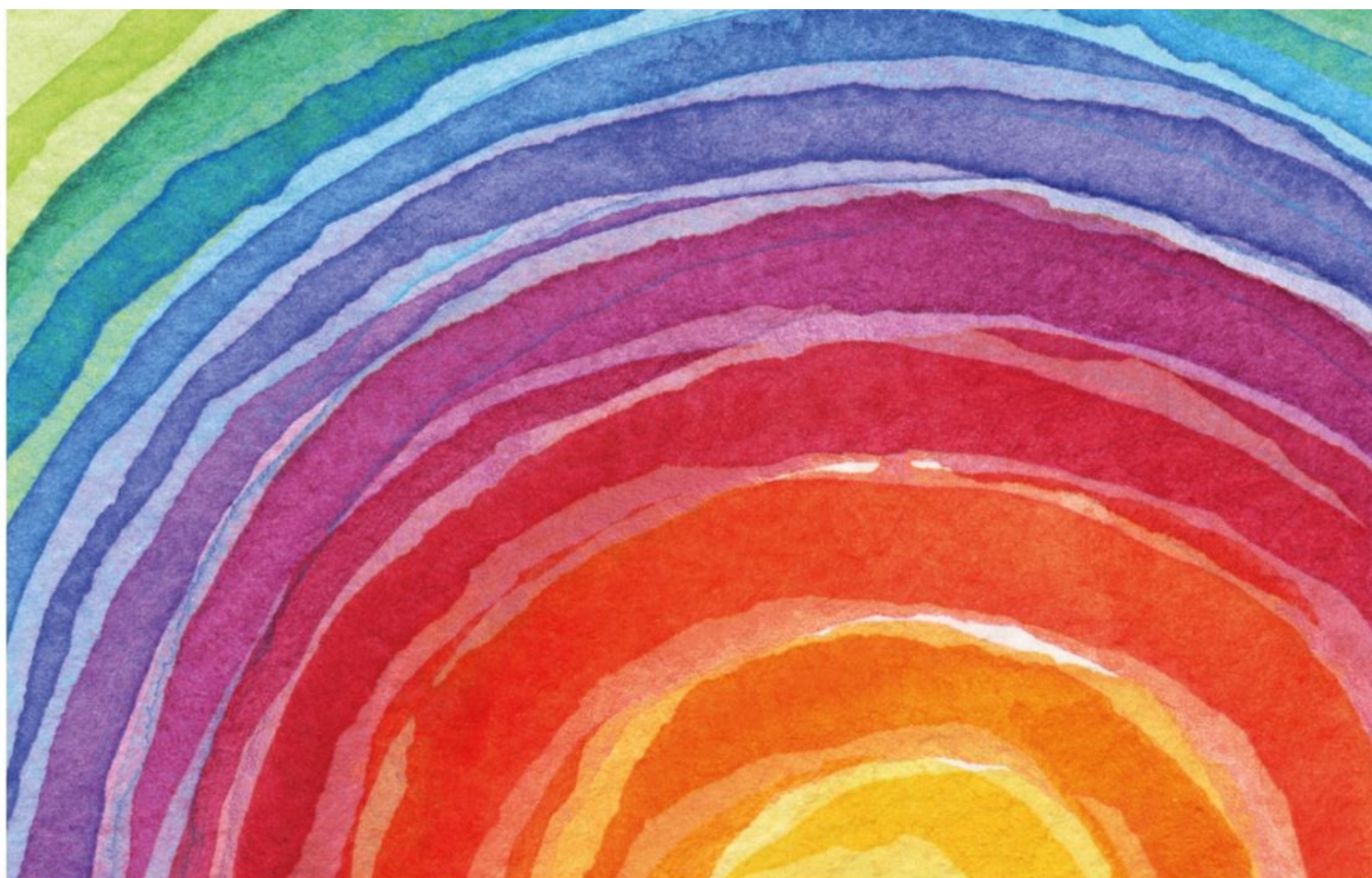


Part A

Early Years Services Funding Category Guidelines 2023



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1. Investment in Early Years

Why invest in the Early Years?

