

National Early Language and Literacy Strategy

Discussion Paper

ARACY on behalf of the National Early Language and Literacy Coalition

October 2020

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National Early Language and Literacy: Discussion Paper

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Purpose of this discussion paper

This discussion paper outlines the objectives and priorities of a National Early Language and Literacy Strategy based on the evidence review undertaken between March 2019 and June 2020. The review included peer-reviewed literature, existing national and international strategies, policies and programs, in addition to previous work undertaken by the National Early Language and Literacy Coalition.^{1,2} Its content will frame the co-design by the Working Group³ of a draft National Strategy. Considerations and questions are highlighted throughout to structure input and discussion on:

Priorities: key focus areas

Targets: key outcomes to be achieved or aimed for in each focus area

Responses: mechanisms to be leveraged (e.g. services, policies, engagement strategies) to achieve targets.

Structure of this paper

This paper provides an overview of:

- objectives of a National Strategy
- proposed priorities of a National Strategy
- parameters of a National Strategy regarding target age-range, terms and definitions
- reasons why Australia needs a National Strategy
- key findings of the evidence review including a summary of the effectiveness of approaches
- examples of Australian frameworks and strategies mapped to proposed priorities
- examples of international agendas and strategies.

Objectives of a National Strategy

The central objective of a National Early Language and Literacy Strategy is to establish a **coordinated national approach to enhancing babies' and children's early language and literacy development in Australia.**

The overarching and long-term goal is to ensure that, before starting school, children are provided with the best opportunities⁴ to develop the foundational language and literacy skills required to learn, be healthy, develop a positive sense of identity and culture, and participate within their family, community and society, throughout their childhood, into adolescence and adulthood.

A National Strategy intends to do this by:

- establishing a common understanding around early language and literacy development
- reflecting and building upon existing strategies, initiatives, services and programs
- identifying priorities, targets and responses in the short, medium and long term.

¹Quach, J., Elek, C., Beatson, R., Bridie, J., & Goldfeld, S. (2017). *Reviewing the evidence for supporting children's early language and literacy development*. Parkville, Vic.: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute and Royal Children's Hospital.

²National Early Language and Literacy Coalition. (2018). *Getting Early Language and Literacy Right, Policy Brief*. National Early Language and Literacy Coalition: Australia

³The Working Group comprises Australian government representatives, National Early Language and Literacy Coalition members and other key stakeholders.

⁴In safe and nurturing environments in which all needs are met—see ARACY's wellbeing framework *The Nest* (<https://www.aracy.org.au/the-nest-in-action/the-nest-in-action>).



Proposed priorities of a National Strategy

The priorities proposed below reflect:

- the areas in which infant and child language and emergent literacy development is most likely to be nurtured:
 - home and family relationships (including grandparents and extended family)
 - community settings such as libraries, playgroups and online/digital platforms
 - early childhood education and care settings
 - with the assistance of specialist support
- systems to be utilised in a coordinated response:
 - early childhood education and care services, including preschool/kindergarten programs
 - child and maternal health services
 - family, community and welfare services
 - allied health, early intervention services and disability support services
 - public library networks
 - research, evaluation and policy development.

Priorities

1. Family support within communities

- a. Promote the importance of language and literacy development and the positive impact this has on future education.
- b. Support families and carers to confidently engage in reading and literacy learning activities with their babies and children in a culturally responsive way.
- c. Ensure community service, health and support workers
 - i. understand and promote the importance of early language and literacy development prior to formal schooling, and
 - ii. where available, use evidence-based approaches for early language and literacy development among the children and families they work with.
- d. Support libraries to facilitate evidence-based early language and literacy programs, campaigns and parenting programs.



- e. Ensure all families have equity in access to community, health and support services that aim and are proven to facilitate early language and literacy development, e.g. public libraries.
- f. Ensure that families and support services have access to books in first languages of that community wherever possible.
- g. Address risks and opportunities in young children engaging with digital technology, including how the use of apps can both help and hinder early literacy.

2. Early education and transitions

- a. Ensure that evidence-based approaches to early language and literacy development are embedded in the initial qualification training and ongoing professional development provided to early childhood educators and teachers.
- b. Ensure all children have equity in access to quality early education for at least two years prior to starting compulsory schooling.
- c. Develop and implement appropriate measures of early language and emergent literacy skills in preschool/kindergarten to ensure children have the skills they need to make a smooth transition to school.

3. Specialist support

- a. Facilitate the early identification of children who require support with language development among young children who have not yet commenced compulsory schooling.
- b. Ensure that children who require early intervention with language development have equity of access to support services.

4. Knowledge production and dissemination

- a. Facilitate the distribution of timely and reliable information for families, educators, service providers and policy-makers on the relevance, nature, availability and impact of early language and literacy development approaches.
- b. Provide support for research and evaluation on Australian-based interventions, and information-sharing on responses and findings.

Key questions to consider regarding targets, responses and stakeholders

- What is the role of families and carers?
- What are the existing national, state and territory policies and initiatives?
- What is the role of federal, state/territory and local governments?
- What is the role of education, health and community service sectors (including libraries and playgroups)?
- How would targets, responses and stakeholders vary by age-range (e.g. birth to two years, three to five years)?
- How do we ensure consideration is given to cultural and linguistic diversity?
- How do we support access for communities in remote and very remote areas?
- What are the appropriate short-, medium- and long-term timeframes for targets and responses?



Age-range

This strategy is targeted at supporting children aged **five years and under**, and their families, **before they commence compulsory schooling** in Australia. This threshold was set to demonstrate the significant need for a coordinated approach to children's early language and emerging literacy development in Australia.

What do we mean by early language and literacy?

Defining early language and literacy

In addition to the specific components of early language and emergent literacy outlined in the below tables, a broader definition of literacy is included in this strategy. Literacy is a complex process occurring beyond the primary reading and writing skills and includes social, cultural, digital, gestural and artistic communication. This broader definition is in alignment with the 'multiliteracies' concept which maintains that individuals 'read' the world around them, making meaning via linguistic, visual, audio, spatial and gestural input, far beyond traditional reading and writing.⁵

Table 1 highlights the key primary outcomes which comprise early language and literacy skills, as informed by child development and education literature.

