

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 transitions into a light purple line that continues towards the bottom left.

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

Summary brief – Western Australia

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

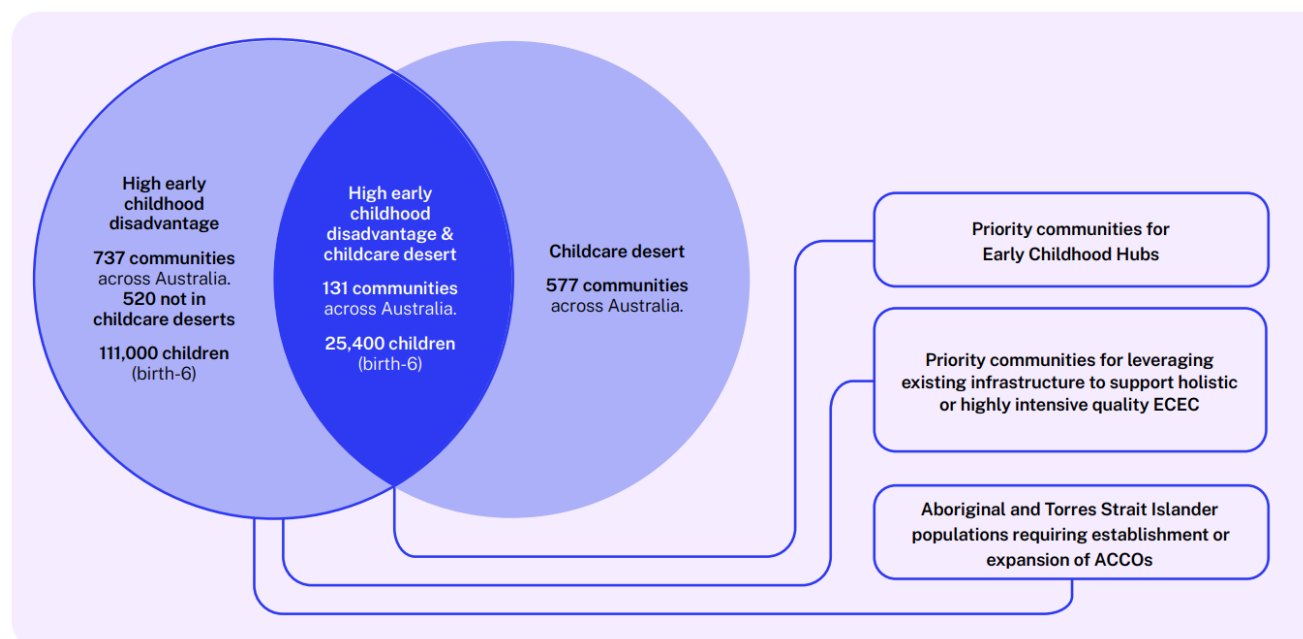
The 520 communities across Australia with high levels of early childhood disadvantage that are not in childcare deserts require attention to better understand and respond to prevailing issues within communities. The response will depend on local need, service availability and the profile of the available 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 Western Australian communities for investment

Priority communities for Early Childhood Hubs

In Western Australia, 27 communities sit at the nexus of early childhood disadvantage and childcare desert and would most benefit from an ECH. 17 of these communities are in regional or remote parts of the state, highlighting the need for targeted regional and remote infrastructure investment in ECHs to ensure children can access the services and supports they need to thrive.

We note that an additional 12 communities identified as childcare deserts with significant early childhood disadvantage were excluded from the research findings 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. All of these communities are regional or remote, and further work is needed to identify how best to support children and families in these locations.

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

65 communities across Western Australia experience high levels of child and family socio-economic disadvantage and developmental vulnerability. Of these, 26 communities 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

Of the communities with high levels of early childhood disadvantage, 28 (43%) have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of 5% or more, with the majority of these in regional and remote areas. These communities would benefit from an integrated service led by an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO). ACCOs 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

Western Australian Government response

Western Australia has a network of 22 Early Childhood Hubs, called Child and Parent Centres (CPCs), located on or near public schools that provide integrated services for children and families. 13 of the CPCs are in the 27 childcare deserts experiencing high early childhood disadvantage.

CPCs offer a range of services for children and families, although the model varies across centres. CPCs have the potential to bridge the gap for families by co-locating essential services, providing warm referrals, and ensuring children receive early interventions to improve long-term outcomes. There is a need to strengthen CPCs to ensure consistent high quality service provision across the state, as well as building new high-quality Early Childhood Hubs in areas most in need.

Western Australia has also committed to the establishment of four full-service schools, a holistic wrap around hub model from birth to end of primary school.

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

Recommendations for the Western Australian Government

SVA recommends the Western Australian Government use this report to guide investment decisions and partner with Commonwealth funding initiatives to ensure every child—no matter where they live—has access to the high-quality early learning support they need to thrive.

(1) Strengthen the Child and Parent Centre model

There are 22 CPCs across the state, with 13 in childcare deserts experiencing high early childhood disadvantage. The model and its impact varies across centres.

- Update and strengthen the CPC model to ensure it operates as a consistent, high-quality ECH model across the state, with strong integration of services and supports.
- Add ECEC (preschool and/or long day care) into the 13 CPCs in childcare deserts with high early childhood disadvantage or explore alternative pathways to meet required ECEC supply.

(2) Prioritise investment in Western Australia's high-need areas

Government funding should be directed towards the 27 communities identified in the report as childcare deserts with high early childhood disadvantage. This includes strengthening CPCs in communities where these exist, including by adding ECEC, and building new ECHs with ECEC in communities without an existing Early Childhood Hub. This could be part of a full service school model.

