

EVIDENCE FOR ACTION IN THE EARLY YEARS SYSTEM

Assessing System Leverage Points



Part 1 of 6: **KEY FINDINGS**

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Suggested citation: Fiona McKenzie, Eve Millar, Sarah Rogers, Sophie O'Sullivan, Renee Martin, Myrna Machuca-Sierra, Zoe Enticott, Ellise Barkley, Heidi Peterson, Tim Moore, Rebecca Fry, Lauren Heery, 2023. Evidence for Action in the Early Years System: Assessing System Leverage Points: Key Findings. Prepared by Orange Compass, Centre for Community Child Health, Clear Horizon and Social Enterprise Finance Australia for the Early Years Catalyst, July 2023.



Acknowledging our funders

We would like to acknowledge and thank the BHP Foundation and Allan & Gill Gray Philanthropies for their visionary support of the Early Years Catalyst in our setup and initial phase of work. It is their support which allows us to gather and to share these insights with the field.

The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of Allan & Gill Gray Philanthropies.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to everyone who took part in this research, including the 210 people who completed our online survey. Your insights have helped bring to life the complexity of working in early childhood development, the necessity of transformational change and the urgency of the task. We hope we have done justice to your wisdom with our report and recommendations.

We are so grateful for the generosity and willingness of our advisors to fit this work into their busy schedules. We particularly acknowledge the Expert Advisory Panel who provided input into the design of our prototype process and then made the journey to Melbourne to be part of an intense two-day workshop.

Expert Advisory Panel

- Brenda Amman
- Kirsty Arnott
- Julia Cornelius
- Karen Hagen
- Annette Harwood
- Bree Katsamangos
- Jade Leak
- Sara McAlister
- Cara Miller
- Nicole Pilsworth
- M'Lynda Stubbs
- Helen Walker

First Nations Input

- Maurita Cavanaugh
- Joanne Goulding
- Lisa Walker
- Staff from the team at Children's Ground - Alice Springs

Other Specialist Input

- Seanna Davidson
- Jen Lorains
- Paul Prichard

We would also like to sincerely thank the team who worked so diligently to make this possible:

Project Team

- Ellise Barkley, Clear Horizon
- Zoe Enticott & team, Clear Horizon
- Rebecca Fry, Centre for Community Child Health
- Lauren Heery, Centre for Community Child Health
- Myrna Machuca-Sierra, Social Enterprise Finance Australia
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- Fiona McKenzie, Orange Compass
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- Tim Moore, Centre for Community Child Health
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Orange Compass - July 2023

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FROM THE EARLY YEARS CATALYST CO CHAIRS

We believe that securing population-level improvements in early childhood development outcomes requires us to understand how our existing systems work to constrain or create opportunities for young children and their families. Rather than seek ‘silver bullets’, we look for multiple opportunities to influence change in many different areas over the short, medium and longer-term. These include changes in policy, practices, resource flows, relationships and connections, power dynamics and mental models. As sector leaders, we also commit to continually reflect on the role we play in influencing early childhood development outcomes and to identify new ways of working in response. It is our hope that this report informs not only our own exploration of next steps to build a better early year’s system but provides the base of evidence for leaders and organisations across the early years field to develop strategies that leverage the system in new and surprising ways.

In BridgeSpan's 2017 report, *Audacious Philanthropy*¹, fifteen examples of large-scale change were reviewed, and it was found that 90 per cent took more than 20 years to achieve the change they were seeking and 75 per cent required actors from across sectors to work in a coordinated fashion (not to say they worked together, just that they were connected and coordinating).

In that spirit of connecting, we offer this beginning insight into the evidence base of looking at what works, what achieves long term systemic leverage and what actions we can all take separately or together that will deliver for Australian children.

Thank you to the many hundreds of people who contributed time and wisdom to this report -we know you share a deep dissatisfaction with the status quo and see a future where all Australian children thrive. We also look forward to hearing what you the reader responds to in this report and the steps you take to catalyse change across the field, wherever you find yourself.