There are also several key secondary outcomes that are known to have direct and indirect impacts on early language and literacy skills. These are detailed in Table 2.

⁵UNESCO International Bureau of Education. (2020). *Multiple Literacies*. Retrieved 21 October, 2020, from <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/glossary-curriculum-terminology/m/multiple-literacies>.

Table 1: Primary early language and literacy outcomes

Early language skills	
Receptive language	Understanding communication, starting with understanding vocal tone and facial expression. Comprehending and following one-stage instructions moving to understanding multi-stage instructions. The understanding of conceptual knowledge such as spatial, numerical and temporal concepts, and the ability to comprehend 'who', 'what' and 'where' questions.
Expressive language	Productive communication starting with cooing and babbling. Expressive vocabulary is defined as the number and complexity of words spoken and used to communicate, starting with single-word utterances to two-word combinations, three- or four-word phrases, and increasingly longer and more complex utterances. Includes conversational discourse skills and being able to produce short narratives.
Emergent literacy skills	
Written language awareness	Understanding the use of print as a communicative device, ability to recognise and discriminate letters, alphabetic letter naming, understanding print concepts such as text directionality, environmental print recognition (e.g. COLES), knowledge of print terminology such as 'word', 'letter', or 'spell', using writing as a communicative or symbolic tool, prewriting and spelling skills (e.g. ability to draw lines, trace and produce letters), emergent name writing.
Phonological awareness	Word awareness (recognition of word boundaries), syllable awareness, phoneme identity (recognising letter sounds), rhyme awareness, segmenting larger phonological units into smaller units (e.g. breaking words into syllables), blending smaller phonological units into larger units (e.g. putting two or more sounds together to make a word).
Composite early language and literacy skills	The synthesis of a range of early language and literacy skills (as listed above) into a single measure.

Table 2: Secondary early language and literacy outcomes

Secondary early language and literacy outcomes	
Executive function skills	Mental processing skills involving working memory, self-regulation, flexible thinking, social awareness and social cognition, organisation, reasoning and problem-solving as well as the ability to adapt to and participate in a range of learning environments.
Home literacy environment	Child engagement in reading activities, the number of children's books or any type of books in the child's home, parents' values and attitudes towards reading, the nature and level of parent-child shared book reading practices or preliteracy activities.
Secondary composite skills	Measures that aggregate a range of development and cognitive outcomes (as listed above) including language, social, emotional and motor skills. Includes measures of general school readiness.

Why do we need a strategy?

Although there is an overarching national framework for learning in the early years (the *Early Years Learning Framework*)⁶ and a national plan for literacy instruction once a child is at school under the curriculum, Australia does not have a coordinated strategy specifically targeting language and emergent literacy for children prior to commencing compulsory schooling. The social and economic benefits of investing in early learning are far-reaching for individuals, families, carers, communities and society as a whole.^{7,8} Given the importance of language development and emergent literacy skills, it is concerning that there is not a cohesive approach for children aged five years and under, as this is the critical stage when the foundations of these skills are established.

We know there are problems in the language development and literacy of many young children.

Focusing on the early years is key to maximising Australia's language and literacy skills

- 8.2% (i.e. 24 232) of Australia's children had a limited command of language; difficulties talking to others, understanding and/or being understood at school entry.⁹

- 6.6% (i.e. 19 417) of Australia's children were unable to attach sounds to letters and/or showed no interest in trying at school entry.⁸
- Children who start school behind, usually stay behind.¹⁰ Up to 90% of children with persistent language problems at age five have poor literacy outcomes 10 years later.¹¹
- Reading to young children very regularly is a strong protective factor against developmental vulnerability.¹²

This is a multi-sectoral problem requiring collaboration and coordinated cross-sector solutions

- Individuals with low literacy are 1.5 to 3 times more likely to experience poorer health outcomes than those who do not have low literacy.¹³
- Exposure in the early years to repeated incidents of maltreatment or household dysfunction (including domestic violence) nearly doubles a child's chance of having below-average language and literacy skills at age five.¹⁴
- The intensity of word exposure between households varies dramatically.¹⁵ Socioeconomic factors can hugely impact a child's language and literacy development, with an average four-year-old in a low socioeconomic situation potentially experiencing up to 13 million fewer words in cumulative experience than a four-year-old in a more average socioeconomic environment.¹⁶
- Housing issues and homelessness are known to detrimentally impact on language development.¹⁷

⁶Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). (2009). *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia.

⁷PwC. (2014). *Putting a value on Early Childhood Education and Care in Australia*. Retrieved from <https://www.pwc.com.au/pdf/putting-value-on-ecec.pdf>.

⁸Heckman, J. (2012). *Invest in early childhood development: Reduce deficits, strengthen the economy*. Retrieved from https://heckmanequation.org/www/assets/2013/07/F_HeckmanDeficitPieceCUSTOM-Generic_052714-3-1.pdf.

⁹Australian Early Development Census 2018: Data Explorer. Retrieved from <https://www.aedc.gov.au/data/data-explorer>.

¹⁰Spira, E., Bracken, S., & Fischel, J. (2005). Predicting improvement after first-grade reading difficulties: The effects of oral language, emergent literacy and behavior skills. *Developmental Psychology*, 41(1), 225–234.

¹¹Stothard et al., cited in Quach, Elek, Beatson, Bridie, & Goldfeld, 2017.

¹²Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2014). *Factors Influencing Early Childhood Development in Tasmania*. No. 4261.6. Retrieved 21 October, 2020, from <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4261.6>

¹³DeWalt, D. A., Berkman, N. D., Sheridan, S., Lohr, K. N., & Pignone, M. P. (2004). Literacy and health outcomes. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 19(12), 1228–1239.

