

Early Learning Strategy – YourSAy consultation report

Summary of YourSAy surveys, discussion
board comments and formal
submissions



Early Learning Strategy – YourSAy Consultation Report

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Purpose

Public feedback was encouraged via the [Early Learning Strategy \(ELS\) YourSAy](#) consultation on the best ways to support early childhood learning and child development. YourSAy feedback channels included a survey tool, discussion board comments and online written submissions.

Strategy development was informed by the following 'in scope' themes:

- Preschool programs to support children's learning and development before school.
- Monitoring developmental milestones to ensure children are 'on track' as they start school.
- Support for parents to help their child's learning and development.

This paper summarises YourSAy engagement feedback and data analysis, building on other consultation and engagement activities, to identify key themes which may inform policy areas and shortlisting, and topics for additional research.

Background

The Early Learning Strategy

The ELS began development in early 2020. The objective of the ELS is to support learning and development for children during the early years of life (birth to five years of age). The public provided feedback through the [YourSAy](#) website.

YourSAy Consultation

Online engagement was hosted on YourSAy from 23 November 2020 to 22 January 2021. A total of 68,300 people were reached through social media and the YourSAy newsletter. This generated 5,547 visits to the YourSAy website.

The following YourSAy feedback has been used to inform this report:

- 21 comments made on the online discussion board
- 15 email submissions (13 from various organisations and 2 from individuals)
- 602 survey responses (the survey contained 21 items containing single and multiple choice answers, Likert scale questions, and open-ended responses. The full instrument and its introduction can be seen in Appendix 1, and introductions to the survey can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Text on YourSAy website.

We're creating an Early Learning Strategy to support learning and development for children during the early years of life.

We want your views on what you believe are the key issues and opportunities in the following areas:

- **Preschool programs** to support children's learning and development before school.
- **Monitoring developmental milestones** to ensure children are 'on track' as they start school.
- **Support for parents** to help their child's learning and development.

Key points

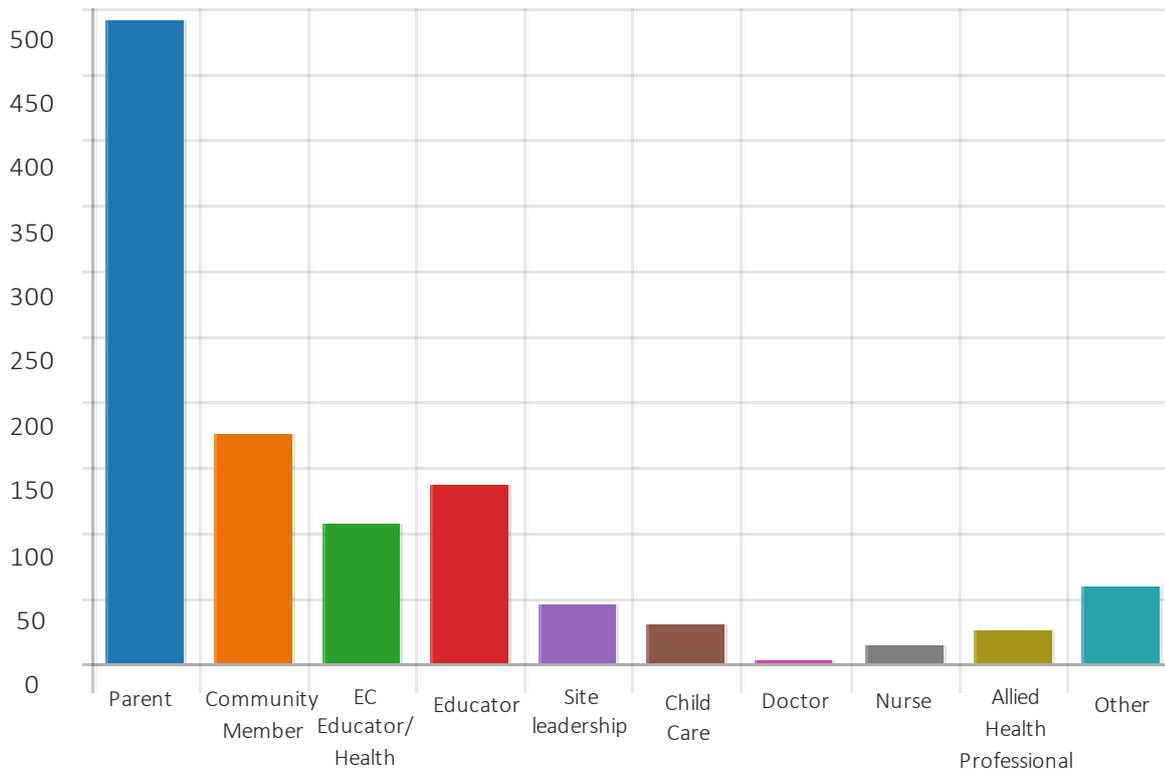
Overall key points include:

- The survey respondents were a fair representation of the South Australian population in terms of geography and roles, however, a far greater proportion of respondents were female.
- Respondents overwhelmingly supported the importance of preschool, and health and development checks for children, and accessible support for parenting.
- Key markers of quality preschool for the responses included a developmentally appropriate curriculum, ratios adults to children, play-based learning and natural environments.
- Responses indicated that preschool services could be enhanced by offering wrap-around care and better integration with health services.
- There were references to the impact of medical specialist wait-times when there are concerns with children's development and learning.
- The role of interaction with educators and teachers, access to support materials (books and articles) and advice from health professionals were valued to support parenting.
- Submissions were received from government, non-government, peak bodies and individuals.
- These submissions focused predominately on the following themes:
 - Support for child development
 - Parent education and learning
 - Preschool and school transition
 - 3-year-old preschool
 - Workforce (professional development).

Who responded?

Survey respondents were asked demographic information such as their age, gender and local council area. The majority of respondents were parents (81.4%), followed by those who work in early childhood education/care/health (45.2%), community members (29.1%), site leadership (7.6%), and doctors/nurses/allied health professionals (6.8%)¹ – see **Figure 2**

Figure 2: Roles in which people responded to survey (n=602).

