



2021-22 Pre-Federal Budget Submission

A plan to ensure that every child starts school ready to learn and leaves school ready for life and work

January 29 2021

To: The Prime Minister and The Treasury

Australia can be the best country in which to raise children. Every Child can start school ready to learn and leave school ready for life and work. This goal has to be a nation-building priority.

On behalf of the Every Child national alliance we commend this Budget Submission to you for your consideration and action.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Schrapel'.

Signed on behalf of

Simon Schrapel AM
Co-Chair, Every Child
CEO Uniting Communities SA

Leith Sterling
Co-Chair, Every Child
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About Every Child Alliance

Every Child is an alliance of 75+ organisations and individuals striving to elevate the well-being of children and young people as a nation-building priority. *Every Child* is proudly supported and funded by The Benevolent Society.

The evidence that backs the strategies in this budget submission.

The evidence that supports action to raise the well-being of all children is abundant and compelling. This submission draws on: (i) the evidence; (ii) strategies promoted by our member organisations (in particular we acknowledge the work of ARACY and National Shelter), and (iii) the insights that have emerged through a Systems Leadership for Child Well-being Project that we have initiated with ANZSOG. This systems leadership project aims to reduce fragmentation of support systems, promote integrated support across government and non-government service systems and promote prevention and the “stacking” of support in the early years for children to

disrupt childhood adversity and trauma. The Every Child ANZSOG systems leadership project has the support of the Prime Minister and other heads of state.

Prior to COVID-19 most Australian children (80%) were doing well, but this still left a significant proportion (20%) who consistently were not doing well (AEDC, 2018). As a consequence of COVID, the future outlook for far too many children and young people will be grim. The pre-COVID data demonstrates:

- 1 in 6 (17.1%) young people aged 15 to 19 who responded to Mission Australia’s Youth Survey 2019 had been homeless.
- In 2014-15, 15.4 per cent of Australians aged 18 to 24 years suffered high or very high psychological distress, up from 11.8 per cent in 2011 (ARACY Child and Youth Report Card, 2018).



32/40

= Australia’s ranking for child wellbeing among OECD countries. (UNICEF, 2020)



\$15.2bn each year

= the cost to Australians of late action for children. (Telethon Kids Institute, 2019)



1.1 million

= the number of children currently at risk of poverty. (ACOSS, 2020)



**In every classroom
6 first-time students
start school
underprepared**

– 12 if the classroom is in a disadvantaged area. (AEDC, 2018)



1 in 6 children live in poverty (ACOSS) with their families forced to choose what basic needs they can afford each week – rent, food, clothes or heating.

Not surprisingly the COVID-19 pandemic has made many indicators worse. For example:

- Young people are especially vulnerable to housing stress related to COVID-19 and the emerging recession, with 44% of renters aged 18 to 24 unable to pay their rent on time (ANU, 2020).
- 40% of young people (aged 15 to 24) feel that the pandemic has impacted their confidence to achieve future goals (Headspace, 2020).

COVID has also highlighted the importance of engaging directly with children and young people on issues that matter to them, particularly across political processes and design participation.

Every Child alliance members call on the federal government to take action in this 2021/22 budget that enables every child, every family, and every community to bounce-back higher than pre-COVID conditions.

This Budget submission proposes a National Child and Youth Future Well-Being and Prosperity strategy that ensures that we all bounce-back – that all children will start school ready to learn and leave school ready for life and work.

We propose 6 key national strategies.

Recommendation 1. Elevate the prosperity and well-being of children and young people as a nation-building priority and a focus for National Cabinet. Budget commitment required – investment in the planning and development mechanisms across government and community participation.

Recommendation 2. Implement an income, employment and social security strategy that is focused on lifting all children out of poverty. Budget Commitment required – increased investment in social security payments and skills and employment support for vulnerable families.

Recommendation 3. Support to First Nations children, young people and families must be a national priority in this and future budgets.

Recommendation 4. Increase workforce participation of women by investing in Early Years Learning and Care systems.

Recommendation 5. Invest in a social housing led recovery. Budget commitment required - Cost over forward estimates \$7.7B over 4 years for new construction. Cost \$20m in 2020-2021 for social housing upgrades.

Recommendation 6. Reset national policy and service systems for children and families to focus on prevention of harm and hardship and “stack” support across all areas of need in the early years.

Budget Recommendations Explained.

Recommendation 1. Elevate the prosperity and well-being of children and young people as a nation-building priority and a focus for National Cabinet. Budget commitment required – investment in the planning and development mechanisms across government and community participation.

Support to children and young people and policy frameworks are fragmented. There is a misalignment of policy, investment, and coordinated service delivery within sectors and governments.

The success of the COVID-19 response led through National Cabinet has demonstrated that where there is a will there is a way. Improving child well-being is not a “knowing” problem, it is a “doing” problem.

National Cabinet is a co-ordinated, influential mechanism through which child wellbeing can be elevated and implemented as a nation-building priority.

This strategy requires:

The Prime Minister lead the development of a National Child Well-Being and Prosperity strategy that incorporates housing, income support, health, early learning and care, education, youth participation and all areas that contribute to child and youth well-being. Children and young people must be meaningfully engaged in the design and implementation of this strategy.