¹⁴Jimenez, M. E., Wade, R., Lin, Y., Morrow, L. M., & Reichman, N. E. (2016). Adverse experiences in early childhood and kindergarten outcomes. *Pediatrics*, 137(2), e20151839.

¹⁵Brushe, M. E., Lynch, J. W., Reilly, S., Melhuish, E., & Brinkman, S. A. (2020) How many words are Australian children hearing in the first year of life? *BMC Pediatrics*, 20(1), 20–52. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12887-020-1946-0>

¹⁶Hart, B., & Risley, T. (2003). The early catastrophe. *American Educator*, 27(1), 4–9. Retrieved from <https://www.bilingualpreschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/The-Early-Catastrophe-The-30-Million-Word-Gap-by-Age-3.pdf>

¹⁷Rafferty, Y., & Shinn, M. (1991). The impact of homelessness on children. *American Psychologist*, 46(11), 1170–1179.

- The regularity with which a child younger than five years old is read to or encouraged to read has strong and consistently significant relationships with their developmental vulnerability in the first year of schooling across all five Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) domains.¹²
- Multi-sectoral factors affect Australian Aboriginal children's language and literacy development (see Figure 1).¹⁸

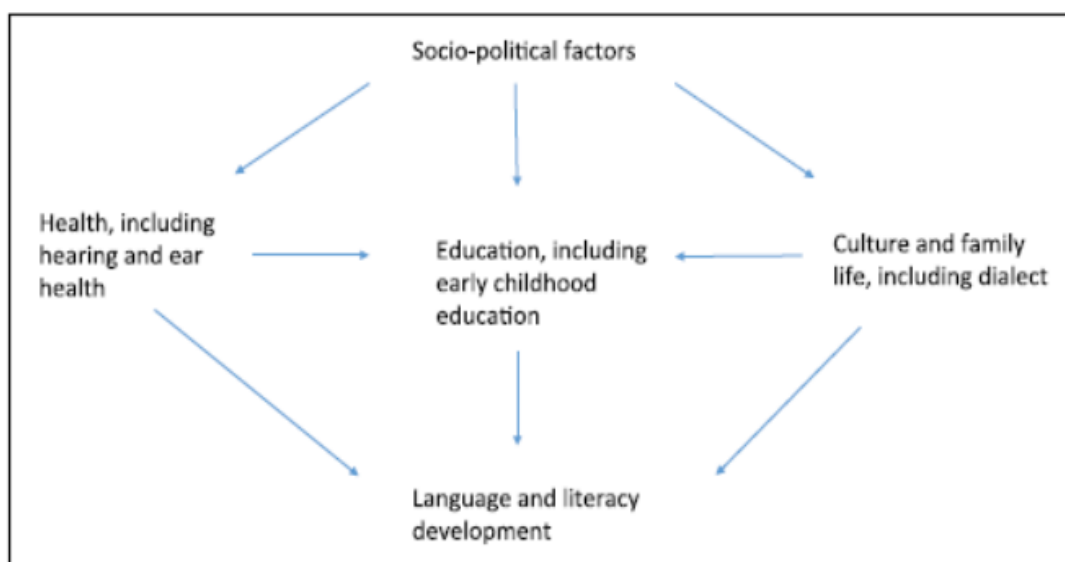


Figure 1. Factors affecting Australian Aboriginal children's language and literacy development.

Source: Webb & Williams, 2017.

There are substantial long-term costs for low literacy and language skills

- 44% of Australian adults don't have the functional literacy skills they need to cope with the demands of everyday life and work.¹⁹
- More than 75% of employers reported that their business was affected by low levels of literacy and numeracy.²⁰
- Language difficulties have been found in up to 50% of young male offenders, and 60% of prison entrants have not studied past Year 10.²¹

There is a lack of national data to demonstrate the scope and impact of the problem as well as a lack of robust evidence to show clearly what works, and why, to improve early language and literacy skills.

¹²Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2014). *Factors Influencing Early Childhood Development in Tasmania*. No. 4261.6. Retrieved 21 October, 2020, from <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4261.6>

¹⁸Webb, G., & Williams, C. (2017). Factors affecting language and literacy development in Australian Aboriginal children: Considering dialect, culture and health. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 16(7), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X17693417>

¹⁹Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2013). *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia, 2011–12*. 4228.0. Retrieved 21 October, 2020, from <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/programme-international-assessment-adult-competencies-australia/latest-release>.

²⁰Australian Industry Group (AIG). (2010). *National Workforce Literacy Project*. North Sydney, NSW: AIG. Retrieved from https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20120329121925/https://www.aigroup.com.au/portal/binary/com.epicentric.contentmanagement.servlet.ContentDeliveryServlet/LIVE_CONTENT/Publications/Reports/2010/8783_Workforce_Literacy_Project_Report.pdf.

²¹Australian Government. (2010–2013). Senate Inquiry: The over-representation of disadvantaged groups within Australian prisons. Retrieved 21 October, 2020, from https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/senate/legal_and_constitutional_affairs/completed_inquiries/2010-13/justicereinvestment/report/c04.

Key findings from the evidence review

The text below summarises key findings from the systematic review on peer-reviewed literature about effective approaches, risk and confounding factors and more disadvantaged groups. The tables in the appendices summarise the strength of the evidence surrounding the effectiveness of approaches on key early language and literacy outcomes. Universally applied approaches and those to support disadvantaged families were reviewed. Groups experiencing disadvantage include families experiencing lower socioeconomic status; culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families; and First Nations families. Children in out-of-home care or who have experienced abuse and neglect were also reviewed but there were not enough studies on the one approach (i.e. three or more) to include in the final analysis.

The approaches targeting children clinically at risk of language and literacy delays are not currently included in the analysis. This involved:

- children who have a disability (including but not limited to physical and/or developmental delay, children with hearing or language delays or impairment, or children who are on the autism spectrum)
- children born pre-term.