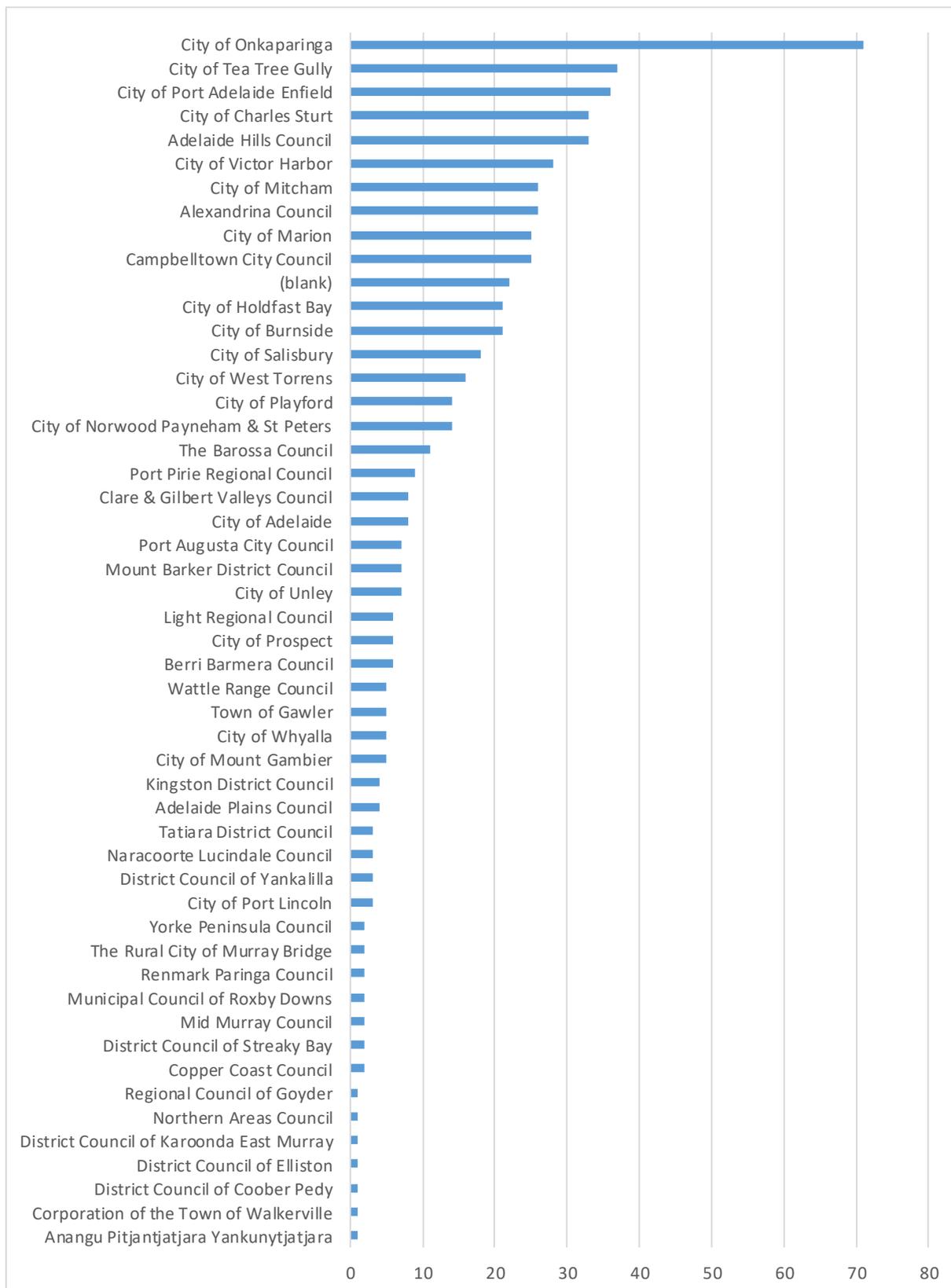


The majority of survey respondents were female (87%). The age of respondents ranged from less than 18 years of age, to more than 65 years of age. The majority (44%) of respondents were aged between 35 and 45 years of age. There were 10 respondents who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI; 1.7%).

Figure 3 shows a wide range of local councils represented in survey responses. There are 69 local councils in South Australia, and responses were received from 51 (73.9%) of these, providing a reasonably representative snapshot. The councils that were not represented in the survey responses are listed in Appendix 2, the majority of which are from outer regional areas with small populations. Of the councils who were not represented, there were responses from neighbouring council areas.

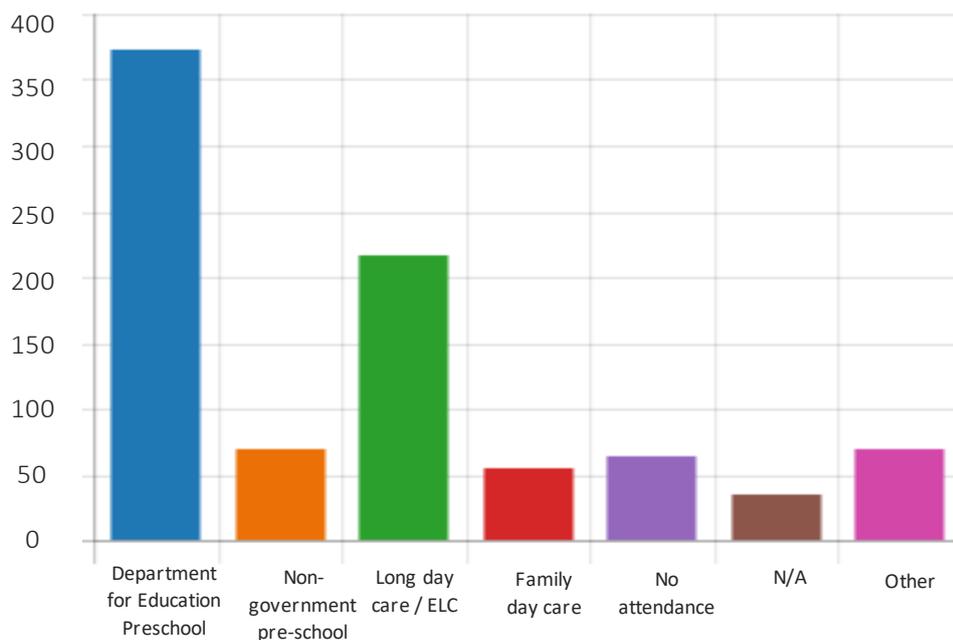
¹ Due to ability to choose more than one option in many items, figures in this report may not equal 100%.

Figure 3: Respondents' local councils (n=602).



Survey respondents were asked which type of early childhood education and care services their child attends. The majority attended a Department for Education preschool, followed by long day care/early learning centre. Note that respondents could choose more than one option.

Figure 4: Attendance at Early Childhood Education and Care Services (n=602).

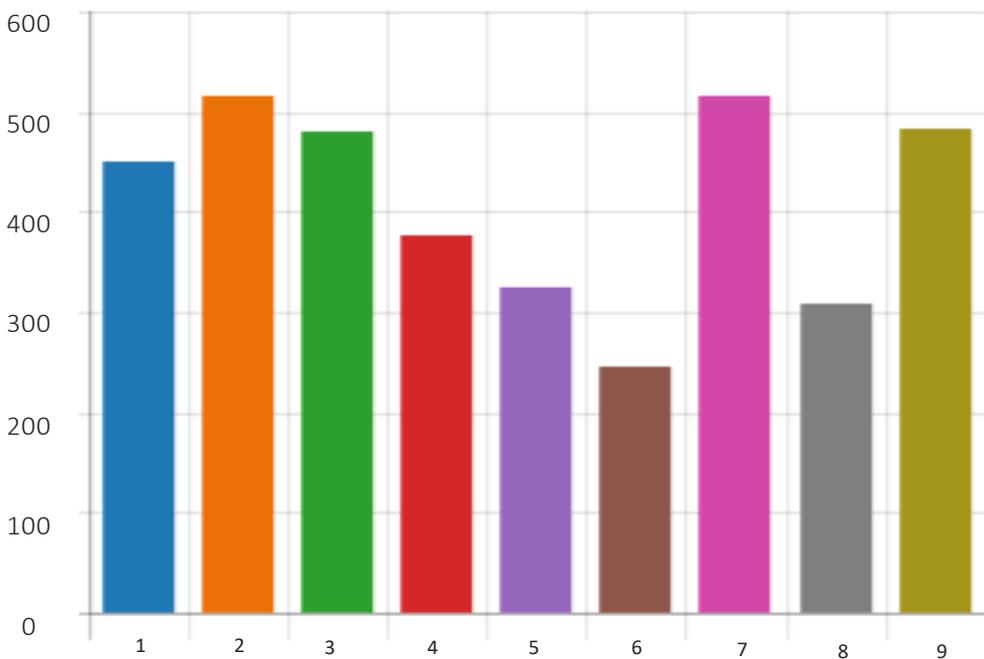


What did they say about Preschool?