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¹ Abe Grindle & Susan Wolf Dittkoff, 2017, *Audacious Philanthropy*. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2017/09/audacious-philanthropy>

INTRODUCTION

Background

Early childhood is a critical period in a child's development that has consequences for the rest of their life. Yet, despite the strong evidence base and skilled professionals wanting to deliver better outcomes for young children and their families, our early years system is still not delivering for all children.

As part of its ongoing evidence gathering and to inform further iteration of the National Early Years Blueprint, the Early Years Catalyst commissioned Orange Compass (with project partners Centre for Community Child Health, Clear Horizon and Social Enterprise Finance Australia), to conduct a rapid assessment of the transformational potential and evidence for action for the 60+ leverage points identified by the hundreds of people from across Australia who participated in the EYC's [systems mapping process](#) completed in 2022.

There are many ideas across the early years system about how to improve the system or change things for the better, especially for those experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage. There are many inspiring examples of specific initiatives and actions that are really making a difference to children and families; however, these are not necessarily leverage points. More than great ideas or innovative approaches, leverage points are those points in the system where making change will have the impact across the whole system.

A leverage point is a place in the system where, by intervening or applying pressure, we can influence change across the whole system.

Purpose

In commissioning this project, the Early Years Catalyst sought to understand two key things:

- The relative potential of each leverage point to transform the early years system and improve early childhood development (ECD) outcomes
- The evidence for action - what does the evidence say about what it will take to create transformative change in Australia's early years system?

The results of the assessment and evidence gathering process have been compiled into the full Evidence for Action report, a substantive resource for the field that provides rich insights into:

- the available evidence
- potential impacts on ECD outcomes
- approaches to implementation, including pre-conditions
- case study examples of implementation, including lessons learnt and information regarding costs and timelines.

This rapid assessment and evidence gathering process was undertaken over ten weeks from January to April 2023. This would not have been possible without the generous engagement of frontline workers, First Nations advisors, families, and researchers.

The project required the design, development and implementation of a bespoke assessment method and participatory process, to assess the relative, potential impact of each leverage point. For those

who want to know more about this rapid prototyping of a method for assessing leverage points, *The Approach* (Part 2 of 6) document unpacks this in detail.

How to use this report

To make the Evidence for Action report easy to navigate, it has been divided into six parts:

This document is **Part 1: Key Findings**.

Part 2 - The Approach provides detail about the assessment process and the evidence gathering approach.

Parts 3 - 6 are focused on the evidence, providing an abundance of information about the 18 leverage points. For ease of navigation, the leverage points were grouped into four clusters, aligned with the key elements of the desired, future state system, identified through the EYC's systems mapping process, (see diagram below):

Part 3: Cluster 1 - Community and families in the driver's seat (Leverage Points 1-6)

Part 4: Cluster 2 - Re-imagining the service system (Leverage Points 7-10)

Part 5: Cluster 3 - Shared accountability for children's outcomes (Leverage Points 11-14)

Part 6: Cluster 4 - Shifting society's perspectives (Leverage Points 15-18)

Each '**Cluster**' document includes a 'cluster summary' that shares insights about the group of leverage points, followed by the evidence for action for each of the individual leverage points in that cluster. For each **leverage point** you will find:

- key insights
- the assessment and rating results
- findings from the evidence scan including insights for implementation
- references for further exploration
- a case study that illustrates one way the leverage point has been implemented.

It is not necessary to read the 'cluster' documents from cover to cover. You can explore any or all leverage points and the many additional references included, as you like. Ideally, start with whichever leverage point or case study is of most interest and follow the linkages from there. Every leverage point has an important role to play and there is much more still to be discovered.

[This report builds from the EYC's systems mapping report:](#)

Key elements of the desired, future state early years system identified through the EYC's systems mapping process include:

- As a society, we prioritise the lifelong wellbeing of all children in Australia.
- Government² (or someone) holds responsibility for the whole
- Accountable, high quality, proactive service systems
- Strong local communities
- Strong families, parents and carers.

² System mapping participants Identified a need for a structure or authority to hold responsibility for the whole system - this was often stated as "government" by participants but we would suggest that within a systemic approach government will be a part of but not the whole solution.