As we develop the National Strategy further, we will include work to more fully consider and address families experiencing higher disadvantages listed above, particularly regarding specialist support.

Effective approaches

Below is a summary of the approaches and interventions shown to be effective when applied universally or among more disadvantaged groups:

- Dialogic book reading practice, which is **shared interactive book reading** that goes beyond the text in the book. This is an evidence-based technique for children who are developing typically that can improve both language and emergent literacy skills.²²

- Although more evidenced for school-aged children, **explicit reading instruction** and intervention approaches, when **delivered by trained facilitators**, can be effective for younger children on the specific skills they are targeting (e.g. letter identification, print concept, decoding skills), but on their own do not always impact on broad-ranging language and literacy skills. Their effectiveness is maximised when activities are delivered using a play-based approach. This is achieved with games, real or imagined scenarios, stories and narratives, or with meaningful context, as young children are experiential learners. Learning is less likely for children who have passive exposure to these skills.
- Exposure to **early learning environments** (such as early childhood education and care services) has broad-ranging benefits on language and literacy skills and appears to have **greater effects among at-risk children** and families.
- **Family and early literacy programs and campaigns** seem to have a **greater effect on families experiencing disadvantage** rather than when universally applied, and improve parent attitudes and values towards reading.
- There was relatively strong support **among families experiencing disadvantage** in the first five years of their children's lives for **parenting programs** that target the child's receptive and expressive language skills, composite early language and literacy skills, and primary school reading skills. These included programs that worked with parents to **promote their parenting skills** and address specific elements of disadvantage—a broader focus than supporting language and literacy development, although some programs did incorporate these topics.

There is a lack of peer-reviewed research on effective approaches for enhancing early language and literacy skills among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities. However, there are several initiatives which show encouraging results including the Northern Territory Government Families as First Teachers program, Abecedarian Approach Australia (3a), and the WA Department of Education's KindiLink play-and-learn initiative for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

It is known that effects of interventions and approaches applied in the first five years of a child's

²² Towson, J. A., Fettig, A., Fleury, V. P., & Abarca, D. L. (2017). Dialogic Reading in Early Childhood Settings: A Summary of the Evidence Base. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 37(3), 123–146. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121417724875>

life can be difficult to maintain throughout the primary school and secondary school years without continued support for families and young people.

Risk and confounding factors

The following risk factors, or confounding factors (i.e. characteristics that can affect the extent a program or intervention is effective) that were identified and controlled for in the reviewed studies to varying extents included (in no particular order):

- parental education (often measured as maternal education)
- parenting styles (e.g. measures of warmth, responsiveness, attachment styles, and discipline styles)
- home reading practices and availability of books
- maternal depression and mental health
- early education experience (particularly from ages three to five)
- educator–child interactions (i.e. responsiveness and warmth)
- educator teaching styles (e.g. behaviour management, task orientation, vocabulary, instructional dialogue)
- child age (i.e. appropriateness of approach to stage of development)
- child gender (male children on average experience slightly later development of language)
- child developmental delays
- sensory impairments (hearing, vision)
- pre-term birth
- ongoing health problems
- poverty.

These exist as key areas which interventions and approaches need to account for and target, in order for their impacts to be effective.

Australian strategies and approaches

Through a national call-out for information on current programs and initiatives employed throughout Australia targeting early language and literacy developments, stakeholder consultation with federal, state and territory government departments, and a desktop review on existing strategies and policies, several key findings around the state of the early language and literacy activities were ascertained.

- There are several potential key links of a National Strategy into existing frameworks and standards, and broader educational goals (see Table 3).
- The extent and content of government approaches to early language and literacy varies by state and territory.
- Government approaches to early language and literacy focus on the early childhood education and care sector, with a lack of priorities around supporting families and specialist support. However, there appears to be a substantial number of programs undertaken in Australia that aim to support families and children experiencing disadvantage who demonstrate substantial language delays and impairments.
- Current programs broadly reflect the approaches and target groups reflected in the literature but there is a lack of robust evaluation, coordination and information-sharing.

Overall, the review relating to current actions being undertaken in Australia illustrates the need for a national coordinated strategy that targets the early education services in addition to family support.

International approaches

A review of key initiatives undertaken in England, Canada and the United States of America (provided later in the paper), show little evidence of co-design, particularly with government departments. There is also a focus on early learning, professional development of educators, and the development and promotion of standards. This positions Australia to lead the way in establishing a collaborative approach to responding to the early language and literacy development needs of families across government and non-government sectors.

Australian examples of existing strategies, standards and initiatives regarding early language and literacy

Mapped to proposed National Strategy objectives and priorities

Table 3

	Early education and transitions				Family support within communities			Specialist support		Knowledge production and dissemination
	Training and supporting educators	Equitable access	School readiness	Assisting workers	Supporting families	Equitable access	Early identification	Equitable access	Research and evaluation	
National										
Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young People	Actions: Australian governments commit to supporting the development and strengthening of early childhood education, to provide every child with the opportunity for the best start in life.	Sub-goals under Goal 2: All young Australians: have the essential skills in literacy and numeracy and are creative and productive users of technology, especially ICT, as a foundation for success in all learning areas; are able to relate to and communicate across cultures, especially the cultures and countries of Asia.								