Preschool quality

Respondents could choose more than one marker of preschool quality. The most popular response was a developmentally/age appropriate curriculum (85.7%), followed by the physical environment (85.5%), and the range of resources for children (80.4%). Less popular was governance and the opportunities to be involved in decisions, though more than 40% of respondents (245) still chose this option.

Figure 5. Markers of pre-school quality (n=602).



Note.

- 1 - Adult interactions with children
- 2 - Physical environment at the service
- 3 - Staff ratios / group sizes
- 4 - Consistency of staff / history of service
- 5 - Leadership
- 6 - Governance and opportunities to be involved in decisions
- 7 - Developmentally / age appropriate curriculum
- 8 - Family / parenting support at the service
- 9 - Range of resources for children
- 10 – Other

The importance of preschool

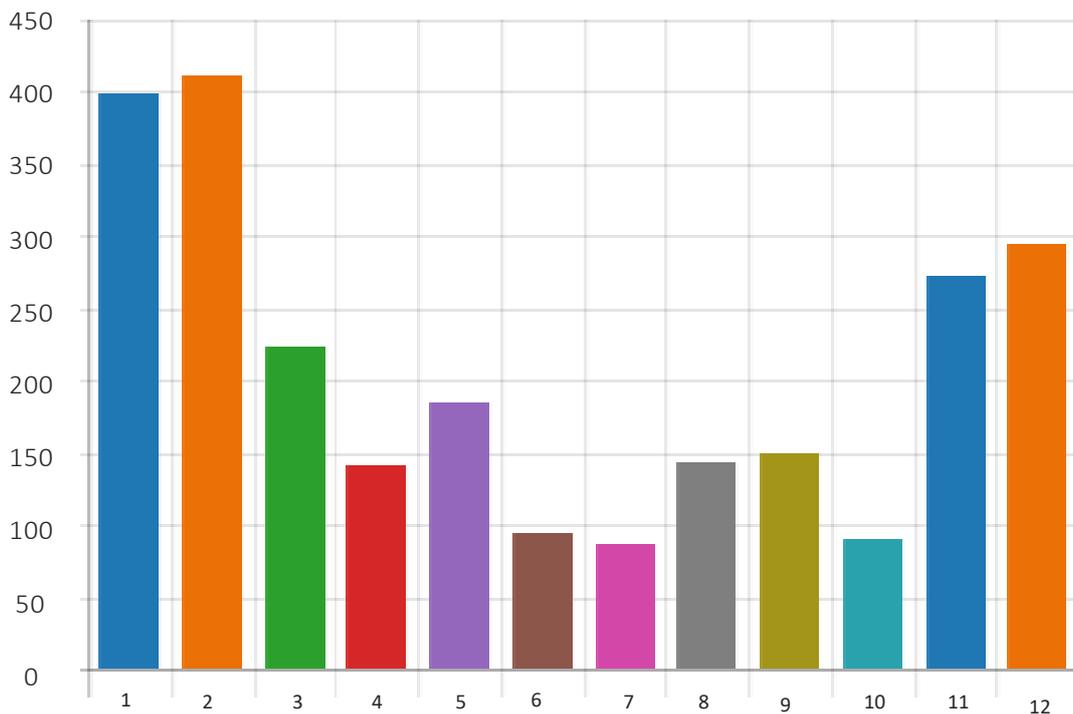
“I think attending preschool is important for children's education.”

The vast majority (95%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, while 3.3% were neutral and 1.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Key factors in preschool choice

Regarding which factors influences their choice of preschool, as Figure 6 demonstrates the majority of respondents chose the service’s reputation or word of mouth (68.3%), followed by its location (66.3%), providing a supportive transition to school (49%), and the service’s particular approach e.g. Nature Play, Montessori, Reggio Emilia (49%). Likewise, 30.7% respondents chose the National Quality Standard Rating as a key factor.

Figure 6. Key factors in preschool choice (n=602).



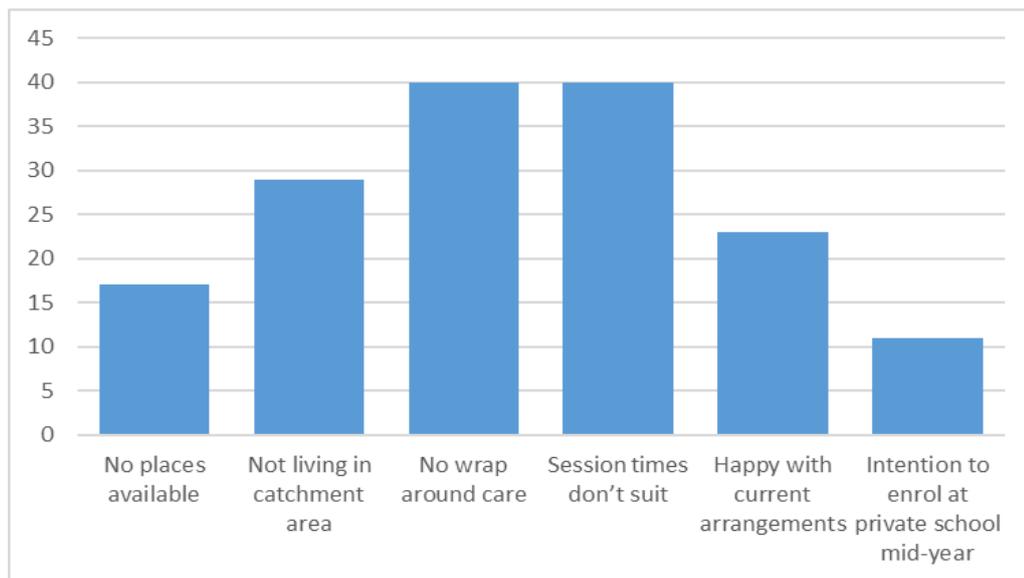
Note.

- 1 - Service location
- 2 - Service reputation or word of mouth
- 3 - Session days / times
- 4 - Service is co-located on a school site where children will / are already going to school
- 5 - National Quality Standard Rating
- 6 - Long day care offered
- 7 - Access to Out of Hours School Care (OHSC)
- 8 - Department for Education Service
- 9 - Cost
- 10 - Cultural links
- 11 - Particular approach e.g. Nature Play, Montessori, Reggio Emilia
- 12 - Support transition to school

Department for Education preschools

One of the survey questions asked about the reason why their child is not/would not be attending a Department preschool. While the majority (43.2%) of respondents indicated this item was not applicable to them, other responses (shown in Figure 7) related to a lack of wrap-around care (6.6%), not living in catchment area (4.8%), unsuitable session times (6.6%), being happy with current arrangements (3.8%), and intention to enrol at a private school mid-year (1.8%).

Figure 7: Reasons for non-attendance at a Department preschool (n=602).



Overall views on preschool

Respondents' overall views about preschool included:

- key factors were teaching and learning approaches, learning environments, support for parenting, the age children are able to start preschool, the educators at the service and transition to school.
- accessibility of Department preschools for working parents.
- access to play-based learning, and the presence of nature in the physical environment for preschools.

Teaching and learning approaches

"Focus should be play based learning and not based on a strict curriculum".

Female, 35-45, Burnside, Parent / Doctor.

"I believe in a play based curriculum that focuses on children developing dispositions of learning, and educators that focus on children's interest and not withdrawing children for standardised testing. Educators who are passionate about early childhood education and spend time with children building connections with children and families".

