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Response to the NSW Department of Education

Regional and Remote Strategy Consultation

May 2017

Contents

About CCSA	3
Introduction	6
Consultation Questions and Responses	6
1. How could the delivery of early childhood education in regional and remote NSW benefit from more integration and collaboration?	6
2. What are Commonwealth and State Government early childhood programs that the Department could link with?	9
3. How can the Department assist early childhood services to engage with Aboriginal families and communities more positively and effectively?	10
4. What are the factors that make it more difficult for families in regional and remote areas to ensure their children participate meaningfully in early childhood education? How can the Department address these factors?	14
5. How effective is distance preschool as a form of early childhood education? How could it be improved?	15
6. How effective is mobile preschool as a delivery method for early childhood education? How could it be improved?	15
7. Overcoming barriers to access associated with distance and remoteness will be a key priority of the Strategy. What are some examples of effective methods to address the impact of distance?	17
8. How can the Department offer greater support to the early childhood education workforce in regional and remote areas?	17
9. What can the Department do to help early childhood services in regional and remote areas recruit and retain early childhood teachers?	18
10. What would an effective incentives program to reward innovation in delivering ECE in regional and remote settings look like?	19
11. What data and information sources should be considered to better inform the Strategy?	20
Conclusion	23

About CCSA

CCSA is a peak body with a vision for sustainable and valued early childhood education and care (ECEC). CCSA partners with and advocates for ECEC services to ensure positive outcomes for children and communities. We achieve this by providing leadership and operational support using our expertise in meeting the governance, management, training, business and workplace relations needs of early childhood education and care settings.

CCSA is approaching its 50th year of operation, supporting both commercial and not-for-profit ECEC services with governance, management and administration needs and supporting services with sector compliance, sustainability and effective workplace relations. We deliver an training and support that builds service capability, presenting many forums, workshops and individual consultations to ECEC services across NSW. This is complemented by providing training to individual services across the operational areas of organisational management, governance, financial management and leadership integrated with professional ECEC practice.

CCSA has been contracted by both state and federal governments to provide support to individual organisations and the sector more generally. CCSA develops strategies and practices that leave a legacy for the future health of each organisation it supports and the sector.

CCSA -

- supports all provider structures in the sector including boards and committees, individual owners, centre directors/coordinators/managers, administrators and educators.
- receives continuous feedback regarding service issues through its 1800 telephone support line and consultations, providing up to date information regarding service issues as well as being able to track change and its effect.
- has represented the sector industrially in both the state (NSW Industrial Relations Commission) and federal jurisdictions (Fair Work Commission) through submissions and providing evidence and information. We are currently involved with the FWC with the review of modern awards that apply to the sector. CCSA is the only un-aligned organisation (neither union or employer group) present and accepted by the commission for these hearings.
- contributes at a policy level in the sector through state and federal reference groups regarding legislation & regulation, policy, funding, quality and sustainability.
- is a member of the NSW Health & Community Services Industry and Advisory Board advisory group (ITAB)

CCSA also –

- has an 1800 management Infoline that receives more than 4900 calls each year from Directors, committee members and staff. We also respond to more than 360 items of written response to requests for assistance each week.
- is an approved provider of teacher training for the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA)

- provides one to one support to ECEC services through our suite of consultancy services focused on building healthy and capable of organisations and professionals. More than 50 consultancies are undertaken each year, and these involve working directly with-
 - boards and committees,
 - owners,
 - centre directors (on-site managers),
 - administration staff and
 - educators/practitioners

This covers a range of needs including-

- governance,
- leadership,
- management,
- National Quality Framework,
- Learning Frameworks
- strategic planning,
- financial management,
- managing change,
- sustainability,
- business planning,
- Modern Awards and workplace relations,
- dispute resolution and
- mentoring and performance reviews of ECEC Directors.

We have a strong knowledge of the issues faced by children’s services in rural and remote areas, from regular contact through our ‘infoline’ and a continuing commitment to regional and remote issues since CCSA began. CCSA has worked with very small services through to large-scale multi-site services. Currently CCSA has approximately 550 for profit and not-for-profit members across NSW which include –

- Long day care
- Preschool
- Mobiles
- Outside School Hours
- Family Day Care
- Occasional Care
- Multi-purpose
- Early Intervention
- Recruitment agency

A large number are located in regional areas.

CCSA also plays a leadership and advocacy role at a state and national level in order to -

- advocate for high quality and affordable early childhood education and care services
- assist government develop and implement effective policy and understand sector needs
- increase community awareness about the value of quality ECEC experiences and qualified early childhood professionals
- promote effective workplaces and excellence in service delivery being a key support for sustainable organisations and better outcomes for children.

