A large, thick, curved graphic element that starts as a solid orange line from the top left, curves downwards and to the right, and then continues as a solid purple line towards the bottom left.

Targeting investment where it counts: Identifying communities for priority investment in integrated early learning models

Summary brief – Queensland

Introduction

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) is an innovative social impact organisation that works with partners to help solve challenging problems, speeding up innovation and redesigning systems so more people in Australia can live their best life. Within SVA, our early years team works to make sure that children experiencing significant disadvantage and vulnerability have access to the supports they need.

This summary brief is drawn from the report, *Targeting investment where it counts*, released in February 2025 by SVA in collaboration with Deloitte Access Economics and the Mitchell Institute. The report shares two models that identify priority locations for government investment in early childhood education and care (ECEC), and the opportunity that each presents to support better early childhood and lifelong outcomes for children:

1) Priority communities for Early Childhood Hubs

The 131 communities across Australia that sit at the nexus of both high early childhood disadvantage¹ and paucity of ECEC services (childcare desert²) are the areas that would benefit most from an Early Childhood Hub (ECH). The early years service system is complex and fragmented, and children and families with the greatest need often do not receive the services and supports they need. This is often due to the difficulty of navigating this system, marginalisation, distrust in the system and other financial and non-financial barriers. Integrated service delivery through an ECH is a key mechanism to overcoming these barriers and seeing families access the diverse range of services and supports they need to thrive.

What is an Early Childhood Hub (ECH)?

An ECH provides access to high-quality ECEC, developmental checks and child health services, family and parenting supports, allied health and other early intervention supports, as well as providing a space where children and families can come together to build social networks. Increasingly located on school sites, they overcome many barriers to accessing and participating in ECEC, outreaching to families and building trust, identifying and redressing developmental concerns and supporting families.

2) Priority communities for leveraging existing early childhood infrastructure for holistic or intensive ECEC models

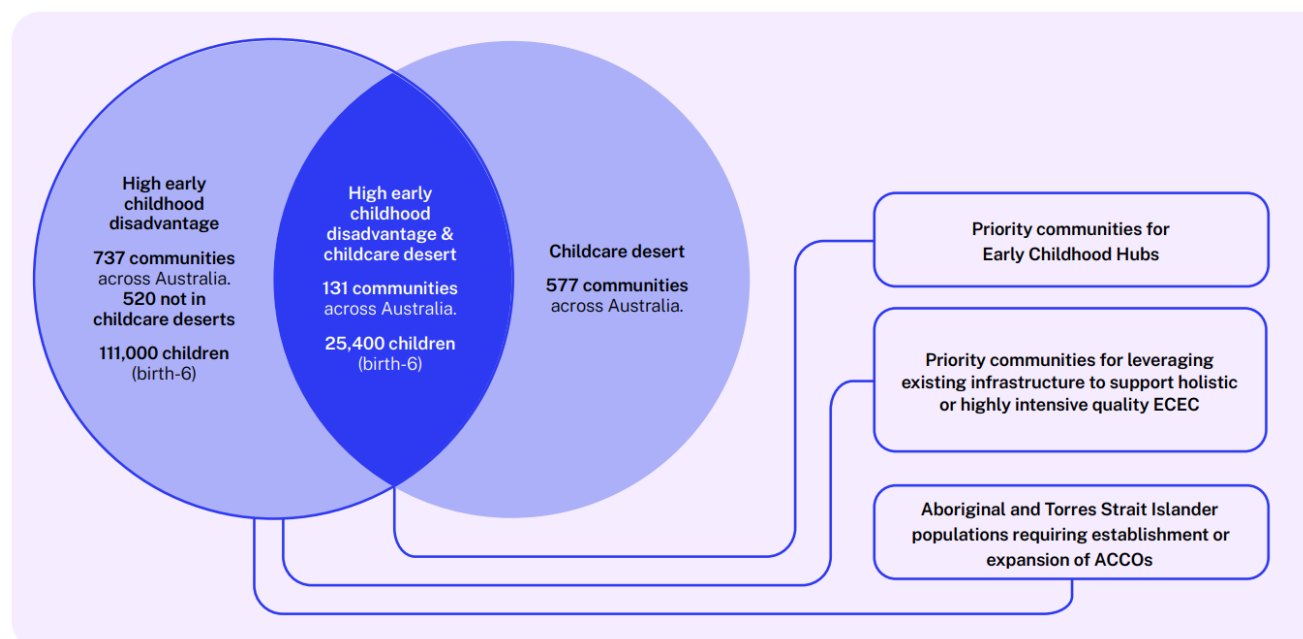
The 520 communities across Australia with high levels of early childhood disadvantage that are not in childcare deserts require attention to better understand and respond to prevailing issues within communities. The response will depend on local need, service availability and the profile of the available ECEC market. Quality is an important element (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander definitions of quality), with data showing that lower quality ECEC services predominate in lower socioeconomic areas.³ Where appropriate, existing ECEC services could be supported to offer a holistic and/or highly intensive quality ECEC model for children.