Female, 35-45, City of Tea Tree Gully, Teacher / Early Childhood Worker

<i>“Think the department needs to be a lot more active to promote our preschools and the markers of quality and curriculum as families are getting confused thinking childcare are offering ‘Preschool programs’ - they are vastly different!”</i>	Female, 35-45, The Barossa Council, Teacher / Early Childhood Worker
<i>“Preschool needs to be about teaching children using a play based curriculum and not forcing learning on them that is above their developmental level”.</i>	Female, 35-45, City of Salisbury, Site Leadership
<i>“Play based activities and opportunity for sensory and nature based activities are really important”</i>	Female, 35-45, City of West Torrens, Parent

Physical Learning Environment and Resources

<i>“More attention needs to be given to the outdoor space available for children at long day care and preschool.”</i>	Female, 35-45, Norwood Payneham St Peters, Parent
<i>“Preschool needs to have plenty of access to nature based play - wooden equipment prefers, sandpit, animals, and vegetables.”</i>	Female, 35-45, Adelaide Hills Council, Parent / Allied Health Professional
<i>“I love the nature play/loose parts approach at our local kindy and kids learning through play.”</i>	Female, 35-45, Clare & Gilbert Valleys Council, Parent

Support with children’s learning and development

<i>“Parents understanding of what preschools serve to do is often misunderstood or not known, having more of a strategic look at how to engage parents at this early stage will be beneficial to build on parents knowledge and connects them to their child's learning, which is better to do in the early years so it flows through as they transition through school”.</i>	Female, 46-54, City of Charles Sturt, Parent / Work in Education
<i>“Many children remain undiagnosed while at Preschool yet Educators are still working over time and going above and beyond to support children and families to set children up with their best possible start. But they need support and funding to be able to staff sites to cater to the needs of all children!!!”</i>	Female, 26-34, Charles Sturt, Parent

Age at Preschool

<i>“I wish they could access preschool for 2 years prior to school.”</i>	Female, 46-54, Wattle Range, Parent / Work in Education
<i>“I think the preschool starting ... could be reduced to 3.”</i>	Female, 35-45, Port Pirie, Parent / Work in Education, Site Leadership

"I feel the opportunity should exist for a second year of preschool if teachers and parents feel child is not developmentally ready for starting school."

Female, 35-45, Adelaide Hills,
Parent / Early Childhood
Worker, School Services Officer

"Let the children start when they turn 4, almost 5 is too old for Preschool."

Female, 35-45, Yankalilla,
Parent

Staff / leadership

"Needs to be valued more and funded/staffed accordingly."

Female, 55-65, Karoonda East
Murray, Teacher / Early
Childhood Worker / School
Services Officer

"I think the quality of Preschool is very much decided by the training and experience that the staff have had and the quality of the leadership overseeing the staff".

Female, 55-65, City of Burnside,
Work in Education

"Preschool is vitally important for so many reasons. South Australia has always had a long and proud tradition of preschool and of being early childhood leaders within Australia".

Male, 46-54, City of Port
Adelaide Enfield, Parent / Child
Care Educator or Leader

"Caring and enthusiastic staff who understand the whole child, particularly children's social emotional needs is important".

Female, 46-54, City of Victor
Harbor, Allied Health
Professional

Transition to school

"Preschool is valuable for children's positive development and to support successful transitions to school".

Female, 26-34, City of
Onkaparinga, Parent / Early
Childhood Worker / School
Services Officer

"Preschool plays a strategically critical role in preparing the child for the transition to primary school".

Male, 65+, no council selected,
Grandparent

Accessibility of preschool / barriers

"...session times are difficult for a family of both parents working full time. That year was particularly challenging for drop-off and pick-up times. I understand the sites may not be able to offer OSHC, but longer sessions would have been better, instead of 1/2 days weekly or 1 full day fortnightly."

Female, 46-54, West Torrens,
Parent

"[With] parents both working it is important that we have Department for Education kindy's with child care attached. Our child could only attend kindy as it had child care on offer also otherwise she would of stayed just at child care. We also were lucky enough to attend a Children's Centre that offered parenting workshops and got to attend a speech workshops."

Female, 46-54, Yankalilla,
Parent

"The government model does not meet the needs of working families, which is most families these days, they need to move with the times, there's no mums at home to do a midday pick up or drop off."

Female, 26-34, Mitcham,
Parent / Child Care Educator
or Leader

"...the downfall for most young families is lack of transport and a means to get children to site."

Female, 46-54, Port Augusta,
Grandparent / Case Worker

Service integration

"Preschools that are connected to other services which give support for young families are an important asset. Being able to access playgroup, health assistance such as OT, speech and other family care needs is less confronting for parents if they are available on site."

Female, 46-54, Playford,
Grandparent / Work in
Education

Submissions relating to preschool

Respondents' overall views about preschool programs included:

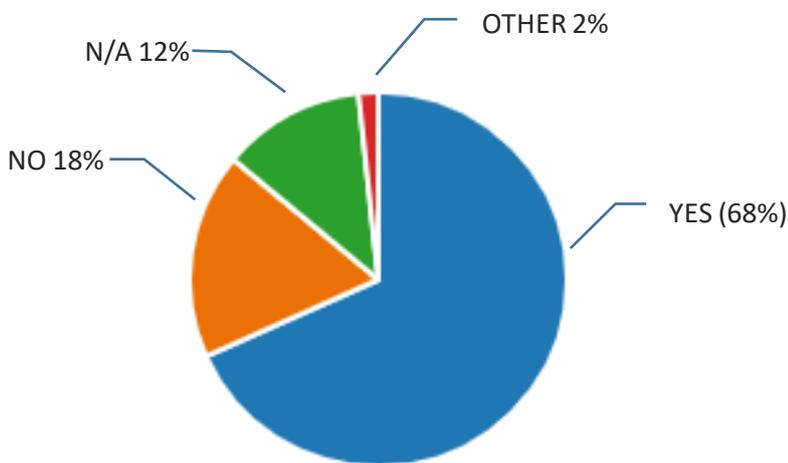
- the expansion of eligibility for universal access to preschool to the 3-year-old cohort. Some believed this should be extended to the whole cohort or eligibility should be rolled out over time and to only include the most vulnerable initially.
- overwhelming support for the extension of eligibility for early childhood education and care services to three year olds in some form.
- comparatively lower levels of 3-year-olds currently enrolled in government preschools in comparison to other Australian jurisdictions, pointing to pilot programs in Victoria, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory.
- support for universal access for 3-year-olds would be beneficial, however, they were concerned that the costs associated with this step may be prohibitive and recommended a limited trial to evaluate the efficacy of that approach.

What did they say about child health and development?

“Children's health and development checks support parenting.”

Almost a third of survey respondents (65.3%) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, 25.2% were neutral and 8.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed². Figure 8 shows the majority of children had had a health and development check (68%).

Figure 8. Children attending health checks.