	Early education and transitions			Family support within communities			Specialist support		Knowledge production and dissemination
	Training and supporting educators	Equitable access	School readiness	Assisting workers	Supporting families	Equitable access	Early identification	Equitable access	
Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration		<p>Actions: Australian governments commit to: continuing to build quality and access to early years learning and development in environments that meets the needs of all Australian families; empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to reach their potential; ensuring the education community works to 'close the gap' for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; ensuring the education community works to provide equality of opportunity and educational outcomes for all students at risk of educational disadvantage.</p>	<p>Sub-goals under Goal 2: Australian governments commit to working in collaboration with the education community to support all young Australians to become successful lifelong learners who have the essential skills in literacy and numeracy as the foundation for learning.</p>		<p>Actions: Australian Governments commit to providing support and advice through a range of channels on how to support children to develop and flourish, including partnering with families, the broader community and other services for children.</p>				<p>Actions: Australian governments commit to continuing to provide public reporting that: focuses on improving performance and student growth and outcomes for all students; provides parents with information on their child's performance, progress and outcomes; is locally, nationally, and internationally relevant; is accessible, timely, consistent and comparable.</p>

Early education and transitions				Family support within communities			Specialist support		Knowledge production and dissemination
	Training and supporting educators	Equitable access	School readiness	Assisting workers	Supporting families	Equitable access	Early identification	Equitable access	Research and evaluation
Early Years Learning Framework			<p>Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators.</p> <p>Sub-goals: Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes. Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts. Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media. Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work.</p>						

	Early education and transitions				Family support within communities			Specialist support		Knowledge production and dissemination
	Training and supporting educators	Equitable access	School readiness	Assisting workers	Supporting families	Equitable access	Early identification	Equitable access	Research and evaluation	
Early Literacy Framework and Strategy for Australian Public Libraries (From the Australian Library and Information Association [ALIA])				4.1 Partnerships: Public libraries have a history of partnerships with other organisations engaged in education, training, leisure activities, social networking, informal learning and technology including branches of Council and non-governmental agencies. Libraries are active participants in partnerships, both hosting and participating. Libraries can provide professional development (PD) sessions for people from other agencies and library staff can participate in PD provided by partner organisations.	4.2 Programs: Library programs and events provide opportunities for all parents/caregivers to connect by sharing books with their children. 4.3 People: Early literacy involves all the library team, not only the children and youth services specialists. Many services delivered by public libraries are intergenerational.	4.2 Programs: Connection is not only about activities within the library, it is also about outreach, with library staff delivering services to the wider community. 5. Strategy: Promoting resources and making them widely available.			5. Strategy: Every public library is an active connector. Participating in academic and other research. Collaborating with other libraries locally/nationally, actively involved in the reading and literacy debate.	

	Early education and transitions			Family support within communities			Specialist support		Knowledge production and dissemination
	Training and supporting educators	Equitable access	School readiness	Assisting workers	Supporting families	Equitable access	Early identification	Equitable access	

New South Wales

Premier's Priorities							Increase the proportion of public school students in the top two NAPLAN bands (or equivalent) for literacy and numeracy by 15% by 2023, including through statewide roll-out of Bump It Up.					
First 2000 Days Framework							Strategic Objective 1: All staff in the NSW Health System understand and promote the importance of the first 2000 days and the best opportunities for action. There is support for health professionals to promote understanding of the key messages about the first 2000 days to parents, carers, early childhood educators, partners and colleagues to				Strategic Objective 3: The NSW Health System provides additional services for those who need specialised help,when they need it.	Strategic Objective 1: NSW Health staff across all service streams access evidence-based information and education about the first 2000 days. There is consistency of information across government and non-government service systems. Partner agencies, parents and carers, early childhood educators and community members have access to clear and accessible

	Early education and transitions				Family support within communities			Specialist support		Knowledge production and dissemination
	Training and supporting educators	Equitable access	School readiness	Assisting workers	Supporting families	Equitable access	Early identification	Equitable access	Research and evaluation	
				ensure children have the best start in life.NSW Health maintains and further strengthens partnerships with agencies and service providers to deliver improved outcomes during the first 2000 days.					information and resources in promoting the importance and impact of the first 2000 days for lifelong health and wellbeing.	
Early Language and Literacy in NSW Public Libraries: Framework for Developing and Evaluating Early Literacy Sessions (ELL in NSW Public Libraries Framework)					Early language and literacy domains: Objectives for children's learning and strategies for library staff as educators in: phonological awareness, alphabet and letter knowledge, concepts of print, background knowledge, and print motivation.	Conduct community analysis				

	Early education and transitions			Family support within communities			Specialist support		Knowledge production and dissemination
	Training and supporting educators	Equitable access	School readiness	Assisting workers	Supporting families	Equitable access	Early identification	Equitable access	

Victoria

School readiness funding program	Priority area for services to spend their funding include evidence-based programs and activities that focus on communication (language development).	Priority areas for services to spend their funding include evidence-based programs and activities that focus on access and inclusion.							
Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF)	Resources to support the framework are available to educators.	<p>Principle: Equity and diversity</p> <p>Early childhood professionals: nurture children's evolving capacity to learn from birth, regardless of circumstance or ability; ensure that the interests, abilities and culture of every child and their family are understood and valued; ensure that all children have equitable access to resources and opportunities to demonstrate their learning; identify and</p>	<p>Outcome 5:</p> <p>Children are effective communicators.</p>						<p>Principle: Assessment for learning and development</p> <p>Early childhood professionals assess children in ways that: are authentic and responsive to how all children can best demonstrate their learning and development; are receptive to and include children's views of their own learning; include information from a wide range of sources to help them assess and plan effectively; reveal each</p>

Early education and transitions			Family support within communities				Specialist support		Knowledge production and dissemination
	Training and supporting educators	Equitable access	School readiness	Assisting workers	Supporting families	Equitable access	Early identification	Equitable access	Research and evaluation
		implement the type and level of support or intervention that is required to demonstrate and improve children's learning and development; recognise multilingualism as an asset and support children to maintain their first language, learn English as an additional language, and learn languages other than English; are committed to equity and avoid practices that directly or indirectly contribute to gender inequality, prejudice and discrimination.							child's specific strengths and capabilities and any gaps in achievement that may benefit from additional early intervention; include the perspectives, knowledge, experiences and expectations of families; provide families with information and ideas to support the child's learning at home and in other services; value the culturally specific knowledge about children and their identity, wellbeing, learning and development that is embedded in their communities; are transparent, giving all adults close to the child access to best 'next steps' in promoting a child's learning and development.