CCSA is well placed to comment on the current and future needs of the sector as an organisation that supports both employers and educators in children’s services, through its continuous involvement in the training and professional development in the sector, and through continuous engagement with both sides of the employment relationship and service delivery issues. The broad member base of service delivery types and governance structures provides an accurate sector view.

CCSA’s staff and board have relevant qualifications and many years experience in professional, management, governance and policy positions within the ECEC sector in large, small and diverse organisations across the state. Individual CCSA staff are also involved in teacher education at university level.

CCSA acknowledges the continued valuable contribution of its members to the information provided in this submission as well as partner organisations, and makes this contribution to support the department’s aim to ensure that children in regional and remote areas have access to sustainable, high quality early childhood education and start school with the skills they need to engage in learning.¹

¹ NSW Dept. of Education, ‘Regional and Remote Early Childhood Education Strategy: Consultation Paper’, 2017

Introduction

CCSA commends the NSW Department of Education in developing a strategy to guide the Early Childhood Education and Care Directorate to better support children in regional and remote situations to overcome the disadvantage that currently exists and the risk of poorer life outcomes that it this brings. CCSA further supports the department in consulting with the sector and community organisations in the development of the strategy, drawing on the knowledge and expertise of those best placed to understand the challenges to rural living.

CCSA maintains that all children have the rights laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), to which Australia is a signatory. These rights are universal, even in situations where there are greater challenges for those rights to be delivered. CCSA members in regional areas have long maintained that while it may be more costly to provide the same services for children in these areas, or to overcome barriers to access and participation, these children have no less value than those in metropolitan locations, and most particularly those in more disadvantaged circumstances. It is important to recognise that children are not in a position to make choices about where they grow up.

To contribute effectively to the consultation with relevant and reliable information, CCSA formed two working parties to add to the sector experience already held by the organisation through its continuous contact with members. Members of the working parties were experienced early childhood and community leaders, managers and practitioners in services across regional and remote areas. Service types included centre-based and mobile services including those providing programs for disadvantaged children and families, including Aboriginal specific services. They are individuals who engage strongly in networks in their regions and so bring a broader knowledge and experience of services available from both not-for-profit organisations and departments at different levels of government.

The working groups addressed the questions posed by the department.

Consultation Questions

Note: the term 'services' is used generally to cover centre-based, mobile and distance, long day care and family day care delivery types.

1. How could the delivery of early childhood education in regional and remote NSW benefit from more integration and collaboration?

- 1.1. The needs of families in regional and remote areas are very diverse due to the broad range of geographical, climatic, cultural, economic and family circumstances that exist. There are also many communities where populations fluctuate in response to the seasonal, climatic and the economic circumstance that exist at any given time. The early childhood (EC) delivery system, including funding arrangements, needs to be responsive to this diversity rather than being rigid and economically based. Funding needs to be flexible and support communities and their EC services in times where attendance numbers might be low or, in fact, will always be low due to the size of the community. A system that recognises the rights

of all children and the diversity of circumstances is necessary for access to be equitable.

Recommendation

The delivery system, including funding models, recognise the changing circumstances and situations in smaller communities and provide flexibility that supports sustainability and therefore equity for families.

- 1.2. Early childhood services and communities report a reduction in government services over time and note that some of those services were both valuable and successful. They also note that children's services would benefit from a proactive approach by other organisations and agencies to engage with the local EC service, recognising the important part they play in the health and wellbeing system for children as well as furthering their learning and development. Though there seems to be a current expectation that EC services need to integrate and collaborate better, there does not seem to be a reciprocal expectation on other agencies and organisations, placing the responsibility on EC services that may be less able to engage as effectively as they might through lack of resources.
- 1.3. The prominence of 'pop-up' services that have resulted from fixed term funding for specific purposes but are then withdrawn, disrupt collaboration and integration and lessen the willingness of communities to engage in the future. Certainty is required for services to commit to engage for a long-term benefit. The development of this strategy provides an opportunity to form a longer-term view that might bridge political cycles. The latter is an important component for communities, organisations and EC services to *trust* the commitment and genuineness of government efforts and programs.
- 1.4. As EC sits across and supports the outcomes of multiple agencies including education, health and welfare, it is important that there be co-operation and collaboration across these portfolios so that there is integration in service planning and delivery rather than within the silos of individual departments and agencies. CCSA members in regional areas also report having to deal with both state and federal departments in relation to programs with similar outcomes resulting in an increased strain on available resources.

