

# Queensland Budget | 2024 – 2025

## Giving all children a good start

During the first five years of a child's life their brain development creates the foundations for learning and development later in life. Exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) cause chronic stress during childhood. Typically, the more adversity a child experiences, the higher their risk of long-term physical, mental and social consequences into adulthood.

Children experiencing poverty have an increased risk of long-term impacts after exposure to ACEs, this can include a higher rate of poor developmental outcomes in later childhood,<sup>1</sup> poorer cognitive and social outcomes, and lower levels of general health.<sup>2</sup> Homelessness makes children four times more likely to have a developmental delay.<sup>3</sup>

While improvements in child development since 2009 have been significant, over one in four of all children, and 42.5 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, are currently assessed as vulnerable in one or more of the five domains on the Australian Early Development Census (2018). Nationally, one in five children are developmentally vulnerable, in Queensland it is one in four.<sup>4</sup>

Children of families experiencing disadvantage are less likely to attend early learning services and maternal and child health services. This means that barriers to achievement start before children have even begun school (Early Years Catalyst, 2022). This is reinforced by the 2023 NAPLAN results, which indicate that one in three Australian students are not on track with their learning. Most of the children performing below expectations are from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>5</sup> As well as this, children in remote areas, and those with parents who did not finish high school or were unemployed were also considered to be at risk and largely scored as below proficient.<sup>6</sup>

The 2023-2024 Queensland budget demonstrated a commitment to supporting families and young children. The announcement of free universal kindergarten for all four-year-olds was a welcome investment but more is required to ensure the most vulnerable children and families in our state have access to the services and support they need.

<sup>1</sup> Badland, H., Chong, S., Kvalsvig, A., Goldfeld, S., Gray, S., Mensah, F., O'Connor, E., O'Connor, M., Redmond, G., Williams, K., & Woolfenden, S. (2018). The impact of multidimensional disadvantage over childhood on developmental outcomes in Australia. *International Journal of Epidemiology* 1485–1496.

<sup>2</sup> Warren, D. (2017) Australian Institute of Family Studies. Social Policy Research Paper No 47: Low Income and Poverty Dynamics: Implications for Child Outcomes.

<sup>3</sup> 2009, HCH Clinicians Network. Mitigating Homeless Children's Risk for Developmental Delay. Healing Hands publication. <https://nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Apr09HealingHands.pdf>

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023). Early childhood and transition to school. Accessed 1 November 2023. Early childhood and transition to school - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare ([aihw.gov.au](http://aihw.gov.au))

<sup>5</sup> Decoding the 2023 NAPLAN results Grattan Institute. Published in *The Australian Financial Review*, 23 August 2023. The new NAPLAN results are a wake-up call - Grattan Institute

<sup>6</sup> Decoding the 2023 NAPLAN results Grattan Institute. Published in *The Australian Financial Review*, 23 August 2023. The new NAPLAN results are a wake-up call - Grattan Institute

Early intervention and support for families and young children will both prevent or reduce the exposure of children to ACEs. The Queensland Government should develop a new whole of community Queensland Early Years Strategy in collaboration with community organisations ('the Early Years Strategy').

Initiatives connected to the Early Years Strategy should be funded in the 2024-2025 Queensland Budget and address the following priorities:

## 1. Establish additional community-led, early years hubs

The Queensland Government should invest in community-led early years hubs. These hubs should be universally available, providing integrated, multi-disciplinary services that will support improved child development outcomes. These early years hubs should be a one-stop-shop family hub, where all families feel welcome and safe to access supports for their varying needs, including pre-natal services.

Community-led early years hubs should be place-based and build on learnings from existing initiatives and demonstration projects. They must meet local gaps and drive integration in services for children's early years and families. Community-led early years hubs should include:

- **Early child education:** Integrated with family support models that can offer a continuum for quality early learning and early childhood education and care for children from birth to school age, the hub would provide accessible, quality, home visiting programs, playgroups, and early childhood education, focused on development-centered parenting for the most vulnerable children.
- **Health and wellbeing:** The hub would provide a continuum of care from pregnancy to school age.
- **Housing and economic assets:** Links to housing and public support would be provided, as well as transportation and financial support in times of need. The hub would also seek to build the capacity of families to develop financial stability.
- **Post-secondary and employment pathways:** Support would be provided to assist parents to undertake training and engage in meaningful paid work.
- **Social support:** A suite of evidence-based parenting programs to meet the diverse needs of the community would be provided. Families would be connected to other families and peers. Support would be provided to assist parents to build social capital and strengthen their connections to their local community.
- **Child safety and justice:** Intensive support would be provided to support families to stay together, with a focus on birth and early childhood. Support would also be provided to families impacted by incarceration.
- **Resourcing for community-controlled services:** The hub should include partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers. Where there is a high proportion of First Nations people in the community, a community-controlled service should be the lead service provider.

## 2. Increase accessibility to high quality early childhood education and care, building on the Kindy for All strategy

From 2024, the Queensland Government will provide free kindergarten for all 4-year-old Queensland children for 15 hours per week. This will improve access to high quality early childhood education and care for more than 50,000 Queensland children, providing educational benefits, financial relief for families and employment opportunities for parents and guardians.

The Queensland Government should increase accessibility to high quality early childhood education and care by building on the Kindy for All strategy. Free access to Kindy should be extended to all three-year-olds, bringing Queensland in line with best practice in Australia and overseas.