(3) Support and strengthen Aboriginal-led early learning services

In line with the Western Australian Government's Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) Strategy, it is recommended that the Government should provide sustainable operational funding of new ACCO-led early childhood hubs in regional and remote communities to deliver more culturally responsive services to these communities.

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

Western Australia – Top 20 areas that have high early childhood disadvantage, and are in a childcare desert

State rank (Hubs need, n=27)	SA2	Remoteness Classification	Estimated population of 0–6 year old children in need
1	Meekatharra	Very Remote	119
2	East Pilbara	Very Remote	220
3	Halls Creek	Very Remote	435
4	Roebuck	Very Remote	241
5	Derby - West Kimberley	Very Remote	654
6	Northam	Inner Regional	131
7	Katanning	Outer Regional	103
8	Leinster - Leonora	Very Remote	278
9	Maddington - Orange Grove - Martin	Major City	216
10	Kununurra	Very Remote	380
11	Calista	Major City	87
12	Carnarvon	Very Remote	136
13	South Hedland	Remote	234
14	Balga - Mirrabooka	Major City	497
15	McKail - Willyung	Outer Regional	149
16	Pinjarra	Major City	71
17	Merredin	Outer Regional	63
18	Girrawheen	Major City	178
19	Boulder	Outer Regional	72
20	Gosnells	Major City	404

Western Australia – Regional areas that have high early childhood disadvantage, and are in a childcare desert

State rank (hubs need, n=27)	SA2	Remoteness Classification	Estimated population of 0–6 year old children in need
6	Northam	Inner Regional	131
7	Katanning	Outer Regional	103
15	McKail - Willyung	Outer Regional	149
27	Merredin	Outer Regional	63
19	Boulder	Outer Regional	72
23	Geraldton - East	Outer Regional	106
25	Albany	Outer Regional	90
27	Geraldton	Outer Regional	134

Western Australia – Metropolitan areas that have high early childhood disadvantage, and are in a childcare desert

State rank (hubs need, n=27)	SA2	Remoteness Classification	Estimated population of 0–6 year old children in need
9	Maddington - Orange Grove - Martin	Outer Metropolitan	216
11	Calista	Outer Metropolitan	87
14	Balga - Mirrabooka	Inner Metropolitan	497
16	Pinjarra	Outer Metropolitan	71
18	Girrawheen	Inner Metropolitan	178
20	Gosnells	Outer Metropolitan	404
21	Beckenham - Kenwick - Langford	Outer Metropolitan	267
22	Alexander Heights - Koondoola	Inner Metropolitan	174
24	Cloverdale	Inner Metropolitan	133
26	Stratton - Jane Brook	Outer Metropolitan	74

Western Australia – Areas that have high early childhood disadvantage and are in a childcare desert but have been excluded because they (a) contain fewer than 50 children in need or (b) included a ‘hot spot’* SA1 within the SA2.

State rank (Childhood disadvantage, n=65)	SA2	Remoteness classification	Estimated population of 0-6yo children in need	Reason for exclusion on overlay
11	Toodyay	Inner Regional	26	(a)
26	Plantagenet	Outer Regional	45	(a)
34	Morawa	Remote	43	(a)
35	Waroonna	Inner Regional	35	(a)
41	Narrogin	Outer Regional	38	(a)
48	Dowerin	Outer Regional	40	(a)
52	Wagin	Outer Regional	38	(a)
55	Brookton	Outer Regional	35	(a)
59	Northampton - Mullewa - Greenough	Remote	58	(b)
61	Cunderdin	Outer Regional	28	(a)
62	Kojonup	Outer Regional	43	(a)
65	Gingin - Dandaragan	Outer Regional	45	(a)

* A hot spot analysis identifies where ECEC accessibility is significantly higher compared to surrounding areas. This was measured at the SA1 level and the SA2 was excluded from the shortlist if it contains one or more hot spots.

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

State rank (Childhood disadvantage, n=65)	SA2	Remoteness classification	Estimated population of 0-6 year old children in need
5	Withers - Usher	Inner Regional	97
7	Parmelia - Orelia	Major City	184
9	College Grove - Carey Park	Inner Regional	85
12	Camillo - Champion Lakes	Major City	71
17	Armadale - Wungong - Brookdale	Major City	419
18	Warnbro	Major City	130
19	Cooloongup	Major City	98
20	Greenfields	Major City	97
25	Marangaroo	Major City	124
28	Nollamara - Westminster	Major City	368
31	Thornlie	Major City	258
32	Mandurah - South	Major City	118
33	Mandurah	Major City	131
40	Seville Grove	Major City	135
42	East Bunbury - Glen Iris	Inner Regional	63
43	Cannington - Queens Park	Major City	287
44	Rockingham	Major City	108
45	Kelmscott	Major City	90
46	Beechboro	Major City	216
47	Port Kennedy	Major City	96
49	Willagee	Major City	109
51	Butler - Merriwa - Ridgewood	Major City	270
57	Hamilton Hill	Major City	125
58	Waikiki	Major City	104
60	Bentley - Wilson - St James	Major City	215
64	Swan View - Greenmount - Midvale	Major City	97



Social Ventures Australia

Brisbane | Darwin | Melbourne | Perth | Sydney | ABN 94 100 487 572 | AFSL 428 865

info@socialventures.org.au | socialventures.org.au