	Early education and transitions				Family support within communities			Specialist support		Knowledge production and dissemination
	Training and supporting educators	Equitable access	School readiness	Assisting workers	Supporting families	Equitable access	Early identification	Equitable access	Research and evaluation	
Every Toddler Talking Initiative	Implementation of professional development program for educators that aims to enhance the development of language and communication in children aged birth to three years.								Pilot trial involving robust evaluation of direct child outcomes.	
Early Childhood Language Program	Provides funding for preschools to provide language programs that allow children to learn and engage with languages other than English.									
Reading and Literacy for all: Quality Indicators for Early Years Literacy Programs in Victorian Public Libraries				Quality standards for early years literacy programs: EY1—Sound educational underpinning EY4—Competent, passionate presenters	Quality standards for early years literacy programs: EY2—Fun and enjoyable for all participants EY3—Model effective reading behaviours to children and their family members or carers	Quality standards for early years literacy programs: EY8—Facilitate access to library collections and services EY11—Respond appropriately to local needs and conditions			Quality standards for early years literacy programs: EY10—Effective evaluation process	

Early education and transitions				Family support within communities			Specialist support		Knowledge production and dissemination
	Training and supporting educators	Equitable access	School readiness	Assisting workers	Supporting families	Equitable access	Early identification	Equitable access	Research and evaluation
					EY5—Inspire a love of reading and words EY6—Target and involve both children and their family members or carers EY9—Complement other early years services				

Queensland

State priorities									
			<p>Priority: Improve wellbeing prior to school.</p> <p>Target: By 2025, we will reduce the percentage of Queensland children developmentally vulnerable in one or more Australian Early Development Census domains to 22%.</p>						

Early education and transitions				Family support within communities			Specialist support		Knowledge production and dissemination
	Training and supporting educators	Equitable access	School readiness	Assisting workers	Supporting families	Equitable access	Early identification	Equitable access	Research and evaluation
State Library of Queensland: Libraries for Literacy 2011–2014				Build collaborative relationships across many sectors including education, community, cultural, technology and library sectors to extend the reach of literacy improvement opportunities. Raise awareness of State Library and public library networks' value and capacity when addressing literacy issues on a state and local educational agenda's relation to social, cultural and community sustainability.	Supporting children and their parents and carers in ensuring better literacy begins at home. Advocate greater understanding of the value of reading to children and parent's effect on early childhood cognitive, language, emotional and social development.	Supporting groups experiencing disadvantage, including Indigenous, remote and communities with a primary language other than English.			
Tasmania									
2019–2022 Department of Education Literacy Framework	Action 2: Build on the collaborative culture between speech and language pathologists and				Action 1: Develop a public campaign to promote the importance of oral language.			Action 3: Increase access and support for learners to improve oral, augmentative and alternative communication.	Action 7: Develop clear expectations and guidelines to build system-wide understanding of the measurement

	Early education and transitions			Family support within communities			Specialist support		Knowledge production and dissemination
	Training and supporting educators	Equitable access	School readiness	Assisting workers	Supporting families	Equitable access	Early identification	Equitable access	Research and evaluation
	<p>educators for a more coherent approach to improve oral, augmentative and alternative communication.</p> <p>Action 6: Provide quality and targeted professional learning to build the capacity of leaders and educators to improve their teaching of English for literacy learning.</p>								<p>of learner growth in literacy.</p> <p>Action 9: Implement the tools and supports to measure the impact of system-wide literacy actions on our learners.</p>

Western Australia

State Library of WA 'Literacy Matters' Literacy Strategy 2017–2027				<p>Goal: All Western Australians have the opportunity to improve their literacy.</p> <p>Strategy: Collaborating with community, volunteer, government and non-government organisations to support</p>	<p>Guiding principles Community-led: A learner-focused approach which will include acknowledging the culture, traditions and interests of individuals, families and communities are central to learning.</p>	<p>Guiding principles Inclusive: Remove barriers to literacy access to ensure equitable participation through creative, flexible and inclusive programs and services delivered</p>		

Early education and transitions				Family support within communities			Specialist support		Knowledge production and dissemination
	Training and supporting educators	Equitable access	School readiness	Assisting workers	Supporting families	Equitable access	Early identification	Equitable access	Research and evaluation
				local community-led literacy initiatives.	<p>Goal: All Western Australians are aware of the value of literacy in opening up lifelong learning potential.</p> <p>Strategy: Provide opportunities for individuals and families to celebrate literacy, learning and the joy of reading.</p> <p>Goal: All Western Australians have the opportunity to improve their literacy.</p> <p>Strategy: Improve the confidence of parents to assist in the development of early literacy skills for their children.</p> <p>Goal: All Western Australians have access to literacy learning programs.</p> <p>Strategy: Provide adult and family literacy initiatives</p>	<p>onsite and online.</p> <p>Goal: All Western Australians are aware of the value of literacy in opening up lifelong learning potential</p> <p>Strategy: Remove the stigma associated with difficulties reading, writing and numeracy.</p> <p>Goal: All Western Australians have the opportunity to improve their literacy.</p> <p>Strategy: Work with EAL/D speakers and communities to provide meaningful and</p>			

Early education and transitions				Family support within communities			Specialist support		Knowledge production and dissemination
	Training and supporting educators	Equitable access	School readiness	Assisting workers	Supporting families	Equitable access	Early identification	Equitable access	Research and evaluation
					that respond to a range of community needs. Support formal and informal literacy programs in community and workplace settings, providing different pathways for people to achieve their literacy goals.	engaging literacy services for all ages. Goal: All Western Australians have access to literacy learning programs. Strategy: Promote and support services so people know where to get help with reading, writing and numeracy.			

International examples of government and non-government initiated early language and literacy national strategies and agendas

Read On. Get On. strategy—England²³

Background

Launched in 2014 by a coalition of charities and educational organisations (Read On. Get On. coalition).