THE CLUSTERS AND THE DESIRED, FUTURE STATE EARLY YEARS SYSTEM

Key elements of the desired, future state early years system:

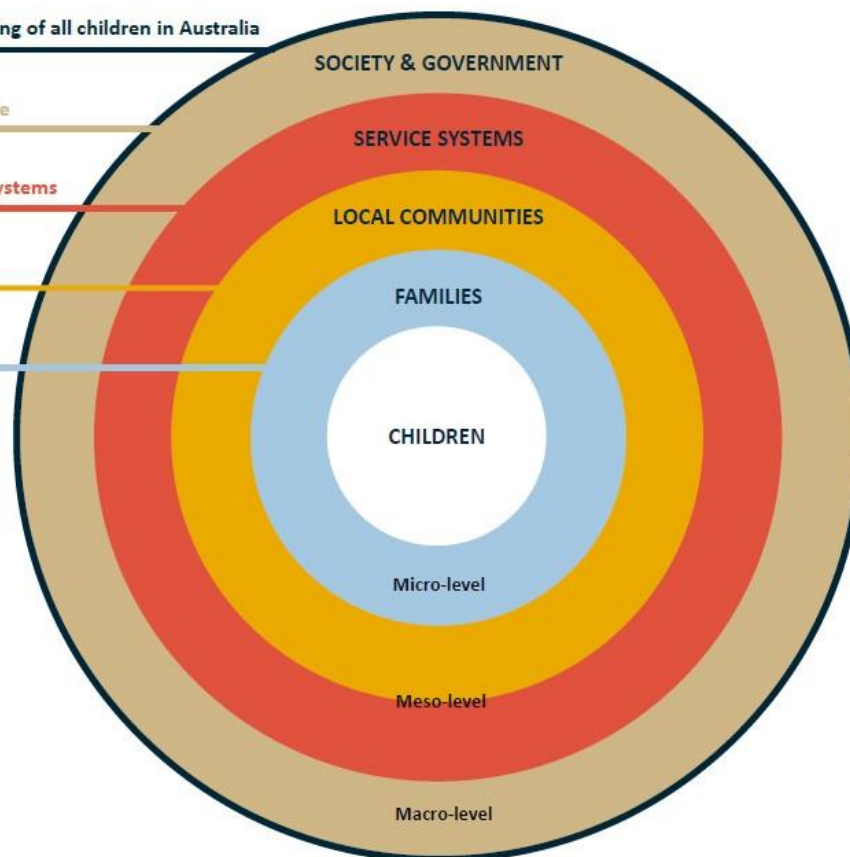
As a society, we prioritise the lifelong wellbeing of all children in Australia

Government holds responsibility for the whole

Accountable, high quality, proactive service systems

Strong local communities

Strong families, parents and carers



Cluster 1:
Communities and families
in the driver's seat
Leverage Points 1-6

Cluster 2:
Reimagining
the service system
Leverage Points 7-10

Cluster 3:
Shared accountability for
children's outcomes
Leverage Points 11-14

Cluster 4:
Shifting society's
perspectives
Leverage Points 15-18

LEVERAGE POINTS AND CASE STUDIES BY CLUSTER

Cluster 1 - Communities and families in the driver's seat

LEVERAGE POINTS
1. Grant greater decision-making power to the local community level
2. Fit-for-purpose funding and commissioning approaches
3. Redirect funding flows to support local priorities and responses
4. Feedback loops from families and communities to government and service providers
5. Amplify family and community voices as partners in program design and delivery
6. Recognise families and those with lived experience as 'experts' for the purposes of evidence, policy and decision making
CASE STUDIES
Case Study 1 - British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform
Case Studies 2 and 3 - The Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project
Case Study 4 - Maranguka Cross Sector Leadership Group
Case Study 5 - Tasmanian Child and Family Learning Centres
Case Study 6 - Our Town

Cluster 2 - Re-imagining the service system

LEVERAGE POINTS
7. Expand the universal service system
8. Invest in a proactive and preventative child protection (child thriving) system
9. Ensure service systems are staffed by high quality workforces
10. Recognise the voice of children in policy and program design
CASE STUDIES
Case Study 7 - Comprehensive early development (CED) systems: The Finnish and English experience
Case Study 8 - Cradle to Kinder
Case Study 9 - By Five Paediatric Project
Case Study 10 - Growing up a reader research project