Evidence tells us that a person's life successes, health and emotional wellbeing are directly related to their early childhood experiences. Getting it right in the early years will see children thrive through their school experiences, academic achievements and gain significant social, emotional and behavioural benefits that underpin success later in life for the individual and broader society. This is particularly important for children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage in the early years.

Our priorities for children and families

To ensure Queensland children from birth to 8 years are engaged in high-quality early childhood programs and services that support learning and development and successful transitions the department is working towards the following priorities:

- Improving children's wellbeing, learning and development;
- Improving quality;
- Optimising funding to improve access, participation, attendance and inclusion; and
- Improving successful transitions

2. Early Childhood Development

Childhood development doesn't occur in isolation. Many complex individual, social and environmental protective and risk factors influence and shape the outcomes for children and families. The Ecological Systems Theory of Childhood Development outlines this interplay of spheres of influence in children's lives with factors at the child, family, community and wider society levels.

Improvement in a child's learning and development outcomes can be supported by increasing the protective factors and reducing the risk and vulnerability factors at each level of influence. Research consistently demonstrates that to do this effectively, early connections with children and their families are needed and the priorities and choices of families should drive the decisions about ways to provide support and services.

The Department funds a broad range of universal and targeted early years services that can make an important contribution by supporting families and children to reduce vulnerabilities, enhance protective factors and create conditions to improve learning and development outcomes for children.

2.1 Ecological Systems - Childhood Development

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2.2 Elements of an effective early childhood development service system

The following elements of a service system are important to support effective early childhood development and improving learning and development outcomes for children.

- **Child-centric**

Children are our most precious asset. In all our considerations, policies and actions we keep a focus on children, their needs and welfare. Children's need for structured and unstructured play and stimulation is recognised and valued. Services are age-appropriate and children of all abilities and backgrounds are included and valued in community life.

- **Tailored and inclusive**

Supports are tailored to the needs of families and children, ranging from more intensive supports for the families experiencing most vulnerability to universal programs for all. They are culturally safe and inclusive.

- **Targeting prevention and early intervention**

A strong focus is placed on parent, baby and child health from pre-conception, including the need for secure attachments and safe homes and communities. Childhood developmental vulnerabilities and trauma are identified and responded to through appropriate practices and as early as possible to improve future outcomes.

- **Seamless and collaborative**

Service providers and communities work together to make families' and children's experiences seamless and place-based. A clear framework provides a shared language that guides delivery of services to children and their families.

- **Evidence-informed**

Programs and services are informed by the best available evidence about children's development, supports needed from the people and organisations in a child's life and how children can best be supported in a changing world.



3. Child Safe Organisations

The Department of Education is committed to providing child safe environments and ensuring our funded partners are child safe organisations that create a culture, adopt strategies and act to promote child wellbeing and prevent harm to children and young people.

Organisations funded to deliver early childhood programs and services must create and maintain child safe environments guided by the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, which are designed to build capacity and deliver child safety and wellbeing in organisations, families and communities and prevent future harm.

3.1 The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

Collectively the principals show that child safe organisations consciously and systematically:

- create an environment where children's safety and wellbeing are the centre of thought, values and actions;
- place emphasis on genuine engagement with, and valuing of children;
- create conditions that reduce the likelihood of harm to children and young people;
- create conditions that increase the likelihood of identifying any harm; and
- respond to any concerns, disclosures, allegations or suspicions.

3.2 Working with Children Check – Blue Card.

Organisations working with children must ensure they have the appropriate blue card requirements in place. The Blue card system promotes a child safe workforce and is the prevention and monitoring system of those working with children and young people.

Organisations providing child services which are regulated under the blue card system must implement a minimum set of risk management strategies that address eight mandatory requirements and will help create a safe and supportive environment for children. These strategies are also monitored and reviewed annually.