¹ Early childhood disadvantage is used as a term to describe communities with both high socio-economic disadvantage and early childhood vulnerability. These areas are in SEIFA deciles 1-4 and have over 10% of children developmentally vulnerably on two or more AEDC domains.

² The shortlist of areas was refined to only include areas where the population of children experiencing significant disadvantage is over 50 children. This criterion aims to exclude areas that have a very low population of children in need and therefore may require a different solution. It also does not include areas that contain a 'hot spot' SA1 for childcare supply using the Mitchell Institute's hot and cold spot analysis.

³ Productivity Commission (2024). A path to universal early childhood education and care, Inquiry report no. 106, Vol. 1. June. Retrieved from <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/childhood/report/childhood-volume1-report.pdf>

Figure I. Intersection of early childhood disadvantage and childcare deserts in Australia



Note: 86 SA2s do not appear in either list. One SA2 had insufficient data. The remaining 85 are all childcare deserts but were excluded because they contained fewer than 50 children in need or included a hotspot SA1 within the SA2. Further detail on methodology can be found on page 13.

This brief shares some of the state-specific findings from the report. To access the full report, visit: <https://www.socialventures.org.au/about/publications/targeting-investment-where-it-counts/>.

Priority Queensland communities for investment

Priority communities for Early Childhood Hubs

28 communities in Queensland sit at the nexus of socio-economic disadvantage and childcare deserts. 27 of these communities are regional or remote parts of the state, highlighting the need for targeted infrastructure investment in Early Childhood Hubs to ensure children can access the services and supports they need to thrive.

An additional 28 communities identified as childcare deserts with significant early childhood disadvantage were excluded from the overlay because they have fewer than 50 children in need, or contain a 'hot spot' SA1 for childcare supply using the Mitchell Institute's hot and cold spot analysis.

Priority communities for leveraging existing early childhood infrastructure for holistic or intensive ECEC models

202 communities across Queensland experience high levels of child and family socio-economic disadvantage and developmental vulnerability. Of these, 146 (72%) are not in childcare deserts but still struggle to meet the needs of children experiencing disadvantage. This suggests that simply expanding services is not enough – tailored, high-quality models of support are needed to better respond to community needs.

Disproportionate impact on First Nations communities

Many of the highest-need areas in Queensland have a significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, especially in remote and regional areas. These communities will require an integrated service led by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO). ACCO early years services play a key role in in meeting a child and family's need for a safe space to build cultural pride, confidence and resilience and to build on the strengths and skills of their children.⁴

⁴ Sydenham, E. (2019). Ensuring equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the early years, SNAICC and ECA.

Queensland Government response

SVA is supportive of the Queensland Government's Putting Queensland Kids First Plan and other commitments to improve early childhood development and learning outcomes. SVA also supports the Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership (TQKP) Early Childhood Better Systems Roadmap, which brings a child-centred systems perspective to improving wellbeing outcomes across the first 2,000 days. In particular, we support the recommendation to establish an integrated state-wide network of child and family hubs that includes investment and initiatives to support quality and facilitate better integration in existing hub models and varieties across Queensland, as well as investment to double the number of Early Years Places and integrated school, health and community-based child and family hubs.

The Government has a unique opportunity to transform early childhood by investing in quality Early Childhood Hubs. It is critical that Government and service providers ensure that new services are designed, funded and operated in a way that maximises outcomes for children and families experiencing disadvantage, including those in priority communities identified in this brief.

National recommendations

For all recommendations, deep engagement with identified communities on needs, priorities and gaps in early years supports is a critical first step to better understand and meet the needs of children and their families. This must include a commitment to shared decision making, self determination and cultural governance, in alignment with Closing the Gap Priority Reform One.