Recommendation

That service provision by governments and departments be co-ordinated, integrated and take a long term view in regard to service delivery.

- 1.5. Engaging in networks is generally seen as positive in regional and remote locations. However, the opportunity to engage effectively with networks is either hampered or prevented due to the cost to engage resting with the individual service. Where there is pressure on service budgets, the cost to support regular effective networking and collaboration becomes a barrier due to the cost of the additional time needed and/or backfill of staff.
- 1.6. Regular changes in funding policy have left many services lacking certainty and security in regard to both current and future financial stability. The current requirements to have five children enrolled who are in their the year before school to receive funding in areas where population fluctuates continues to be a concern, with service providers concerned about the cost of engaging in off-site meetings with other providers, government and community agencies. There is recognition

that this affects the level of fees charged which increases the likelihood that fees become a barrier to attendance.

- 1.7. Though there is willingness to initiate contacts and build relationships with other agencies the skill, knowledge and resources are not always present. Centre Directors report that help and training is needed to address the 'why, who and how' of effective collaboration with other agencies in their community or region. There seems to be an assumption that the requisite skills and understanding should exist. However, recognition in the strategy that this is not necessarily a skill set for Directors, who initially train as educators rather than community workers, would inform how EC services can best be supported to build their capability in this area, with the added benefit of contributing to service sustainability. This may be in the form of specific training, support and their co-ordination within the strategy.
- 1.8. CCSA's decades of supporting managers of EC services recognises the challenges educators face when taking on this role (e.g. centre Director). A different skill set is required to deliver on the requirements of the role and, in particular, engaging effectively with the wider community and support agencies. Increasing managers' capability in this area will provide better opportunity for Directors to engage and collaborate with associated programs that benefit children through improved family and community engagement. In response to this consultation EC directors have indicated additional management support on site would be highly valuable,

Recommendation

On-site support for service managers/directors be available in regard to increasing management capability that includes business planning, operation and community engagement.

The delivery system, including funding models, needs to recognise that engagement with community and other agencies or departments requires the commitment of resources of the service provider, raising concerns regarding the cost/benefit. Funding models need to recognise that investment in upskilling and ongoing community engagement focused on increasing access and attendance is a cost of effective delivery.

- 1.9. Early childhood services are currently only required to report outputs such as enrolments and attendance. This is a narrow approach and, while important, does not provide the opportunity for services to identify successful strategies that deliver improved outcomes for children. This inhibits the state's ability to identify successful programs that may be replicated in similar circumstances including partnerships with other agencies, organisations and institutions such as universities.
- 1.10. A better approach would be to require services to identify the plans they have developed, the associated strategies that are applied, identify any barriers that have been experienced and the outcomes they are achieving. This will enable services to demonstrate funds are used appropriately and the results that are being achieved.
- 1.11. CCSA recognises that additional reporting might not be well received by the sector and additional training may be necessary to upskill staff to be able to report effectively. However, it is an important component of an effective delivery system be enabling the collection of important data and information that informs the results of funding programs and successful sub-programs and strategies that might be implemented more broadly.

Recommendation

An improved online reporting framework be developed that includes both outputs and outcomes of programs to better inform future planning and targeted delivery and allocation of resources. Training be provided to services to enable efficient and effective use of the reporting framework.

Note: an example of the collection and reporting of results is included in answer to the last question.

- 1.12. Departmental officers take carriage of developing and maintaining local networks and programs in collaboration with local community leaders. Require services to plan and report on their engagement and collaboration activities, barriers and outcomes
- 1.13. Previous iterations of regional and remote support saw departmental officers (DoCS) take carriage of facilitating and co-ordinating local networks and programs working with local organisations or individuals. This is considered an effective method to deliver, guide, support and respond to local needs. The recognition of local people and agencies as integral to planning and delivery is considered a critical element in the success of local and targeted solutions as part of government policy.

Recommendation

Departmental officers take carriage of developing and maintaining local networks and programs in collaboration with local community leaders.

- 1.14. CCSA's consultation with sector leaders identified it is also important that alternate facilitation is also available as there is no 'one size fits all' solution. Alternate facilitation is required in some areas by local, non-departmental personnel, to overcome relationship concerns that have resulted from less positive experiences, often considered 'interventions'. The collaboration with respected local organisations and leaders is considered important in these circumstances.
- 1.15. A suggestion in CCSA consultations was that EC specific organisations facilitate regional meetings (across stakeholder groups) to build capability in collaboration for mutual benefit, explore possibilities and share success stories that might be able to be replicated. Participants identified that on-site support is the most beneficial delivery method for long-term impact.
- 1.16. A further element in driving change was that funding should facilitate services increase their ability to engage effectively 'beyond the fence' better. This requires a long-term strategy that provides the certainty that enables services to invest in better engagement with confidence- not just funding for five year olds, and improve interagency planning and co-operation. Recognising that younger children become older children in the funding model enables services to take a longer-term view in their planning and community engagement.