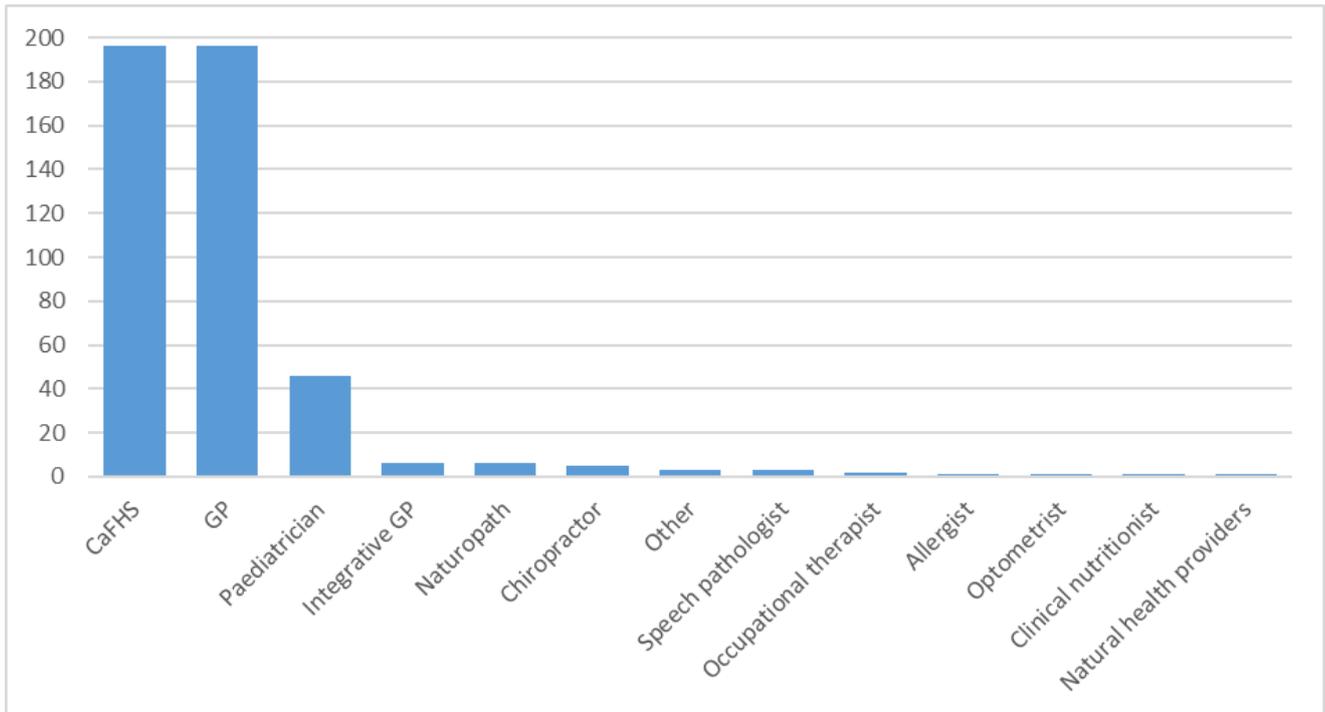


Respondents could choose more than one. Preferred suppliers options included GPs (36%); Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS; 33%); paediatrician (12%); or other (4%) such as integrated GPs, naturopaths, chiropractors, speech therapists, and occupational therapists – see Figure 9.

When they accessed health and development checks, more than half responded said they did so in line with the 'My Health and Development Record' (Blue Book) recommendations' (51.8%), and a third (33.1%) of respondents chose 'When I had any other concerns'. As more than one answer was able to be selected, a large number of respondents chose both 'in line with the blue book' and 'when I had any other concerns'.

² The remainder did not respond to this item.

Figure 9. Preferred provider for health and development (n=602).



Reasons for not accessing child health/developmental checks/services

Two open-ended health survey items asked for reasons why families have not accessed health services, and for general comments in relation to child health and development.

Many survey respondents indicated lack of knowledge of how and where to access checks as a reason for not accessing child health/development checks. Other respondents stated they felt confident to monitor their own child's development and would seek or had sought follow up when required.

Many survey respondents interpreted this question as asking reasons for not accessing *government-type* health and development checks, such as visits with CaFHS nurses. Families rely on the health checks undertaken at their education/care service and that COVID interrupted that service in 2020. Many respondents referred to a gap in CaFHS services, saying they were geared towards when the child is a newborn and infant. Response also indicated concerns with being judged and difficulty in accessing services.

Respondents also raised concerns about feeling judged by the CaFHS nurses in relation to, for example, general parenting, eating and sleeping, non-alignment in views about parenting and immunisation choices.

Lack of knowledge

"We didn't know much about it. We were back go[ing] to work. It was easier to just get help if something was wrong through the GP."

Female, 46-54, City of West Torrens, Parent

"Unsure when and how to access"

Female, 35-45, City of Tea Tree Gully, Work in Education and care or early childhood health service / Site Leadership;

Seeking support when required

"I tend to initiate check ups if I'm concerned regarding any areas of development".

Female, 35-45, City of Tea Tree Gully, Parent / Nurse

"Our children are healthy, happy and bright. They do not need checks unless for some reason I become concerned"

Female, 26-34, City of Holdfast Bay, Parent

COVID

"[A health check is] on the to-do list. COVID restrictions delayed it."

Female, 35-45, City of Marion, Parent

"CaFHS cancelled preschool visits due to COVID."

Female, 26-34, Campbelltown City Council, Parent / Allied Health Professional

"COVID meant the preschool ones were cancelled and there was never a catch-up opportunity."

Female, 35-45, City of Tea Tree Gully, Parent

"COVID effected the 4 year old checks as they were done at kindy. These are very important and have picked up health issues with my kids."

Female, 35-45, Clare & Gilbert Valleys Council, Parent

Feelings of being judged

“Being judged, projecting of answers based on the Nurse’s opinion (about sleeping and diet, for example) as opposed to what the baby needed (emotionally and physically).”

Female, 35-45, City of West Torrens, Parent

“...as a young parent I did not like being judged by some service providers.”

Female, 35-45, Port Augusta City Council, Parent / Community Service Worker

“Too much judgement and anxiety given to vulnerable parents who should trust their own instincts and not be so wrapped up on ages and milestones ... I also believe the nurses who provide these checks have a primarily have a nursing background therefore it’s all medical bases rather than developmental/cultural/holistic to the whole child.”

Female, 26-34, City of Victor Harbor, Parent / Early Childhood Worker / School Services Officer

“As someone who has studied perinatal mental health and attachment parenting I did not always feel in alignment with the perspectives of judgemental staff. Some brilliant, most were not.

Female, 35-45, City of Tea Tree Gully, Parent / Allied Health Professional

It did not instil parental intuition and undermined parental choice at times. This impacts mental health of the parent. I feel that I was lucky to have an awareness of this and was not fragile but others could be.”

Access

“Parents work full time and are not able to access these during times required”

Female, 65+, City of Onkaparinga, Grandparent

“Not aware of any around here”

Female, 46-54, City of Alexandrina, Parent

“Lack of services in the country”

Female, 35-45, Port Augusta, Parent / Teacher

Overall views on child development

Respondents’ overall views about child health and development included:

- health checks being provided alongside care was a strong theme
- long wait times for follow up services where needs were identified at the checks, and the gap in CaFHS support emerged.
- Aboriginal health and helping vaccination rates.
- the value of the ‘Blue Book’, accessibility of health services and the importance of mental health
- importance and valuing of health checks and the CaFHS service

- sense of isolation for some families and seeking additional support.