Cluster 3 - Shared accountability for children's outcomes

LEVERAGE POINTS
11. Reform the culture of measurement and evaluation
12. Enforce accountability for outcomes for children and families
13. Government to guarantee equitable access to services for all children
14. Ensure all children have their basic material needs met

CASE STUDIES

Case Study 11 - Stronger Places, Stronger People: Hands Up Mallee

Case Study 12 - The Benevolent Society Social Benefit Bond – Resilient Families service

Case Study 13 - Sure Start Local Programmes UK (Sure Start)

Case Study 14 - Sweden's Parental Leave Policy

Cluster 4 - Shifting society's perspectives

LEVERAGE POINTS

15. Create a shift in Australia's socio-cultural identity to become a society that priorities the wellbeing of all children

16. Change our framing/conceptualisation and approach to 'care' in Australia

17. Create a shift in our collective mindsets to recognise First Nations ways of knowing, learning, being and doing about care

18. Create a shift in societal perspectives of disadvantage and difference; free of racism and judgement

CASE STUDIES

Case Study 15 - The Campaign for Action on Family Violence, New Zealand (2007-2011)

Case Study 16 - Dove - Campaign for Real Beauty

Case Study 17 - Children's Ground, Northern Territory

Case Study 18 - The Voice of Racism digital experience, part of New Zealand's Give Nothing to Racism campaign (2020-2021) and National Action Plan Against Racism

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The assessment process is described in detail in [The Approach](#) document (Part 2 of 6). The outcomes of the assessment and rating of the individual leverage points are found in the 'cluster' documents.

Using a structured, multi-level assessment framework, each leverage point was assessed, with a participatory process that included experts, front line practitioners, the broader field, families, and First Nations contributors - through a series of panels, interviews, and surveys. The multi-level assessment framework considered:

- The potential impact of the individual leverage point – including scale/desirability/viability
- The wider systematic context of the leverage point – including appetite/disruption/enabling conditions/unit
- The key actors required to drive this change – including agency/authority/capability.

The final 'ranking' and the evidence for action for each leverage point is a combination of the findings of the assessment process, along with insights and evidence drawn from diverse perspectives including frontline practice knowledge and expertise; family perspectives; First Nations wisdom and ways of knowing; and the published research.

THE TOP 5 LEVERAGE POINTS

We want to emphasise of the many ideas for change that were generated out of the systems mapping project we merged and narrowed them down to 18 distinct ideas which had evidence to demonstrate potential to transform the system. Even those which were ranked lower were still rated by at least 50% of respondents as having high transformative potential. None are a 'bad idea' and after examining the evidence, in an ideal world, **all leverage points would be actioned by different actors**. Of course, the reader might notice that their personal 'favourite' leverage point is rated lower than they think it should be - but we would note that it is all about relative choice and considering all the factors.

Of the 18 leverage points that were assessed, **the five below** were assessed to have the highest potential to transform the early years system and improve outcomes for children and families, based on their potential systemic impact, viability, and the actors required to drive change.

Rank	Leverage Point	Cluster
1	LP14: Ensure all children and their families have their basic material needs met	3 - Shared accountability for children's outcomes
2	LP12: Enforce accountability for outcomes for children and families	3 - Shared accountability for children's outcomes
3	LP9: Ensure service systems are staffed by high quality workforces	2 - Re-imagining the service system
4	LP1: Grant greater decision-making power to the local community level	1 - Communities and families in the driver's seat
5	LP16: Change our framing/conceptualisation of and approach to 'care' in Australia	4 - Shifting society's perspectives

As noted above, these five leverage points were seen as having the greatest potential to transform the early years system to improve outcomes for children and their families, so that all children can thrive. None of these are easy fixes. To implement all five would require challenging deeply held societal beliefs, addressing structural poverty and inequality, removing barriers to prevention and early intervention, increasing equity of access to services across all postcodes, and the greater valuing of the education and care workforces.