2. What are Commonwealth and State Government early childhood programs that the Department could link with?

- 2.1. A common response to this question by CCSA consultation participants was that the department should be proactive in operating across jurisdictions and departments, applying an integrated approach across education, health and welfare. The view results from service providers wanting governments at all levels co-ordinating programs so that services don't have to deal with multiple departments and agencies which uses more resources and impedes effective delivery.

- 2.2. A concern was expressed in regard to there being no corporate history of successful programs. A focus on 'innovative programs' ignores those which have been successful in the past but not continued because of changing government priorities. A further contributing factor is the regular changes in departmental positions. Continuity of personnel with experience in these important portfolios has not been apparent.
- 2.3. The Commonwealth Indigenous Advancement Strategy was identified as a program that would benefit from better linking with the NSW state government. It was recently restructured and many preschools lost funding through that process. However, the results of this targeted funding have been positive and would benefit from a more planned and co-operative approach that targeted areas of greatest need rather than rely on a successful submission by individual services.
- 2.4. The introduction of the NDIS is problematic for EC services and in particular early intervention services that will lose funding with the conclusion of ADHC support. In most circumstances older individuals with additional needs have the capacity to make choices for themselves regarding support and associated services. Families with prior to school age children in this situation have to make choices on their behalf and are not necessarily best placed to make these judgements in relation to early learning opportunities and have relied on professionals in early intervention services to inform and guide them. Allied professional are also not best placed to be supporting families in relation to early learning and inclusive practice. It would be beneficial for the state and commonwealth governments to link with the local EC sector in regard the effective implementation of the NDIS for including prior to school age children in mainstream services effectively.
- 2.5. Other programs for linking include:
 - Mums and Bubs and
 - Aboriginal Health services generally

3. How can the Department assist early childhood services to engage with Aboriginal families and communities more positively and effectively?

- 3.1. Cultural competency is essential for staff that do not have knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history. Cultural competency is a beginning, a first step in understanding the situation and possible circumstances of Aboriginal communities in their area and more generally. It is common for Directors and staff in particular to voice their concern in regard to lack of knowledge, even where a willingness to connect and engage exists, which affects their confidence in regard to making adjustments in operation and practice. Lack of knowledge limits action because of the fear to offend.
- 3.2. Early years services that have engaged with local Aboriginal communities and developed programs to improve outcomes have been successful. Some Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) funded programs have delivered improved results in literacy and numeracy (results attached). The non-continuance of federal IAS funds in a number of preschools has impeded the progress of their strategies to overcome barriers. This included assisting travel to preschool. Other services that have been proactive as a result of a commitment to Aboriginal children and communities have also had good results.

Recommendation

A strategy to identify and share the success stories of services provides an opportunity for effective program and practices to be adopted by others with some confidence that the effort will bring improved results.

- 3.3. Funding to support Aboriginal children in regional and remote areas is less than in metropolitan areas, reducing their ability to overcome barriers, assist their inclusion and engage well with local communities. Currently the fixed level of support of \$6,600 *replaces* the base level funding rather than being added to it. Regional and remote services with higher base rate funding receive less for the purpose of supporting the inclusion Aboriginal children. Example-

Assumes 600 hours

Ignores regional loading as it covers all children enrolled.

Band	Base Rate	Aboriginal	Additional \$ to assist inclusion
18	\$4,250	\$6,600	\$2,350
8	\$6,600	\$6,600	Nil

Recommendation

Funding support for the inclusion of aboriginal children and their families is additional to base rates within the system.

- 3.4. Successful inclusion that provides a legacy for future children involves engagement beyond the preschool fence. Lower fees are important to overcome the affordability barrier but a relationship with communities is necessary for more meaningful and lasting results.
- 3.5. It is important that a deliberate, purposeful and sensitive program of upskilling staff in regional and remote areas is available and is provided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The program needs to include expectations of the development of plans that include appropriate partnerships and strategies that include identifying and reporting progress and results. To ensure a beneficial change the work needs to be delivered by Aboriginal people or in partnership to demonstrate authenticity and integrity
- 3.6. The absence of a culturally specific body in NSW resourced to provide information and onsite or regional support to early years' services is a gap in service provision. For the strategy to be successful for Aboriginal families and children it requires the direct involvement of those with knowledge in the sector to facilitate the development of specific plans to connect and build relationships of trust and reciprocal benefit. The process needs to be collaborative involving local indigenous community members to determine local solutions. The former Aboriginal Early Childhood Support and Learning (AECSL) is an example of such a body.