Goals

Leadership

- Government should restate its commitment to the strategy's goals.
- The Read On. Get On. coalition will recruit local leaders to convene campaigns addressing specific literacy challenges, using local assets alongside national programmes.
- The Read On. Get On. coalition will advocate and innovate to ensure services that promote children's reading deliver quality efficiently.
- The Read On. Get On. coalition will work with the government and researchers to create a consistent national measure of children's reading and ways of tracking progress in early language and literacy throughout the early years.

Changing behavior and cultural attitudes to reading

- The Read On. Get On. coalition will develop a new integrated, national programme of activities including a further behaviour change campaign to support parenting, early language and reading.
- All children are reading well by the age of 11 by 2025.
- All children will be achieving good levels of language, early literacy and reading development by age five by 2020.

Priorities for action

The Read On. Get On. coalition will lead a national campaign and activities to promote reading for pleasure in schools, libraries, at home and in the wider community.

Early years priorities:

- The government should increase investment in the early years workforce.
- The government should refresh the role of children's centres, which are a vital resource in supporting early language and reading skills in disadvantaged communities.

Primary school years priorities:

- School leaders and other peak professional bodies should support teachers' professional development and subject knowledge of teaching and encouraging reading.
- The government should work with academy chains and trusts, local authorities and school leaders to ensure that all primary schools have school improvement support when local authorities no longer have a duty to supply it.

²³Douglas, J., & Lawton, K. (2016) *Read On. Get On. A strategy to get England's children reading*. London, UK: Save the Children on behalf of the Read On. Get On. Campaign. Retrieved from https://cdn.literacytrust.org.uk/media/documents/Read_On_Get_On_Strategy.pdf.

National Strategy for Early Literacy—Canada²⁴

Background

Initiated by a group of education, literacy and public interest organisations, the Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network led the commissioning of policy research papers and series of national consultation in the development of the final strategy as advised by a National Advisory Committee.

Recommendations and actions

Encourage and assist initiatives that facilitate children's language and literacy development from a very young age.

Actions

- Implement initiatives that help parents to understand the importance of their child's language and literacy development and to engage in activities that support this development.
- Build this guidance and support system around existing community resources that support early literacy such as hospitals, health clinics, libraries, schools and early learning centres.
- Facilitate the development of a system of high-quality, centre-based, enriched early learning and care programs for preschool children.
- Ensure that pre-service and in-service training programs for early learning specialists provide a strong background on early language and literacy development.
- Implement universal screening programs to identify important sensory and cognitive challenges at an early age (e.g. vision, hearing, language development, etc.) together with the appropriate intervention programs.
- Develop targeted, evidence-based initiatives to improve outcomes for children in families where neither English nor French is spoken and for Aboriginal Canadians.
- Support initiatives that improve the literacy skills of adults.

Ensure that appropriate teaching strategies, shown through rigorous, evidence-based research to be effective in developing strong literacy skills, are used in all Canadian classrooms.

Actions

- Enhance Canada's teacher training programs to ensure that all graduating teachers understand: a) how children learn to read; b) what instructional methods are effective for ensuring that children acquire strong reading skills; c) how to identify a child's specific literacy weaknesses; and d) what interventions are appropriate to address each weakness.
- Enhance in-service training programs and within-school support services to develop such understanding and skill development among current teachers.
- Ensure that each school and school board puts in place an explicit literacy assessment, instruction, support, intervention and monitoring process, implementing the three-tier model.
- Ensure that all children acquire fundamental literacy skills through an evidence-based instructional program that must include systematic, direct, and explicit instruction, supporting the acquisition of essential alphabetic, code-breaking skills, and the development of strong oral language, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and reading comprehension skills.

²⁴The Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network & Jamieson, D. (2009). National Strategy for Early Literacy, Summary Report 2009. Ontario, Canada: The Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network. Retrieved from <https://www.strongstart.ca/wp-content/uploads/National-Strategy-for-Early-Literacy.pdf>.

Encourage community engagement and support for ongoing literacy development throughout the year.

Actions

- Develop and advance community-based family literacy programs.
- Encourage programs that engage community volunteers to work with young students within the school.
- Support community-based programs for students in at-risk communities. Programs that engage local sports teams and businesses can be particularly effective.
- Develop summer learning programs for at-risk children.
- Encourage paediatricians and family physicians to work with childcare providers and literacy specialists at the community level to promote literacy locally, as well as within their practices.

Improve communication and the sharing of literacy-related knowledge and resources.

Actions

- Communicate the urgency of Canada's need to improve literacy skills.
- Improve the sharing of knowledge about programs and resources across Canada.
- Support applied research and evaluation initiatives that address gaps in our knowledge of literacy skill development. These include:
 - improving measurement instruments for a range of skills and populations, including for Francophone readers and other linguistic groups
 - developing and evaluating improved interventions and instructional techniques
 - performing systematic evaluations of programs and initiatives
 - facilitating knowledge transfer, exchange, and application, within and across Canada's research, policy and practice sectors
 - promoting implementation of science research to enhance our capacity to scale up effective instruction techniques and interventions across whole education systems.

Good Start, Grow Smart—United States of America²⁵

Background

Introduced in 2002 by President Bush, this national initiative draws together several programs throughout the country with the goal of enhancing the cognitive development of children in the early years. This includes a plan to enhance children's school readiness through the following activities:

Strengthening the Head Start Program

Actions

- Ensuring cognitive development of children in Head Start. Head Start recipients to assess children aged three to five years, and the development of a national reporting system on these results.
- Provision of training to Head Start teachers through Project STEP, a summer teacher education program involving intensive early literacy training activities.

Partnering with states to improve early learning

Actions

- Encourage states to set quality criteria for early childhood education, including setting early learning guidelines, professional development, program coordination plans.
- Expand flexibility in childcare funding matching.
- Establish new state program integration waivers: allow states to better integrate and coordinate funding for specific early childhood goals across several funding programs.
- Establish Early Childhood Educator Academies.
- Provide guidance to states on coordination of services.