This combination also reinforces that systems change takes time, collaboration and action across all of the four clusters:

1. **Communities and families in the driver's seat**
2. **Re-imagining the service system**
3. **Ensuring shared accountability for children's outcomes**
4. **Shifting society's perspectives**

Notably, the top two leverage points are part of 'Cluster 3 - Shared accountability for children's outcomes', a series of leverage points emphasising the need for **all actors within the system taking responsibility** and being **held accountable** for delivering positive outcomes for children and families.

These ratings represent a moment in time:

Insights from the Expert Advisory Panel workshops suggest that when assessing the impact potential of individual leverage points, people brought a wide range of considerations, assumptions, and judgements to their assessment. These ratings also may not remain consistent for an individual over time and, were we to repeat the process, ratings may change.

THE LEVERAGE POINTS RANKED 1-18

(Highest to Lowest ranking of potential impact)

Rank	Leverage Point	Cluster	Example of what this might look like in reality
1	LP14: Ensure all children and their families have their basic material needs met	Cluster 3 - Shared accountability for children's outcomes	The welfare system is more accessible and provides a real safety net that keeps families and children out of poverty and treats those suffering hardship more fairly.
2	LP12: Enforce accountability for outcomes for children and families	Cluster 3 - Shared accountability for children's outcomes	Services that are funded to work with children and families are publicly accountable for the outcomes they achieve (making a difference) and are measured against what is important to children and families (not just what is important to funders).
3	LP9: Ensure service systems are staffed by high quality workforces	Cluster 2 - Re-imagining the service system	There are enough skilled workers to meet demand across all areas of Australia, so that children and families can access the support they need in a timely way, from trusted staff.
4	LP1: Grant greater decision-making power to the local community level	Cluster 1 - Communities and families in the driver's seat	Local communities are supported and resourced so that they can be an equal partner with service providers and government and share in decision making about the things that matter to them- through community-led place-based approaches.
5	LP16: Change our framing/conceptualisation of and approach to 'care' in Australia	Cluster 4 - Shifting society's perspectives	The often invisible and undervalued work of caring is better understood, valued and rewarded across all care roles and sectors - both unpaid and paid.
6	LP18: Create a shift in societal perspectives of disadvantage and difference; free of racism	Cluster 4 - Shifting society's perspectives	As a society we do not judge/treat children and families who are experiencing disadvantage as 'less than' and everybody is treated as equal and worthy.

	and judgement against disadvantaged children and communities		
7	LP6: Recognise families and those with lived experience as 'experts' for the purposes of evidence, policy and decision making	Cluster 1 - Communities and families in the driver's seat	When decisions are being made about policy, funding and programs, the real-life experience of families is heard and respected (and given as much weight as formal 'experts'), and this can be seen in the final decisions.
8	LP 2: Fit-for-purpose funding and commissioning approaches	Cluster 1 - Communities and families in the driver's seat	Services are funded (and measured) in ways that mean that they can deliver what families and communities need, including being flexible and responsive to changing circumstances. Services are rewarded for working with other services to meet the individual needs of children and families.
9	LP13: Government to guarantee equitable access to services for all children - regardless of where they live in Australia	Cluster 3 - Shared accountability for children's outcomes	Where necessary, government steps in to make sure that there are affordable services available for all children and families everywhere across Australia - whether it is financially profitable or not.
10	LP17: Create a shift in our collective mindsets to recognise First Nations ways of knowing, learning, being and doing and about care	Cluster 4 - Shifting society's perspectives	More people experience and value First Nations ways of knowing, learning, doing and being - including in policy and decision making across government, services and community.
11	LP8: Invest in a proactive and preventative child protection [child thriving] system	Cluster 2 - Re-imagining the service system	The child protection system is focused on building stronger families and preventing situations where children are unsafe and are removed from their families, supporting children and parents to thrive in a way that works for children and families.
12	LP5: Amplify family and community voices as partners in program design and delivery	Cluster 1 - Communities and families in the driver's seat	It is standard practice to have families and communities as part of the design of services and programs (including partnerships between community and different levels of government) so that they deliver what is important to those families and communities.

