

Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care – yourtown's advocacy submission



What is it about?

The South Australian Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care will hear expert evidence and the experiences and views of families to provide advice to the government on delivering a high-quality early years system that is fit for the future.

Why is it important?

South Australian children and the families should have access to an early years' system that supports them from the outset to gain access to the help they need when they need it. This system should be designed with inbuilt flexibility to meet children and families where they are at.

Some of yourtown's key messages:

1. To strengthen the early years' system, the government should fund virtual counselling services and supports specifically directed towards supporting parents and carers

Telehealth and digital mental health services (such as Parentline) can bridge the gap when face to face services are unavailable due to time, location, waitlists, or limited resourcing. Digital mental health services can also reach those in rural and remote locations at times that they need them most no matter where a person lives.

2. The early years' system adopt a whole of systems approach to supporting child development to ensure South Australian children have the opportunity to set positive life trajectories

Parents/carers attempting to access child development support face systemic barriers including restrictive eligibility criteria and must then navigate complex referral processes before they can access the help they need. An effective system needs to have strong referral pathways, and individualised connections between services to ensure there is cross-sector collaboration at the local and individual level across the continuum of a child's life, no matter what service or sector they are engaging with.

3. That the early years' system is grounded in trauma-informed practices and guided by human rights

Without grounding in trauma-informed practices children and their families/carers will be at risk of re-traumatisation because the system lacks the requisite knowledge and training around the sensitivities, vulnerabilities and triggers of children who have experienced or been exposed to trauma.

4. The South Australian education system have greater consideration for, and be responsive to, children's development needs especially complex needs

Early experiences shape children's development and can have a lasting effect on mental health and wellbeing. While families are the first and most important influence on children's development; educators and the education system also play an important role in supporting and promoting positive child development.

5. The early years' system be expanded and funded so that South Australian children are given access to timely assessments and development checks, and pathways to support including paediatric clinics and specialist care

Early childhood development interventions delivered to children aged under five years' have been clearly shown to have substantial and sustained impacts on long-term cognitive and neurological outcomes and improve mental health outcomes. It is therefore important to identify and work towards minimising health and development issues or delays early on.

6. That increased support is provided to parents/carers to improve parental/carer efficacy and family functioning

Increased support for disadvantaged or vulnerable families is needed to ensure children growing up in these households have an equal opportunity to engage in education and realise their potential.

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