## 3. Funding to support development and growth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's (ACCC) most recent interim report into the Childcare Inquiry highlights that childcare plays a vital role in Australian society. Over one million Australian households used childcare last year, with most households with children accessing childcare at some point in their lives.<sup>7</sup>

However, First Nations children are less likely to be enrolled in childcare than non-First Nations children. Approximately 51 per cent of 0–5-year-olds and 16 per cent of 6–13-year-old First Nations children attended childcare in 2022.<sup>8</sup> This was 9 percentage points below the total Australian child population.

Currently there is no comprehensive community controlled early education and care system in Queensland. To support the Queensland Government's commitment to the National Closing the Gap targets, the Queensland Government must support the development and growth of community-controlled early childhood services.

This should include:

- supporting the development of a statewide model for community controlled early childhood services and kindergartens, with funding to design a specific curriculum that embeds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture
- supporting community-controlled organisations to establish early childhood services by identifying appropriate government owned sites that can be leased to community-controlled organisations under peppercorn lease arrangements, or funding community-controlled services to purchase and build the required infrastructure.

## 4. Improve inclusive practices by creating schools that better reflect and help equip all young people

All children have a right to education. However, suspensions and exclusions are going disproportionately to students with a disability. Between 2016–2020, students with disability received 46 per cent of all short-term suspensions, despite making up about 17 per cent of the Queensland school population.<sup>9</sup>

Suspensions lead to students with disability being further segregated from their peers, falling behind in their learning and failing to gain the skills they need to contribute to the community once they leave

<sup>7</sup> Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. (2023). *Childcare inquiry Interim report*. [\[Document title\] \(accg.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). *Education of First Nations people*. Accessed 14 November 2023. [Education of First Nations people - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> A Right to Learn: Keep Disabled Kids in Class. <https://www.arighttolearn.com.au> Accessed 1 October 2023.

school. First Nations students with disability are five times more at risk of suspensions, and students in out of home care with disability are six times more at risk compared to students not in those groups.<sup>10</sup>

The [A Right to Learn](#) campaign is calling on the Queensland Government to:

- Commit to halving the number of suspensions of students with disabilities within five years.
- Establish a Parliamentary Inquiry into the overuse of school suspensions and exclusions in Queensland State Schools.
- Invest in evidence-based alternatives.<sup>11</sup>
- Introduce inclusion scorecards for every Queensland State School.
- Establish an independent board to oversee all reforms to reduce suspensions and exclusions and provide greater transparency.

## 5. Integrate child development and wellbeing into relevant services where children are presenting outside of early education and care programs

QCROSS member organisations are reporting an increasing level of demand for services. In many instances, people are presenting with young children to services that do not provide specific services to young people. For example:

- In 2021–22, data from Queensland Specialist Homelessness Services indicates that the age group most commonly presenting are aged 0–9.
- Between 2016 and 2022, 31 per cent of all Queensland domestic and family violence occurrences involved children. However, Queensland Audit Office identified that there are few domestic and family violence supports available for children, particularly in regional areas.<sup>12</sup>

The Queensland Government must consider where young people are presenting to services with their parents. Secure and longer-term funding is required to support those organisations to provide direct supports to children and young people on an ongoing basis.

Further to this, revised Ministerial Charter letters should be issued to all Ministers explicitly stipulating leadership and support responsibilities for child development and wellbeing relevant to their portfolios.

## 6. Double the current investment into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Service

The Family Wellbeing Service (FWS) was established in response to the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry, *Taking Responsibility: A Roadmap for Queensland Child Protection*. A critical feature of the FWS is that they are led by community-controlled organisations, ensuring culturally safe services that reflect community and family strengths, as well as local needs, aspirations, leadership, and cultural knowledges. Through family led support approaches, the FWS aims to increase the level of self-

<sup>10</sup> Graham, L.J., Killingly, C., Alexander, M., & Wiggans, S. (2023) Suspensions in QLD state schools, 2016–2020: overrepresentation, intersectionality and disproportionate risk. *The Australian Educational Researcher*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-023-00652-6>

<sup>11</sup> Funding for Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, as recommended by the South Australian inquiry into school suspensions. This should include funding for wrap around services and staff that work with students at risk of suspension and provide restorative and trauma-informed services.

<sup>12</sup> Queensland Audit Office. (2022). *Keeping people safe from domestic and family violence, (Report 5: 2022–23)*. (pp. 5,19, 21). [https://www.qao.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-11/Keeping%20people%20safe%20from%20domestic%20and%20family%20violence%20%28Report%205\\_2022%E2%80%9302.pdf](https://www.qao.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-11/Keeping%20people%20safe%20from%20domestic%20and%20family%20violence%20%28Report%205_2022%E2%80%9302.pdf)

V2 (02.2024)

determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and in the longer-term, reduce the number of children referred into the child protection system.

Across Queensland, several organisations delivering the FWS are reporting significant waitlists. A 2021 FWS evaluation report highlights a steady increase in the number of families self-referring, indicating a strong level of trust with the program and service providers. It also concluded that the FWS is contributing to its aim of reducing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children moving into the child protection system.<sup>13</sup>

To build on the outcomes being achieved by the FWS, the Queensland Government must double the current investment over the next five years. This would increase funding from \$54 million in 2023-2024 to a total of \$108 million by 2027-2028.

---

<sup>13</sup> Abt Associates. (2021). *Final Report Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services Evaluation*. V2 (02.2024)