The Prime Minister make the measurement, reporting and improvement of the wellbeing of Australian children a regular item for monitoring and action on the agenda for National Cabinet.

Recommendation 2. Implement an income, employment and social security strategy that is focused on lifting all children out of poverty.

Every Child supports the Australian Council of Social Services’ (ACOSS) position that there should be a permanent and adequate increase to JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and related payments (such as the Parenting Payment) that ensures everyone can cover the basics. This

includes single parents, who need a Single Parent Supplement to cover their additional costs, as well as restoration of wage indexation to the Family Tax Benefit.

Childhood poverty is a significant risk factor for poorer outcomes in adulthood. Early years support to families and children can disrupt the drivers of childhood adversity and trauma and get children off to a better start in life.

With increased levels of assistance provided by the Commonwealth during the COVID-19 pandemic, many families have risen out of poverty temporarily. Every Child welcomes the increased payments to families and commends the Commonwealth on this economic stimulus initiative. Let's make this enduring. We urge leaders to "do it for the kids". The view that increased social security is a disincentive to work does not take account of the fact that Australian children do not control this and should not be punished because the economy is not creating enough jobs, or because their parents/carers fail to secure adequate work.

Specific recommended budget actions include:

- That JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and related payments be permanently increased to provide a guaranteed minimum income for all families.

Recommendation 3: Support to First Nations children, young people and families must be a national priority in this and future budgets.

Every Child supports the work of Family Matters, the Coalition of Peaks, and SNAICC in their call to close the gap on injustice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We support their call to strengthen early years supports for Aboriginal and Torres Children. Increased funding to roll-out community controlled services across all areas of child well-being – health, education, early learning and care, housing and more is essential.

We support the establishment of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner to oversee strategies that improve the well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Recommendation 4. Increase workforce participation of women by investing in Early Years Learning and Care systems.

The evidence indicates that investing in sectors that create more jobs for women – many who might otherwise be struggling to support their families on income support – is good for children and good for the economy.

For example, early intervention can prevent enormous ongoing costs. A 2019 report by CoLab and partners found that every Australian is paying \$607 per year (\$15.2 billion in total) for services that could have been avoided, had children and families in need been provided with early and appropriate help. Much of this help would be delivered by women through roles in the caring sector.

The evidence is clear that stacking support in the early years improves outcomes for children, their families and our entire community (See Molloy C, O'Connor M, Guo S, Lin C, Harrop C, Perini N, Goldfeld S. (2019).

Along with our partners ARACY, Thrive By Five and others we recommend that:

- The Commonwealth provide funding for a national roll-out of universal quality early childhood education including:

- Implementing a National 5 year partnership agreement on early years learning and support to foster co-operation and consistent service provision across all jurisdictions.
- Providing a minimum entitlement of 30 hours of 95% subsidised care per week for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as an ongoing measure to Close the Gap in ECEC attendance and Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) outcomes.
- Funding a sector development initiative to establish regional intermediary services that support the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services to deliver quality early education and development supports.
- Invest in pre-school to enable access for every 3 year old.

Recommendation 5: Invest in a social housing led recovery

COVID exposed a disturbing housing problem in Australia– children, young people and families cannot be safe, if they don't have a safe, secure place to call home. 1 in 6 young people aged 15 to 19 had been homeless (Mission Australia 2019). That is an economic and social challenge as these young people are not likely to be engaged in school, vocational learning or work. Every Child accepts the evidence and understands the fundamental importance of safe and secure housing to promote child and youth well-being. We support proposals submitted by National Shelter, that include:

- A larger and better targeted stimulus to economic activity would be gained through a major boost to building social and affordable housing via the Social Housing Acceleration and Renovation Program (SHARP)(cost over forward estimates \$7.7B over 4 years).
- Introduce an Affordable Housing Infrastructure Booster (AHIB). Cost \$20m in 2020-2021

Every Child recommends that the Commonwealth provide urgent funding for an expanded national strategy to deliver and upgrade social and public housing as a means of providing stable housing for children and young people.

Recommendation 6. Reset national policy and service systems for children and families to focus on prevention of harm and hardship and “stack” support across all areas of need in the early years.

[The Strong Foundations: Getting it Right in the First 1000 Days Partnership](#) led by ARACY, has found in its 2017 report¹ that children exposed to adverse environments and experiences early are likely to continue to be exposed to such experiences, and that changes or adaptations made during the first 1000 days can have lifelong effects.

This evidence is clear – to prevent harm and hardship for children we need to stack support early for children and families. (See *Molloy C, O'Connor M, Guo S, Lin C, Harrop C, Perini N, Goldfeld S. (2019).*

We seek funding to scale-up evidence-based: (i) early years centres, such as those operated successfully by The Benevolent Society that provide integrated support to children and families and (ii) sustained nurse home visiting programs and other early years integrated services that respond to health, education and other needs of children and families. For example, the right@home program provides 25 nurse home visits to at-risk families until the child is aged 2 years. Delivered through existing universal services, right@home is being tested through the largest randomized controlled trial in Australian history, including around 700 families.