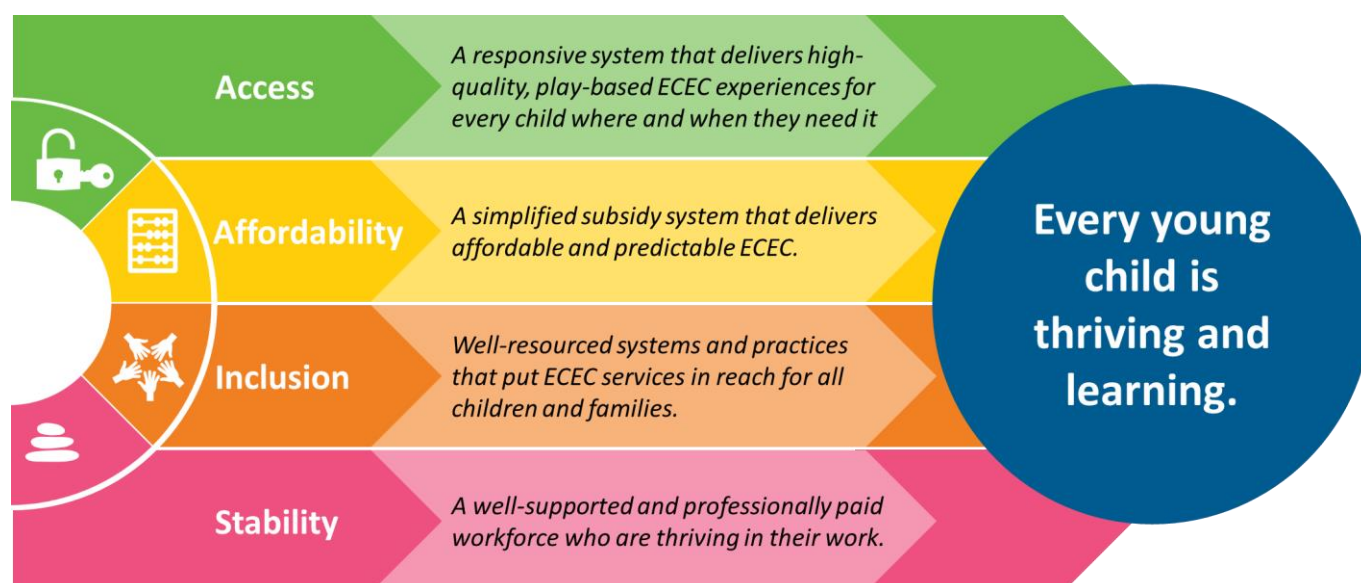
Early Childhood Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures, and to the Elders both past and present.



ECA welcomes the development of a National Vision for Early Childhood Education and Care and the opportunity to provide feedback. ECA want to see a strong early childhood education system that places children at its centre and supports them through measures that ensure high-quality, play-based ECEC that is accessible, affordable, inclusive and stable—so that every young child is thriving and learning. The draft vision is aligned with many of ECA’s priorities for the sector and for children.

ECA would like to see an aspirational vision developed that positively frames the opportunities that quality ECEC provides. Further, we see opportunities to improve the vision by better representing the needs and interests of the groups affected (children, families, communities, the profession and society more broadly). To succeed, the vision needs to be authorised and owned by government to ensure that it is not only implemented but also well connected to other initiatives, frameworks and strategies.

Our priorities and vision are outlined below.



The vision and its components

The presentation of the vision, while responding to some critical areas for action, makes it difficult to locate a coherent overarching focus. The way the information is presented also creates an artificial distinction between core components – particularly the relationship between the vision and outcomes. It may be beneficial to articulate: an overarching vision, what the vision means for different group (rather than having a separate vision per group), and specific outcomes for each group. There is also an opportunity to articulate specific outcomes for equity groups. Similarly, the principles articulated have different meaning for different interest groups — including children, families, communities, the ECEC profession, and society more broadly. Articulating how each principle applies to these groups provides the opportunity to describe a broader range of positive impacts that quality ECEC provides.

The vision tends to narrowly frame core concepts such as quality and inclusion along with the benefits of high quality ECEC for children and families.



For families, quality ECEC supports decision making about their social and economic participation, which includes balancing caring responsibilities with workforce participation, starting or running a business, and engaging in study or training—we know that this is particularly important for women. ECEC can also play a significant role in families' support networks, particularly when they are experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage (including family violence or other hardships).

The concept of quality is not well articulated in the vision or the principles. There is an opportunity to make stronger connection to Australia's National Quality Framework, which provides the regulations, standards and practice under which quality is understood.

The concept of inclusion could be better incorporated into the language of the vision. Inclusion is of critical importance in the ECEC sector and strongly related to the principles and priorities in the vision. ECA has developed a Statement of Inclusion that articulates a commitment to “the inclusion of every child in early childhood education and care. Inclusion means that every child has access to, participates meaningfully in, and experiences positive outcomes from early childhood education and care programs”¹. This positively framed commitment offers an alternative to focussing on barriers and deficit language.

Making the profession visible

For the profession to feel valued and recognised, as mentioned in the vision, they need to be visible in the vision. There is an opportunity to elevate some of the values, practices and language found in the Approved Learning Framework and Standards throughout this vision to better resonate with the sector – for example, the value of play based learning. This is particularly important when framing the outcomes of high quality ECEC.

Mechanisms to authorise the vision

It is currently unclear how and under whose authority the vision will be authorised. It is imperative that this is clearly identified along with the mechanism through which the governments stewardship roles are embedded and protected in policy.

Further, the connection between the vision and other initiatives—spanning portfolios, departments and jurisdiction—needs be made explicit. This is important in understanding how the vision connects to other significant strategies (The Early Years Strategy, National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, National plan to protect Australia's Children) and its authority across the system.

¹ [Statement-of-Inclusion-2016.pdf \(earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au\)](https://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/Statement-of-Inclusion-2016.pdf)