Long wait times

- “The child development unit waiting list for assessment is far too long at present. Early intervention is not possible if children have to wait 6-12 months to have initial assessments.”* Female, 46-54, City of Tea Tree Gully, Parent / Teacher / Early Childhood Worker / School Services Officer
- “Checks at preschool support families and staff in accessing referrals for children are great, but the wait times are so long. Better however than having gone to a GP and being told 'to wait and see' or 'not to worry.’”* Female, 65+, City of Port Adelaide Enfield, Teacher / Early Childhood Worker / School Services Officer
- “It sometimes hard to weed out the information you need. Accessing the right service depending on your child can be a lengthy process if there are problems found with child's health and development.”* Female, 55-65, City of Whyalla, Grandparent / Teacher / Early Childhood Worker / School Services Officer

A gap in CaFHS support

- “...need to take a longitudinal approach to assisting parents... It seems to be "are you meeting developmental benchmarks? Y/N" it needs to stretch further into the future.”* Male, 46-54, City of Onkaparinga, Parent / Teacher / Early Childhood Worker / School Services Officer

Health checks alongside care

- “Would be great to have these based at local long day care and preschool services.”* Female, 46-54, City of West Torrens, Work in Education and Care
- “These checks need to be offered in long day care services that provide preschool / kindy ... assisting parents in getting children's development checked regularly to allow better access to early intervention when needed.”* Female, 26-34, Adelaide Hills Council, Parent / Child Care Educator or Leader
- “Disappointing that CaFHS services provided 'in house' at Kindergartens is reducing each year “* Female, 26-34, Naracoorte Lucindale Council, Parent
- “It would have been great if there were vision and hearing checks done at government kindy.”* Female, 35-45, City of Adelaide, Parent

“Provision of health and development checks need to be available and easily accessible for all families. Providing those checks on preschool sites helps to facilitate access for families.”

Female, 55-65, Naracoorte
Lucindale Council, Teacher /
Early Childhood Worker / School
Services Officer

“More preschools should offer speech and language programs.”

Female, 46-54, Adelaide Hills
Council, Parent

“There is a definite rise in the number of children reaching Preschool who have some sort of undiagnosed developmental delay..... we need to find ways to identify these developmentally vulnerable children sooner and to engage, support and educate families about childhood development and where to access support when needed..... A more unified service between health and education from an early age would be helpful.”

JR – Dashboard Response

The blue book

“The blue book has been very helpful.”

Female, 35-45, Campbelltown
City Council, Parent

“It should be in the blue book the best time to enrol your child in preschool. As first time parents are missing out on spots in local catchments as the letters of offers go out earlier in the year and you don't realise.”

Female, 35-45, City of Playford,
Parent / Site Leadership /
Teacher

Aboriginal health

“Put more money into Aboriginal children's health including the options to access traditional bush medicine and health carers alongside non-Aboriginal medicine.”

Female, 55-65, City of Holdfast
Bay, Parent / Work in Education
and Care

Health Service Accessibility, isolation and seeking support

“There is always an issue around vulnerable families and their transport availability and support to attend appointments.”

Female, no age give, no LCA
given, Parent

“Parents are so isolated now, and pushed back to work so quickly that we often don't get to maintain a "village", or support group. “

Female, 26-34, City of
Onkaparinga, parent / member
of the community

Value of CaFHS and health checks

<i>“CAFHS were amazing and I am only realising this as we have moved to the country and have no access to CAFHS in our district”</i>	Female, 46-54, District of Yankalilla, parent
<i>“Preschool health checks are absolutely essential. My daughters’ vision issues were picked up at this check.”</i>	Female, 55-65, District of Karoonda East Murray, Teacher / Early Childhood Worker (ECW) / School Services Officer (SSO)
<i>“CAFHS developmental health checks and drop-in clinics supported us greatly as parents. It gave us reassurance that our children were developmentally on track and we were able to discuss parenting concerns and access trusted information.”</i>	Male, 46-54, City of Port Adelaide Enfield, Parent, Child Care educator or leader
<i>“I think that having CaFHS milestone ages and stages checks are a huge assistance for families. The checks can pick up any developmental issues early and they can then be address with early intervention. Ages and stages at the different milestones can monitor the progression of those interventions and if further assessments from Infant Development team at a hospital need to be done. CaFHS and Family Home Visiting is a crucial part of the team around the child and family.”</i>	Female, 55-65, City of Charles Sturt, Parent, Member of the community, Work in Education and care or early childhood health service, Teacher / Early Childhood Worker (ECW) / School Services Officer (SSO), Child Care educator or leader, Home visiting Fieldworker LT@H

Mental Health

<i>“I’m glad to see more focus in primary schools on mindfulness and mental health. I think all primary schools should have a specialist mental health advocate/position for young people to visit. This would likely help with the trajectories of ‘at risk’ young people much more effectively.”</i>	Female, 35-45, City of Salisbury, Parent
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Submissions relating to child development

Submissions related to Child Development:

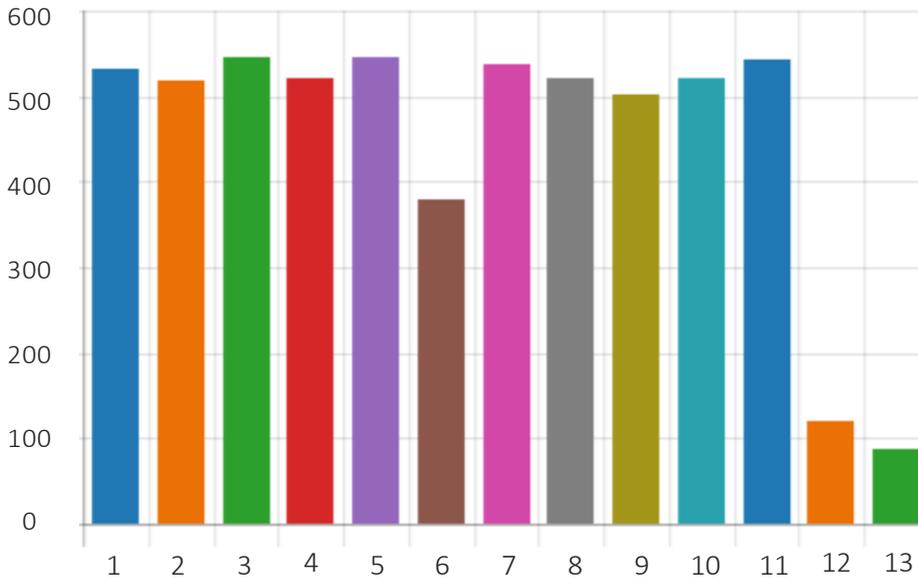
- Increased and improved support for children regarding developmental vulnerabilities and health was highlighted by both individuals and organisations. This was focused not only on education; but also related to health, functional vulnerabilities, and links to service provision.
- Encouragement to government to adopt a birth to five approach to addressing vulnerability and suggested early intervention is key. It was further pointed out that currently a number of children were not receiving health and development checks.
- Reframe how child development was viewed, stating that population wide monitoring of child development should not be considered a cost but an investment.
- Strengthen partnerships across government and non-government sectors to help increase the proportion of children developmentally on track.

- Focused support on specific cohorts, such as Aboriginal children or children in positions of disadvantage.
- Adequate support provided to regional and remote early education centres, with location not being a factor.

What did they say about parenting support?

Survey respondents were asked what they thought was important for children’s development and learning. Respondents could choose more than one answer, and seen in Figure 10, many responses were popular. Less popular responses included attending playgroup, and children learning naturally and not needing much help.