13	LP4: Feedback loops from families and communities to government and service providers	Cluster 1 - Communities and families in the driver's seat	Services and government seek and take on board regular feedback from families and communities about how well they are meeting the needs of local communities and where they can improve.
14	LP11: Reform the culture of measurement and evaluation	Cluster 3 - Shared accountability for children's outcomes	Government and services are focused on how well they support children and families and whether they make a difference, including the important work of frontline workers who take the time to build trust and work flexibility with children and families.
15	LP3: Redirect funding flows to support local priorities and responses	Cluster 1 - Communities and families in the driver's seat	The money that government spends in a local community is pooled and then allocated to funding the services/programs that are what community (and families) need and think is most important.
16	LP15: Create a shift in Australia's socio-cultural identity to become a society that prioritises the wellbeing of all children	Cluster 4 - Shifting society's perspectives	As a society, we are focused on how healthy and happy everyone in Australia is, rather than focusing on how much everything costs, including everyone accepting that we all (parents or not) have a part to play in making sure every child has a what they need to thrive.
17	LP7: Expand the universal service system	Cluster 2 - Re-imagining the service system	All families can access more services at low or no cost and can choose which ones they want to participate in or not and families feel less judged about their needs and choices.
18	LP10: Recognise the voice of children in policy and program design	Cluster 2 - Re-imagining the service system	It is standard practice to seek and include the views and voices of children in any program and policy design that impacts directly on the lives of children.

IMPLICATIONS

What does this mean for transforming the early years system?

Systems change is possible:

This work shows that systems change is possible. It may take time and sustained effort, but the evidence collected here shows that it can be done. The collection of leverage points and case studies speak to the variety of scales, levels and types of systems change that can be pursued in redesigning the early years system.

No single actor can achieve transformational change alone:

Achieving systemic change will take a committed coalition of actors from across the systems, sectors, and places. Not even government can do it alone, it requires collaboration. It also requires a high degree of agency, authorisation and capability. This will only be possible if individual organisations and vested interests are willing to put aside their individual agendas in pursuit of a shared vision and agenda.

No single leverage point can achieve transformation on its own:

For children and their families, the systems that influence ECD outcomes are all linked, interact and are related, and it is unsurprising that so too are all the leverage points interconnected and interrelated to some degree. In fact, mapping the linkages creates a web of interconnections, demonstrating that there is no 'silver bullet' or single leverage point that will deliver transformational change on its own.

Seeing how the leverage points are linked, including how they may reinforce or block each other if implemented in tandem, are important considerations when seeking systems change. Fortunately, as is noted below, some leverage points can unlock the potential of others.

But a suite of leverage points can achieve transformation:

It is well known that systems change typically requires shifts across the micro (individual), meso (collective) and macro (system) levels in order to create lasting change. The majority (12) of the leverage points related to macro (system) level change. Only four out of the 18 were focused on micro level change. This speaks to the need to avoid silver bullets and to consider a suite of interventions across different scales. It is consistent with growing recognition of the importance of taking a 'portfolio approach' to systems change.

Some leverage points can unlock others:

Many of the leverage points can act as building blocks for others. There is great potential for snowballing and cumulative impact if the ball starts rolling with one or two. For example, Leverage Point 11 (culture of measurement and evaluation) would be an important enabler of Leverage Point 4 (feedback loops) and Leverage Point 6 (valuing lived experience) as it would create tangible ways to incorporate community priorities as key outcomes and measures of impact. This reinforces the need

to hold the full suite of leverage points in mind and that the sequencing of actions may also be essential to success.

Noting that context matters:

While the rankings are compelling, they are specific to a certain time, place and perspective. Others may arrive at different conclusions based on their view of the system as well as their own agency, authority, aspirations, timeframe and even budget. Different leverage points will be more or less suitable for different contexts and for different actors. And while we encourage learning and deriving of insights from the case studies included, we would note that translating a specific intervention to a different scale or context requires careful attention.