The risk management strategies must include the following, at a minimum:

- A **statement of commitment** outlining the organisation's commitment to maintaining the safety and wellbeing of children and young people;
- A **code of conduct** which outlines the organisation's values and provides clear expectations for all stakeholders;
- **Key policies and procedures** for the employment, education, training, and management of volunteers, employees and trainees;
- An easy-to-follow **procedure** which ensures staff respond as quickly as possible to any allegation, disclosure or suspicion of harm of a child in the organisation's care;
- **Policies and procedures** for the organisation's general compliance with the blue card system, including maintaining a staff register and when to review the risk management strategy;
- A **detailed plan** for managing breaches of the risk management strategy and which sets out the consequences if policies and procedures are not followed;

- A **risk management plan** which identifies the potential risks of harm to children and young people in participating in high risk activities or special events arranged by the organisation; and
- A system for **communication and support** so that everyone is aware of their responsibilities under the risk management strategy.

Information about the blue card system requirements is available at the Queensland Government's [Blue Card Services website](#).

3.3 Protecting Children from Harm.

Child safe organisations create the conditions that reduce the likelihood of harm to children and young people while increasing the likelihood of identifying and responding to concerns, disclosures, allegations and suspicions. Funded services must understand the opportunities and responsibilities that support child protection and ensure that staff who are mandatory reporters are aware of their reporting obligations under the Child Protection Act 1999. The responsibilities of mandatory reporters include the requirement to notify the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs if they have formed a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection. For further information about child protection matters go to the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs website.

4. Our approach to achieving outcomes for families and children

The Department has adopted a Results-Based Accountability (RBA) approach to performance reporting and monitoring. This approach uses a simple framework to help the Department and Early Years Service (EYS) providers focus on positive outcomes. By adopting RBA, the Department can work better with EYS providers to ensure that investment is effective and achieving positive outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

RBA identifies two types of accountability that are interconnected:

- **Population accountability:** is focused on high-level outcomes for a particular population (e.g. a specific demographic or geographic community).
- **Performance accountability:** is focused at the service delivery and client outcome level which contributes to achieving population outcomes.

Population Accountability is about the wellbeing of whole populations such as communities, cities, states and the nation. Funded Early Years Services are not responsible for change at the population level but contribute, along with other services and government departments, to improve wellbeing. Early years investments directly contribute to improving child development outcomes.

The Department will use the following indicators¹ to identify progress towards the intended result: Queensland children from birth to 8 years are engaged in high-quality early childhood programs and services that support learning and development and successful transitions.

¹ An indicator is a measure that shows progress towards a desired condition of wellbeing (result/outcome) for a population, that a range of partners are working towards, together.

- Proportion of children developmentally on track on four or more (of five) Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) domains
- Proportion of Queensland children enrolled in an early childhood education program; and
- Proportion of children with transition statements from a kindergarten service to school.

Performance Accountability has a dual emphasis on ensuring that services are focused on achieving results for children and their families attending or participating in their service/program (activities) and continuous improvement.

The Department's service agreements with funded Early Years Services include specific details about activities to be delivered as well as reporting requirements on two types of measures:

- Accountability measures: how much did we do? How well did we do it?; and
- Result measures: was anyone better off?

<u>How Much We Do (Quantity)</u>		<u>How Well We Do It (Quality)</u>	
# of clients/customers served		% Common measures (e.g. client staff ration, staff turnover rate, staff morale, % staff fully trained, % satisfied customers, % clients seen in their own language, worker safety, unit cost)	
# Activities (by type of activity)		% Activity-specific measures (e.g. % actions timely, % clients completing activity, % actions correct and complete, % of actions meeting standards etc)	
<u>Is Anyone Better Off?</u>			
# Skills/Knowledge (e.g. parenting skills)		% Skills/Knowledge (e.g. parenting skills)	
# Attitude (e.g. play based learning)		% Attitude (e.g. play based learning)	
# Behaviour (e.g. school attendance)		% Behaviour (e.g. school attendance)	
# Circumstance (e.g. working, in stable housing)		% Circumstance (e.g. working, in stable housing)	

The data will be supplemented by a narrative report which forms part of the reporting requirements. A guide to writing the narrative report is found in Part B – Category Guidelines for each of the funding categories.