Figure 10. What is important for child development and learning? (n=602)



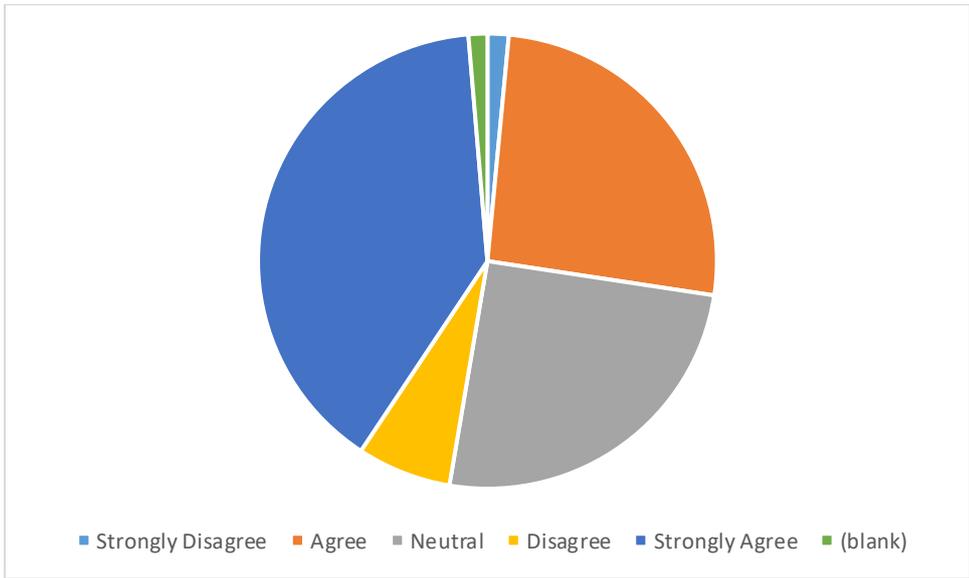
Note.

- 1-Reading to my child every day
- 2-Having books in the home
- 3-Talking with my child about everyday events
- 4-Asking questions
- 5-Interacting with other children and families
- 6-Attending playgroup
- 7-Attending an early childhood service e.g. kindergarten/ child care
- 8-Family outings e.g. to the local park
- 9-Having routines
- 10-Setting clear expectations and boundaries
- 11-Self-regulation skills (ability to share, manage emotions, calm self when upset, get along with others etc)
- 12-Children learn naturally, they don't need much help
- 13-Other

Only two thirds (65.3%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with children’s health and development checks supporting their parenting, while 25.2% were neutral and 8.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed³ - see Figure 11 below.

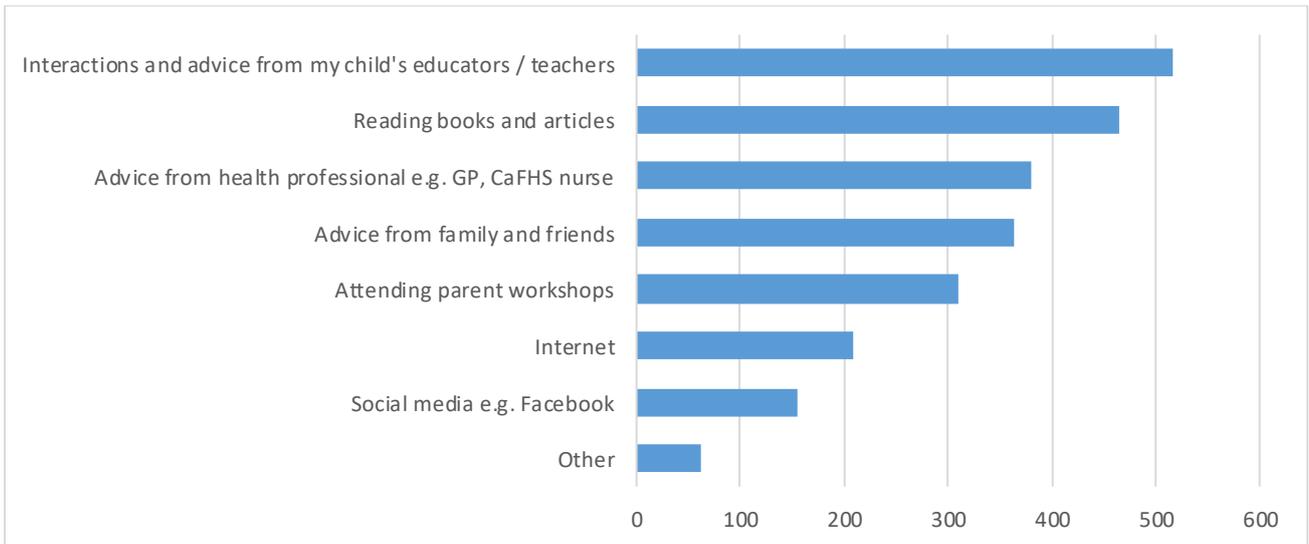
³ The remainder did not respond.

Figure 11. Agreement with statement "Children's health and development checks support parenting."



In terms of what respondents said supports them in providing development and learning to their children; educator advice, books and articles, and health professional guidance were the most popular responses – see Figure 12 below.

Figure 12. What helps parents/carers support their child's development and learning? (n=602)



Overall views on parenting support

Several themes were identified for each type of child care/education service that provides parenting support.

- integrated services with wrap-around care and health services would help to support working parents
- importance of parents as first teachers
- playgroups, Children's Centres,
- challenges for working families
- gender equality and the impact of geographic location.

Indicative quotes are given below.

Importance of parents as first teachers

"The most important thing in the life and learning of young children is their family, their parents, their home. If we want to be effective we need to support families and children in families."

BS – Dashboard Response

"The children get their initial education from the family"

NN – Dashboard Response

Playgroups

"I have noticed that there are no playgroups in our area that promote child health and development and it's much needed".

Female, 35-44, City of Victor Harbor, Parent / Allied Health Professional

"Our local Learning Together offers great support to families. Playgroups are a great way to meet other families and for children to play in a happy and safe environment".

Female, 46-54, Wattle Range Council, Parent / Work in Education and Care

Children's Centres

"I would go to a children's centre that run programs which fit with the philosophy of how I want to raise my children".

Female, 35-44, City of Holdfast Bay, Parent/Allied Health Professional

"We talked with our child's educators, the Community Development Co-ordinator, Family Services Practitioner and CAFHS nurses at our Children's Centre. We talked with other parents at playgroups, we accessed information through Parenting Easy guides, and internet sites such as Raising Children Network".

Male, 46-54, City of Port Adelaide Enfield, Parent / Child Care Educator or Leader

"Children's Centres are great, but not enough of them".

Female, 35-45, The Barossa Council, Parent

Working parents

"Parent support through the provision of playgroup is also beneficial. I do think more could be provided through preschools accessing more social activities to support parents. For working parents though this can be a bit tricky to participate in."

Female, no age given, Campbelltown City Council, Parent

"I would love to see a comprehensive B-12 approach to education, inclusive of health and parenting support. As much as I love standalone kindergartens for their adorableness, they are a little outdated as working parents need before and after care. I'm not in favour of a rack em pack em stack em generic model, but childcare, kindergarten, preschool etc all need to fall in line together under one strategy."

Female, 35-45, City of Marion, Parent / Teacher / Early Childhood Worker / School Services Officer

"Parents are so isolated now, and pushed back to work so quickly that we often don't get to maintain a "village", or support group."

Female, 26-34, City of Onkaparinga, Parent

Equality

"More for men! Family friendly workplaces."

Male, 55-65, Tea Tree Gully, Grandparent / Work in Education and Care

Geographical location

"I believe we are disadvantaged living in a small rural town. We need more access to midwives and CAFHS nurses. Parent groups for new mums have been scarce since our CAFHS nurse went on maternity leave in July last year and new mums are missing out on this very important service."

Female, 46-54, Wattle Range Council, Parent / Work in Education and Care

"Social isolation and limited access to services significant issue in outer metro to rural areas."