And not everyone wants the system to change:

There are deeply entrenched and under-recognised resisting forces operating within the systems, including those who are saying they want change but are blocking it through their actions. There are always those who benefit from maintaining the status quo. Shifting this will take a fundamental change in the mental models and deep narratives about power, expertise, evidence and the need to 'be right' – which bakes in resistance to innovation, existing power structures, ways of working with families and communities and the focus of measurement and evaluation - again lots of vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

Because there are deep system forces are at play:

Part of this entrenched resistance is activated by the fact that many of the leverage points would challenge dominant system narratives, patterns of behaviour and deep forces in the system. In referring back to the outputs from the [previous mapping](#) of the systems that influence ECD outcomes (current state map), we can see how disruptive they might be. Examples include deeply held beliefs like *'poverty is a choice and should be punished'*, *'families are a no-go zone'*, and *'there are good mothers and bad mothers'*. It also includes long-held patterns like *'we are a society that is prepared to live with poverty'* and the ongoing *'erosion of the village'*. Many of the leverage points also challenge an ongoing *'avoidance of the big levers of change'*.

What does this mean for taking action?

It is time for the long game:

Transformative change is possible, even in complex interconnected systems that are underpinned by deep system forces. However, there is currently a stark difference between the time it takes to create change and the duration of (often government or philanthropic) funding. In systems change, 5-10 years is considered a short timeframe.

Out of the list of 18 leverage points, there was not one that could deliver transformational change within an election cycle. In fact, all leverage points required at least 2-4 years of implementation to achieve any momentum and 5-10 years to see any change in outcomes. Some of the most powerful leverage points take the longest to achieve:

- eight of the leverage points were rated as having a medium (10-20 years) timeframe for change
- two leverage points were rated as having a long-term (20-40 years) timeframe for change
- the leverage points in 'Cluster 4: Shifting societal beliefs' were seen as an especially long endeavour.

Although there are some quicker wins:

If you are in a hurry, the 'quickest wins' with a shorter timeframe (5-10 years) include all six leverage points found in Cluster 1 and two leverage points from Cluster 2.

'Quicker wins' in Cluster 1 - Communities and families in the driver's seat

- LP1: Grant greater decision-making power to the local community level
- LP2: Fit-for-purpose funding and commissioning approaches
- LP3: Redirect funding flows to support local priorities and responses
- LP4: Feedback loops from families and communities to government and service providers
- LP5: Amplify family and community voices as partners in program design and delivery
- LP6: Recognise families and those with lived experience as 'experts' for the purposes of evidence, policy and decision making

'Quicker wins' in Cluster 2 - Re-imagining the service system

- LP9: Ensure service systems are staffed by high quality workforces
- LP10: Recognise the voice of children in policy and program design

And safer bets:

The consolidated rankings reflect the transformative potential for each leverage point. Separately, participants were also asked to rank leverage points for their 'likelihood of success' in the Australian context. Those rated as 'highest likelihood' reflected areas of existing momentum and policy attention. If your focus is on (relatively) 'safer bets', then the following would be higher on your list:

Consistent with the current focus and support for place-based approaches:

- LP1: Grant greater decision-making power to the local community level
- LP2: Fit-for-purpose funding and commissioning approaches
- LP4: Feedback loops from families and communities to government and service providers

Consistent with an increased policy focus on lived experience:

- LP6: Recognise families and those with lived experience as 'experts' for the purposes of evidence, policy and decision making

Consistent with the new national strategy for the care economy:

- LP16: Change our framing/conceptualisation of 'care' in Australia.

But high risk comes with high reward:

The leverage points rated as having lowest likelihood were related to overcoming deeper societal beliefs and system forces. They were also rated as some of the highest potential impact. Yet they would require challenging discrimination, individualistic (neo-liberal) perspectives on disadvantage and the lack of shared accountability across society for the wellbeing of all children.

If you are interested in creating transformative change, have the agency and authority to generate new momentum, and a higher risk appetite, you might focus on:

- LP8: Invest in a proactive and preventative child protection (child thriving) system
- LP15: Create a shift in Australia's socio-cultural identity to become a society that prioritises the wellbeing of all children
- LP18: Create a shift in societal perspectives of disadvantage and difference; free of racism and judgement.