Providing parents, teachers and caregivers information on early learning

Actions

- Highlight early childhood education research.
- Provide a guidebook for parents and families.
- Provide a guidebook for early childhood educators and caregivers.
- Award 'sunshine' schools and initiatives: Department of Education will highlight exemplary preschool programs and initiatives throughout the country and make available best practices from states, counties, school districts, pre-k programs, Head Start sites and childcare centers.

²⁵Good Start, Grow Smart: The Bush Administration's Early Childhood Initiative. Retrieved October 21, 2020, from <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/earlychildhood/earlychildhood.html>.

Appendix 1: Evidence of effectiveness for universal approaches

Outcome area	Study outcome	Impact of	Grade
Early language	Receptive language	Reading instruction and intervention	Supported
		Early education services	Supported
	Expressive language	Dialogic reading practices	Unknown
		Dialogic reading practices	Supported
		Reading instruction and intervention	Unknown
Emergent literacy	Written language awareness	Early education services	Promising
		Contingent talk parent program	Unknown
		Play literacy activities	Promising
		Dialogic reading practices	Promising
		Reading instruction and intervention	Supported
	Phonological awareness	Early education services	Emerging
		Dialogic reading practices	Emerging
		Reading instruction and intervention	Unknown
		Early education services	Promising
		Early education services	Unknown
Composite early language and literacy skills	Reading instruction and intervention	Reading instruction and intervention	Failed to demonstrate effect
		Family and early literacy campaigns and programs	Promising
	Play literacy activities	Play literacy activities	Promising

Secondary early language and literacy outcomes			
Executive function skills		Reading instruction and intervention	Emerging
		Early education services	Promising
		Cognitive development program	Emerging
Home literacy environment	Child engagement in reading activities	Family and early literacy campaigns and programs	Unknown
		Family and early literacy campaigns and programs	Unknown
		Family and early literacy campaigns and programs	Promising
		Reading instruction and intervention	Unknown
	Parent reading practices	Dialogic reading practices	Unknown
		Family and early literacy campaigns and programs	Unknown
Secondary composite skills		Early education services	Unknown
		Family and early literacy campaigns and programs	Unknown
		Early health visits	Emerging
		Fertility treatment	Emerging
		Day sleeps	Unknown

Appendix 2: Evidence of effectiveness for minority groups

Outcome area	Study outcome	Approach type	Grade for at-risk families	Grade for CALD families	Grade for First Nations families
Emergent literacy	Alphabet knowledge	Reading instruction and intervention	Supported	Unknown<3 studies	Unknown
		Early education services	Supported	Promising	Unknown
		Family and early literacy campaigns and programs	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
	Letter-word identification	Reading instruction and intervention	Promising	Unknown<3 studies	Unknown
		Early education services	Supported	Promising	Unknown
		Parenting programs	Emerging	Unknown	Unknown
	Print concept	Reading instruction and intervention	Unknown	Unknown<3 studies	Unknown
		Early education services	Unknown	Emerging	Unknown
		Play literacy activities	Unknown<3 studies	Unknown<3 studies	Unknown
Spelling and writing	Family and early literacy campaigns and programs	Unknown	Promising	Unknown	
	Reading instruction and intervention	Emerging	Unknown<3 studies	Unknown	
	Early education services	Emerging	Promising	Unknown	
Composite early language and literacy skills	Parenting programs	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	
	Early education services	Supported	Promising	Unknown	
	Reading instruction and intervention	Well supported	Unknown<3 studies	Unknown	
	Family and early literacy campaigns and programs	Well supported	Unknown	Unknown	
Primary school reading skills	Play literacy activities	Unknown<3 studies	Unknown<3 studies	Unknown	
	Parenting programs	Supported	Unknown	Unknown	
	Early education services	Supported	Promising	Unknown	
	Reading instruction and intervention	Well supported	Unknown<3 studies	Unknown	
	Parenting programs	Supported	Unknown	Unknown	

Early language	Expressive language	Reading instruction and intervention	Promising	Unknown<3 studies	Unknown
		Early education services	Supported	Unknown	Unknown
		Contingent talk parent program	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
		Family and early literacy campaigns and programs	Emerging	Unknown	Unknown
		Play literacy activities	Unknown<3 studies	Unknown<3 studies	Unknown
	Receptive language	Parenting programs	Supported	Unknown	Emerging
		Reading instruction and intervention	Supported	Unknown<3 studies	Unknown
		Early education services	Supported	Promising	Unknown
		Family and early literacy campaigns and programs	Emerging	Unknown	Unknown
		Parenting programs	Supported	Unknown	Unknown
Cognitive development	Approaches to learning	Early education services	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
		Parenting programs	Promising	Unknown	Unknown
		Reading instruction and intervention	Unknown	Unknown<3 studies	Unknown
	Executive function skills	Early education services	Promising	Emerging	Unknown
		Cognitive development programs	Unknown<3 studies	Unknown	Unknown
		Parenting programs	Promising	Unknown	Unknown
	Non-verbal cognitive skills	Early education services	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
		Parenting programs	Promising	Unknown	Unknown
		Early education services	Supported	Promising	Unknown
	Composite cognitive and developmental skills	Family and early literacy campaigns and programs	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
		Early health visits	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
		Parenting programs	Failed to demonstrate effect	Unknown	Unknown
		Fertility treatment	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
		Day sleeps	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

Home literacy environment	Child engagement in reading activities	Family and early literacy campaigns and programs	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
	Number of books in the home	Family and early literacy campaigns and programs	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
	Parents' values and attitudes towards reading	Family and early literacy campaigns and programs	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
	Parent reading practices	Reading instruction and intervention	Unknown	Unknown<3 studies	Unknown
		Family and early literacy campaigns and programs	Well supported	Unknown	Unknown
		Early education services	Promising	Emerging	Unknown
		Parenting programs	Promising	Unknown	Emerging

Note: Grading of evidence for cognitive development outcomes should be interpreted with caution as they were not targeted through search terms conducted as part of this review.