Female, 35-45, Barossa Council, Parent / Work in Education and Care / Teacher / Early Childhood Worker / School Services Officer

Submissions related to support for parenting

Almost all submissions received touched on the importance of parent engagement in development and learning, both in the effect that it can have on a children's learning but also in supporting parents to ensure their children attend preschool services, access developmental checks or seek functional assessments. A number of responses noted the need for parent engagement in development and learning, stating that families are the 'first teachers' for children.

There was a concern that although the first five years of children's lives were recognised as a key period in children's health, development and as a foundation for future outcomes support for parents is not consistently provided in South Australia.

Further it was suggested that playgroups enhance early child development while providing parent engagement in development and learning and that placement of playgroups should be informed by existing service gaps, lower Socio Economic Status (SES) locations and Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) vulnerability.

It was also thought that improved parent engagement in development and learning could build community consensus towards the importance of early learning and the role of parents as first and ongoing educators for their children. Further outlined was the need to provide direct and ongoing support in this engagement to build confidence in the relationship with the education provider and staff.

What have we heard?

Summary

Through the commentary provided via the YourSAy survey, submissions and the dashboard a number of themes emerged. These were primarily:

- The importance of preschool to early childhood development
- Greater support for parents to understand their child's developmental needs
- Universal coverage for child development checks
- More access to playgroups and children's centres
- Preparation and transition to school
- Greater service integration and system performance (including leadership, professional development of educators, concerns regarding curriculum)
- Access to two years of preschool (3 year old eligibility)

'No Jab, No Play' (NJNP) was reflected as an area of concern in survey responses, discussion board comments and a formal submission. The NJNP policy refers to changes to the *South Australian Public Health Act 2011* from 7 August 2020, stating children will not be able to enrol in or attend early childhood services unless all their immunisation requirements are met or they meet one of the Chief Public Health Officer's exemption thresholds. Portfolio responsibility for NJNP resides with the Department of Health and Wellbeing and is out of scope of the Early Learning Strategy.

Through our engagement with families, communities, our staff, government agencies and key sector organisations, we have heard that South Australians value and aspire to have the following components of an early learning system. Through the development of the Early Learning Strategy, evidence based research and experience in other jurisdictions have identified a range of policy levers and initiatives for consideration.

- **Readily accessible quality support for child development**
Comprehensive universal health and development screening to enable the early identification and prevention of developmental issues prior to school.
- **Responsive local programs and services supporting community priorities**
Increased use of AEDC data to support identification of local priorities, additional support with analysis of data and generating responses, tools, support and resources to support local activation.
- **Strong support for families as their children's first teachers**
Community promotion of the importance of early childhood learning and development, resources to support home learning environments, and support for playgroups including existing community ones.
- **Reduced barriers and increased participation in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services**
Expanded access to early childhood education and care in remote areas and for children experiencing developmental delays.
- **Clear but collaborative leadership of early childhood development and learning**
Whole of government leadership and unified strategic vision to support policy direction and alignment for early years in South Australia.
- **Consistent leadership, support and delivery of excellence in teaching and learning**

Focusing on extending current strengths through pedagogical repertoire and content guidance, professional learning opportunities for teaching and learning, and leadership. Further, ongoing system wide strategic guidance and support for transition to preschool and school including greater information sharing and input from families. In addition to increased data sharing across agencies to enable more coordinated responses and support for children and their families.

Next steps

The Department for Education is continuing to refine potential policy levers and associated initiatives in response to the key themes for consideration in the Department's Early Learning Strategy. The Department for Education is also working with other Government agencies to consider shared areas of future work.

Glossary

CaFHS – Child and Family Health Service

ELC – Early Learning Centre

ELS – Early Learning Strategy

LCA – Local Council Area

NJNP – No Job, No Play

Appendix 1

Figure 13: Introduction to survey.



Survey Items

1. What early childhood education and care services did / does / will your child / grandchild attend?

Tick all that apply

- Department for Education Preschool
- Non-government Preschool (e.g. Community Preschool)
- Long day care / Early Learning Centre
- Family Day Care
- Does not / will not attend any early childhood services
- N/A
- Other _____

2. What are the markers of preschool quality for you?

Tick all that apply

- Adult interactions with children
- Physical environment at the service
- Staff ratios / group sizes

Consistency of staff / history of service
Leadership
Governance and opportunities to be involved in decisions
Developmentally / age appropriate curriculum
Family / parenting support at the service
Range of resources for children

3. Please indicate how well you agree with the following statement:

I think attending preschool is important for children's education

Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly disagree

4. Which are the key factors that would / did influence your choice of preschool?

Tick all that apply

Service location
Service reputation or word of mouth
Session days / times
Service is co-located on a school site where children will / are already going to school
National Quality Standard Rating
Long day care offered
Access to Out of Hours School Care (OHSC)
Department for Education Service
Cost
Cultural links
Particular approach e.g. Nature Play, Montessori, Reggio Emilia
Support transition to school

5. If your child / grandchild didn't / won't access a Department for Education preschool, are there any reasons for this?

Tick all that apply

No places available at local preschool
Do not live in catchment area of preferred preschool
Wrap around care not available e.g. OSHC, vacation care, before and after preschool care
Session times offered wouldn't suit
Happy with current education and care service
Planned for my child / grandchild to start at a private school with a mid-year intake and did not want them to only access 6 months of preschool
N/A
Other _____

6. Do you have any other comments on your overall views about preschool?

7. Has your child / grandchild had a health and development check?

* Health check may include hearing and vision assessments, support for fussy eating and general child development

Yes
No
N/A
Other _____

8. Who is your preferred provider for child health and development?

Child and Family Health (CaFHS)

GP

Paediatrician

Other _____

9. Please indicate when you accessed child health and development checks for your child / grandchild.

Tick all that apply

Accessed in line with the 'My Health and Development Record' (Blue Book) recommendations

When I had any concerns

Other _____

10. Please indicate how well you agree with the following statement: Children's health and development checks support parenting?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

11. If you / your family have not accessed child health and developmental health checks or services, are there any reasons why?

12. Do you have any other comments in relation to child health and development?

13. What do you think is important for children's development and learning?

Tick all that apply

Reading to my child every day

Having books in the home

Talking with my child about everyday events

Asking questions

Interacting with other children and families

Attending playgroup

Attending an early childhood service e.g. kindergarten / child care

Family outings e.g. to the local park

Having routines

Setting clear expectations and boundaries

Self-regulation skills (ability to share, manage emotions, calm self when upset, get along with others etc)

Children learn naturally, they don't need much help

Other _____

14. What helps parents / carers to support their child's development and learning?

Tick all that apply

Interactions and advice from my child's educators / teachers

Advice from health professional e.g. GP, CaFHS nurse

Attending parent workshops

Reading books and articles

Social media e.g. Facebook

Internet

Advice from family and friends

Other _____

15. Where do you access / prefer to go for parenting support or advice about your child's learning and development?

16. Any other comments in terms of parent support?

Appendix 2

Local Council Areas not represented by YourSAy survey data

Barunga West Council
Coorong District Council
District Council of Ceduna
District Council of Cleve
District Council of Franklin Harbour
District Council of Grant
District Council of Kimba
District Council of Lower Eyre Peninsula
District Council of Loxton Waikerie
District Council of Mount Remarkable
District Council of Orroroo Carrieton
District Council of Peterborough
District Council of Robe
District Council of Tumby Bay
Kangaroo Island Council
Southern Mallee District Council
The Flinders Ranges Council
Wakefield Regional Council
Wudinna District Council

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