



ECIA(VC) Information Sheet July 2007

Council of Australian Governments (COAG)

NATIONAL REFORM AGENDA

Victoria's Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood March 2007

A number of readers will have been involved in the statewide consultations regarding the Plan for Victoria's Children over the last 18 months. During this time, ECIA(VC) committee has also been involved in consultations with the Office for Children, Statewide Outcomes Branch. ECIA(VC) also organised a parent panel to provide input into this plan.

ECIA(VC) president, Dr Susana Gavidia-Payne was present at the release of the formal document. The particular issues regarding the proposed review of ECIS programs and the implementation of a universal, integrated service system, which are at the core of the plan, are being actively discussed with DHS representatives to ensure a partnership approach to any future development and initiatives.

This paper summarises the main points for those with an interest in ECIS programs.

The full 53 page document is available at:

<http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/CA256D8000265E1A/page/Listing-Home+Page+News-Victoria%27s+plan+to+improve+outcomes+in+early+childhood!OpenDocument>

SUMMARY POINTS:

Premier's Overview (page 2):

The paper sets out a 10 year plan for laying a foundation for a brighter future for Children. The framework has 4 policy directions, namely:

- > Improving antenatal care
 - > Strengthening health development and learning of children 1-5 years
 - > Enhancing provision of early childhood education and care
 - > Improving the early years workforce.
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Actions are listed under these four policy directions to achieve an integrated, high quality, accessible early childhood service system with

- > A more professional workforce
- > Stronger universal early learning services
- > Better targeting of resources to disadvantaged children that shows a sensitive and responsive to the needs of a diverse range of children and families.

Background and Context (sections 1&2)

The plan acknowledges the research and implications regarding:

- > the developing brain
- > family environment and child development
- > effects of disadvantage on child development
- > the economics of human capital formation (social and economic benefits of investing in the early years).

The Government's role and responsibility in supporting a comprehensive, effective and responsive service system is described. A service system to support effective parenting, sustain and improve health and development of children from antenatal to formal child care settings, to transition to school is envisaged. This description includes the work of improving outcomes and addressing inequalities in service provision for those at risk of developmental delay.

The policy context for the plan includes: *Growing Victoria Together, A Fairer Victoria* and the *Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework*.

The Early Childhood services covered in the plan include:

- > Maternal and Child Health
- > Parenting Support Services
- > Child Care
- > Kindergarten
- > Children's Centres
- > Best Start

With particular targeted areas being:

- > Koori Maternity services
- > Early Childhood Intervention Services
- > Family intervention services.

General measures of progress are mentioned for each policy direction. Examples include the proportion of children born healthy, the proportion of children acquiring basic skills, an increase in workforce participation for parents with children under 5 years of age. One challenge noted is the need to agree on outcome measures of children's progress.

The Process (page 22):

- > COAG National Reform Agenda – released April 2007
- > Commonwealth Government to Release a Response to this Plan.
- > Victorian Government to develop the implementation and funding plan with priorities and jurisdictions. Local government will be involved in the planning.

The Commonwealth and State Governments are to share the costs of reform. The degree of Commonwealth government contribution will affect the pace and scale of reform.

In the interim Section 4 lists an overview of the expected actions with recommendations for Commonwealth and State Government responsibilities.

Section 4: The plan for each policy direction (pages 23-45)

53 Actions under each policy direction are noted with recommendations for either Victorian Government Commitment, Commonwealth Government Implementation or Commonwealth Support.

Actions of general interest include:

- > Support to Maternal and Child Health Services
- > Support to local government Municipal Early Year Plans
- > Expanding newborn hearing screening to all maternity hospitals
- > Two new checks for learning and development are proposed: between 18 months and 3 years, and in the first year of school.
- > More resources for non-government organisations and local government to provide innovative support programs for parents.
- > With regard to preschool and child care, an effort by government, public and private service providers, professional associations and unions to drive and enforce a quality framework is recommended.
- > There are a large number of actions proposed regarding staff qualifications, access and affordability in child care and kindergarten.

Actions relating to Early Childhood Intervention Services include:

- > Emphasis on service integration, moving away from stand alone facilities, removing barriers between ECIS, early childhood services, family support and child protection (page 30)
 - > Priority to review ECIS to develop a more robust and efficient system of ECI that can respond to the growing demand (page 32)
 - > Victorian government calling on Commonwealth to increase investment in disability services.
 - > Increased investment for the greater demand for ECI, building secondary and tertiary services into the universal system.
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Specific Actions for ECI are Actions 14 and 15 (pages 32 and 33):

“Action 14:

Victoria recommends comprehensively reviewing services and support for children with developmental concerns, including Early Childhood Intervention Services.”

“Action 15:

The Victorian Government has already committed to:

- > Providing an extra 150 Early Intervention places each year, so that children can access support more quickly.
- > Providing 150 new Enhanced Early Intervention packages, each year, for children with autism and other high support needs. Enhanced Early Intervention packages will enable children with these more complex needs to access therapy services in addition to those already provided to them through regular Early Intervention Services.”

Concluding Comments from ECIA: *There is obviously much to be done here and ECIA(VC) will keep members informed. We are currently involved in discussions with the State government to ensure that all views are considered, especially in light of Action 14. Should you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact us on eciavic@bigpond.com*