- The Commonwealth Government prioritise investment for new infrastructure in the 131 childcare deserts across Australia with high child and family disadvantage and developmental vulnerability.
- When investing in these areas, we recommend building Early Childhood Hubs or ACCO early years services in areas with high Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander populations. These children and families need more than a place in childcare.
- The Commonwealth Government provide funding for the effective and sustainable operation of these Early Childhood Hubs and ACCOs. Dedicated resources to grow and support the ACCO early years sector are also critical.
- The Commonwealth Government invest in a range of quality integrated early learning models in the 520 communities experiencing high child and family disadvantage and developmental vulnerability that are not childcare deserts. These include:
 - ACCO early years services;
 - holistic high-quality ECEC models; and/or
 - highly intensive, quality ECEC models, as detailed in this report.

Appendix

Queensland - Areas that have high early childhood disadvantage and are in a childcare desert

State rank (Hubs need, n=28)	SA2	Remoteness classification	Estimated population of 0-6 year old children in need
1	Aurukun	Very Remote	108
2	Herberton	Outer Regional	54
3	Yarrabah	Outer Regional	311
4	Northern Peninsula	Very Remote	426
5	Tablelands	Outer Regional	51
6	Palm Island	Remote	309
7	Wacol	Major City	143
8	Cape York	Remote	549
9	Burrum - Fraser	Inner Regional	71
10	Bundaberg Surrounds - South	Inner Regional	59
11	Gympie Surrounds	Inner Regional	102
12	Gayndah - Mundubbera	Outer Regional	63
13	Torres	Very Remote	183
14	Bundaberg Surrounds - North	Inner Regional	60
15	Torres Strait Islands	Very Remote	631
16	Gladstone Hinterland	Inner Regional	68
17	Chinchilla	Outer Regional	62
18	Innisfail	Outer Regional	211
19	Central Highlands - East	Outer Regional	273
20	Far South West	Very Remote	65

Queensland - Areas that have high early childhood disadvantage and are in a childcare desert, but have been excluded from the overlay above.

These communities have fewer than 50 children identified as in need, or contain a 'hot spot' SA1 for childcare supply.

State rank (Childhood disadvantage)	SA2	Remoteness Classification	Estimated population of 0–6 year old children in need
10	Mount Morgan	Inner Regional	25
17	Charleville	Very Remote	33
59	Gin Gin	Inner Regional	47
63	Tara	Outer Regional	56
64	Kuranda	Outer Regional	50
72	Point Vernon	Inner Regional	48
74	Southern Downs - East	Inner Regional	11
89	Nanango	Inner Regional	81
111	Maryborough Surrounds - South	Inner Regional	49
118	Booral - River Heads	Inner Regional	22
125	Stanthorpe Surrounds	Outer Regional	37
136	Monto - Eidsvold	Outer Regional	34
141	Kilcoy	Inner Regional	35
146	North Stradbroke Island	Remote	15
150	Northern Beaches	Outer Regional	30
153	Johnstone	Outer Regional	44
159	Miles - Wandoan	Outer Regional	45
160	Southern Downs - West	Inner Regional	35
162	Kingaroy Surrounds - South	Inner Regional	25
163	Clifton - Greenmount	Inner Regional	34
170	Kilkivan	Outer Regional	25
175	Ingham Surrounds	Outer Regional	25
178	Burdekin	Outer Regional	34
180	Crows Nest - Rosalie	Inner Regional	78
184	Babinda	Outer Regional	25
194	Magnetic Island	Outer Regional	9
200	Central Highlands - West	Remote	43
202	Dalrymple	Outer Regional	15

Queensland - Areas that have the highest early childhood disadvantage but are not classified as childcare deserts

State rank (Childhood disadvantage, n=146)	SA2	Remoteness Classification	Estimated population of 0–6 year old children in need
6	Heatley	Outer Regional	57
7	Berserker	Inner Regional	97
11	Svensson Heights - Norville	Inner Regional	62
12	Inala - Richlands	Major City	954
13	Mackay	Inner Regional	39
14	Park Avenue	Inner Regional	46
15	Southern Moreton Bay Islands	Inner Regional	56
16	Wilsonton	Inner Regional	192
18	Leichhardt - One Mile	Major City	207
19	West Gladstone	Inner Regional	61
20	Condon - Rasmussen	Outer Regional	185
21	Cranbrook	Outer Regional	60
22	Lakes Creek	Inner Regional	69
23	Marsden	Major City	348
24	Manoora	Outer Regional	227
25	Kingston (Qld)	Major City	290
26	Carpentaria	Very Remote	451
27	Woree	Outer Regional	86
29	Bundaberg	Inner Regional	88
30	Newtown (Qld)	Inner Regional	144



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