



More young children set to thrive thanks to new alliance of sector leaders

A new initiative supported by BHP Foundation will address the root causes of disadvantage for Australian children from birth to five years.

Re-engineering and disrupting the early years system

With 90 per cent of a child's brain grown by age five, early childhood is a critical period in a child's development that has consequences for the rest of their life. While there is excellent and growing evidence of what children need to be able to thrive, the system is not set up to allow different services to work together and ensure support is available to families before they hit crisis point.

Lasting, positive change in early childhood will come through a better understanding of the constraints in the way the system currently operates, that are leading to poor outcomes for children, and what needs to change to see more children flourish.

This will help ensure all Australian children get what they need in the early years, when they need it, to have the best chance in life.

The initiative is enabled through an investment of AU\$1 million from the BHP Foundation to pioneer and test this Early Years Catalyst approach over 18 months.

A system-wide approach

The Early Childhood Development Field Catalyst will, for the first time, bring together a group of 13 leaders and researchers from across children and family services to re-engineer and disrupt the current fragmented early years system in Australia.

The Early Years Catalyst approach works to foster a system-wide approach to addressing the root causes of disadvantage for young children from birth to five years. This includes supporting the development, adoption and implementation of an Early Years Blueprint to overhaul the way that the system operates, along with how services are funded, regulated and delivered.

This will be crucial to developing a system that works for children and drives change across the system.

Delivering improved outcomes

During the 18-month test period, Social Ventures Australia will provide the backbone for the initiative and manage the project on behalf of the alliance. The group of experienced sector leaders aim to deliver improved early childhood outcomes in Australia by:

- bringing different parts of the sector together to allow them to work more effectively to support young children and design new solutions that better meet children's needs
- developing and supporting the sector to embed a National Early Years Blueprint for improving the lives of young children
- advocating for policy change and evidence-informed approaches where it's identified the system is failing children



As its first task, this collaborative group will map the current system to better understand the root causes of problems and identify the leverage points for change. The mapping project will look at the interconnected systems that impact the early years, including early childhood education and care, child and maternal health, mental health, family support, housing, social services and child protection.

This will be followed by a longer process to seek to change elements of the current child and family system and inform future policy to allow more young children to thrive in Australia.

'We know from our work at SVA that not only is early childhood the best time to maximise social impact, it's also the most cost-effective investment which saves governments and communities many millions of dollars in reduced health, welfare and justice expenses.'

Emma Sydenham
Director of Early Childhood at SVA.

Leaders from across the spectrum

The 13 leaders come from across the spectrum of sectors that interact with children including early childhood education and care, child and maternal health, mental health, family support, housing, social services and child protection.

The alliance was formed following the National Early Years Summit in March 2020 which brought together approximately 550 experts across diverse parts of the system.

Members of the group include:

- The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)
- The Centre for Community Child Health @ the Murdoch Children's Research Institute
- The Centre for Policy Development
- Every Child Campaign led by The Benevolent Society
- Families Australia
- The Front Project (TFP)
- Goodstart Early Learning,
- Logan Together
- The Parent-Infant Research Institute
- Queensland University of Technology
- SNAICC – National Voice for our Children
- Social Ventures Australia
- Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership.

The project is co-chaired by Penny Dakin (ARACY) and Jane Hunt (TFP).

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) is a not-for-profit organisation that works with partners to alleviate disadvantage – towards an Australia where all people and communities thrive.

Helping young people fulfill their potential

The BHP Foundation partners with NGOs and institutions across the world to enable equality of opportunity so more people can realise the power of education to improve life choices, fulfil their potential and contribute to society. The Foundation works in a spirit of genuine partnership with like-minded civil society organisations and international institutions to align aspirations behind a common goal and make the best use of collective expertise.

The Early Childhood Development Field Catalyst is part of our Australia Country Program which aims to support social development and sustainability in Australia.

For more information on the BHP Foundation visit bhp.com/foundation.