Be sure to focus on system structure, design, power and roles:

No matter the leverage point, the 'type' of systems change most required are shifts in system structure, design, power and roles:

- 15 of the leverage points required systemic change in terms of the 'role of actors and connections across the system (e.g. power, roles, relationships)'
- 12 of the leverage points required changes in 'system structure and design (e.g. rules of the system)'.

This speaks to critical importance of paying attention to ways of working. It requires challenging who has power and a seat at the table. It also speaks to the need to move beyond small shifts that sit within the current rules of the system or simply maximising resources and conditions.

Where 'communication about the system' and 'feedback loops' did feature as the type of system change required, it was not about better channels for outreach or data gathering. This group of leverage points were specifically about including the missing voices of 'system beneficiaries', including through increasing community level influence as a channel for beneficiaries to be heard.

What does this tell us about the evidence?

Learnings are not being well documented:

Individuals, organisations and collaborations in Australia are doing some excellent work with many innovative approaches that are targeting different leverage points and addressing complexity - some of which are showcased in the case studies. However, there are many existing efforts that could be joined up or 'scaled up' that are not being built upon, through an ongoing failure to take impactful solutions and promising practices beyond a pilot project. Programs are also not being comprehensively evaluated to due to lack of funding for evaluation.

Lack of evidence doesn't mean it doesn't work:

This project included a review of publicly available (published) evidence, which is limited. We know there are numerous examples of innovative and promising practice across Australia, and that no publicly available evidence doesn't mean it doesn't work, it means we don't have the evidence yet.

There is a chronic lack of funding for comprehensive evaluation for innovative initiatives, which means that key elements and learnings are not consistently being documented, evaluated, or translated or even promoted effectively. Where evaluation does occur, techniques are trailing behind innovation. We are frequently either failing to gather the correct data or failing to evaluate for long enough to establish outcomes and impact.

There is also a distinct lack of evidence around what does not work. Our funding systems and the culture of 'success' has led to a lack of published evidence around initiatives, or components of initiatives that have failed. Successes are highlighted and failures hidden. This is problematic as an understanding of what doesn't work and unintended consequences, are equally as important as an understanding of what does work.

It's all in the implementation:

Throughout this project, it was again apparent that there is a lot of certainty and consensus around what needs to be done to transform the early childhood system (see the EYC's [Rapid Review Report](#)). The case for much of the 'what' is already widely advocated and indeed, firmly incorporated into the wording of many systems wide policies and strategies.

However, policy intent is clearly not translating into implementation or outcomes for children and families. This gap between intent and outcomes is critical and yet, rarely noted or examined. Rather than pursuing policy reform as 'the' answer, undertaking a serious investigation of the evidence about implementation and operationalising policy initiatives, would likely deliver practical and actionable intelligence that may well be transformational.

Field and families have untapped expertise:

This rapid assessment clearly shows that not only are the 'field' and 'families' willing to be involved in conversations about systems change, but they also bring insight, high aspiration and a sense of urgency to the task. As the rankings show, they are seeking major reforms, not fiddling at the edges. There is untapped expertise, knowledge and solutions that sit with families, communities and front-line staff. They could and should be part of the design and implementation of systems change.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

There are obviously many ways to pursue transformative systems change and action different leverage points. Systems change will take time, collaboration and action across all four clusters:

- [Cluster 1: Communities and families in the driver's seat](#)
- [Cluster 2: Re-imagining the service system](#)
- [Cluster 3: Ensuring shared accountability for children's outcomes](#)
- [Cluster 4: Shifting society's perspectives](#)

We suggest that the reader consider a strategy of mixed approaches that includes both direct action and collaborative action that supports others in their efforts, to create the enabling conditions for change.

We note that many of the 'macro' level leverage points are necessarily much larger than early childhood development, have many stakeholders, across many sectors, with immense complexity to be addressed; all of which go well beyond impact on young children and their families. It will be important for actors in the early childhood development system to consider how they can find opportunities to join other cross-sector efforts, beyond domains traditionally associated with early childhood development.

Given the interconnectedness of all the leverage points, if each of us focuses our energies where we have the most agency, authority, and influence, we will increase the likelihood of systems transformation and long-term impact.

Orange Compass - July 2023