The measures have been developed using the RBA process in collaboration with Departmental staff and EYS providers.

4.1 Our partners

The Department encourages a collaborative and cooperative approach to achieving outcomes for children and families. Partnerships may be created for strategic planning, service co-ordination, information sharing, service/program delivery, or capacity building.

The Department will work with the following partners and share information to ensure a coordinated effort to improve the wellbeing of children and their families:

- EYS providers;
- Early Childhood Education and Care sector;
- Early childhood workforce;
- State and Non-State Schools;
- Other Government agencies at state and federal levels; and
- Researchers.

Through partnerships early we can:

- Work collaboratively to share information and plan to ensure holistic approaches to children’s learning, development and wellbeing.
- Understand each other’s practice, skills and expertise, learn from each other and make referrals when appropriate.
- Acknowledge the significance of transitions within and across early childhood settings, including kindergarten and school, and ensure that children understand the process and have an active role in preparing for these transitions.
- Build on children’s prior learning and experiences to build continuity for their learning and development from birth to eight years of age.

Where the funded early years service is located in one of the Department’s [Connect 4 Children \(C4C\)](#) nominated priority locations, it is expected that the service will actively contribute to the C4C network and work toward implementing the identified priorities and objectives of the Birth to Five Plans. Through C4C Birth to Five Plans, the department is supporting local responses driven by the priorities of the local community.

5. Early Years Funding Categories

The Department of Education provides funding grants to both small local organisations and large state-wide organisations to deliver a range of early years programs and services in priority communities. The funding is allocated through five funding categories designed to align funding for similar purposes to streamline performance and reporting requirements. The five Early Years Services (EYS) Funding categories are:

- Integrated Service Delivery
- Child Focused Activities and Groups

- Early Childhood Education and Care
- Sector Support; and
- Family Support

5.1 The EYS funding categories in summary:

- ***Integrated Services (ISD) funding category*** – *Services under the ISD funding category, known by the common name Early Years Places, are ‘one-stop shops’ where families can access a range of services and disciplines which create a comprehensive, connected, and locally responsive hub of child and family wellbeing services. The Integrated services support families with children aged from birth to eight years of age and offer activities that must include child focused learning and development programs, links to early childhood education and care services, parenting capacity building programs and family support and access to child and maternal and allied health services.*
- ***Child Focused Activities and Groups*** – *provides funding to deliver activities and environments that promote optimal early childhood learning and development with the child and parent participating together. CFAG activities support families with children aged from birth to eight years and include playgroup, parenting programs, mobile home visit programs and support positive attachment and build on parenting capacity and confidence.*
- ***Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Funding category*** – *The ECEC funding category is prioritised toward geographic locations where access to ECEC services is limited. Funding supports access to high quality child learning and development through the provision of early childhood education and care provided in accordance with the Education and Care Services National Law (Queensland) Act 2011 and the Education and Care Services Act 2013 (QLD) for children aged from birth to 13 years. Funded activities include: Limited Hours Care, and Vacation Care Access (for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Children with disability).*
- ***Sector Support funding category*** – *provides funding to increase the effectiveness of the early childhood development service system. Sector Support Initiatives include building capacity and capability of the workforce, improving the quality or service delivery or the physical environment, establishing and supporting sector governance, professional development, and reducing barriers to increase children’s participation in ECEC.*
- ***Family Support funding category*** – *provides funding for a range of child centred services that work with parents/carers to achieve better developmental outcomes for their children aged from birth to eight years. Funded services work with families, in particular those who are experiencing complex needs, vulnerability or disadvantage, to protect and promote the wellbeing and rights of children, build on parenting strategies, and support children’s physical, cognitive, language and social/emotional development.*