Recommendations

- A NSW specific Aboriginal early childhood body be resourced and tasked to deliver a program to both Aboriginal specific and mainstream services to provide information and support to develop plans to connect and engage with Aboriginal

communities and increase enrolment and improved outcomes for Aboriginal children.

- The body establish a working relationship with existing organisations such as the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) to utilise existing resources and capability.
- A collaborative plan be developed between individual services and local community members where possible and leverage existing credible relationships. The plan be reported against to enable progress, outcomes and ongoing challenges to be identified in relation to enrolment and learning and development outcomes.

3.7. SNAICC and its resources are not necessarily well known in mainstream services, and often thought to only support Aboriginal services. It can be made more prominent in this regard to assist to fill the gap left by with the withdrawal of funding support for AECSL by the federal government. In regard to cultural competency training SNAICC currently has available -

- 'A Place for Culture' - cultural competency for services
- 'Working and Walking Together' - cultural competency for agencies

However, these are delivered over two days and may be problematic for services that also need to deliver a service to children and families.

Recommendation

3.8. A strategy that supports raising cultural competency within EC services be developed and implemented. This should include access to quality resources and support for services to increase their capability to include Aboriginal children and families.

3.9. Integrated services are achieving positive results through their relationship and proximity to associated services such as health. Examples such as Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Services (Nowra) and Nikinpa Aboriginal Child and Family Centre (Toronto) have increased numbers of enrolments and attendances. It suggests that other services could benefit from strong relationships with local Aboriginal services where these relationships can be facilitated through local Aboriginal people or bodies (such as that above) that can scaffold their development and that of early years' services generally.

3.10. An effective strategy in some services has been the employment of Aboriginal workers. The benefit is both for Aboriginal children through culturally sensitive practice and in being a liaison with local communities. Achieving positive results is not without its challenges due to the meeting of different cultures, the background and life experience of the individual/s, employment expectations and training requirements of the sector. A program that promotes and supports employment through information, ongoing support that includes flexible and supportive employment practices and supported training would provide improved outcomes. It would need to support registered training organisations (RTO's) to deliver in regional and remote areas in a culturally sensitive way in partnership with services and local communities.

Auntie Gloria (Part 2)- <http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/nqsplp/e-learning-videos/talking-about-practice/recognition-of-prior-learning-pathways/>

Recommendation

A specific program be developed to promote and support the employment of Aboriginal educators that enables services to develop an employment strategy that

- acknowledges and responds to cultural differences and
- meets employment and sector requirements including training and gaining qualifications.

The program is delivered by culturally knowledgeable and sensitive organisations with the ability to form effective partnerships and relationships with Aboriginal communities and/or organisations.

- 3.11. It is important to have Aboriginal specific positions within the Early Childhood Education Directorate to link and liaise with services and inform the department's policy positions and program development. The position that currently exists is positive in advancing both policy and programs.

Recommendation

The current position within the department Programs and Projects section continues and additional staff be added to support policy development across the directorate.

- 3.12. Community managed services, both generally and specific to early years services, can face challenges in relation to building and maintaining capability in governance and management. Though many are capable, those that experience these challenges are less able to change existing practices that can promote better access and engagement to increase enrolments of Aboriginal children. This is particularly the case where economic circumstances pressure sustainability. Regular access to information and support to develop and maintain governance and management capability has a direct impact on improving compliance and sustainability. This provides the opportunity to develop strategies that improve engagement with Aboriginal communities and subsequently increased Aboriginal enrolments.

Recommendation (also reference 3.6 above)

A NSW specific Aboriginal early childhood body be resourced and tasked to support improved capability in governance and management to both Aboriginal specific and mainstream services with a view to better engagement and increased enrolments of Aboriginal children.

- 3.13. In smaller and more remote communities there are often fewer numbers of children and over a greater area, where accessing a service is difficult due to distance or difficult circumstances. The sustainability of a centre-based or mobile service in these circumstances is problematic due to both the current funding model and fluctuations in numbers. Different models of delivery need to be explored so that access to a developmentally appropriate prior to school experience is available to these children. The introduction of the Safety Net in Start Strong is a good example of responding to contextual issues within regional and remote communities.

Recommendation

Pilot programs are explored and trialled in partnership with local communities and experienced organisations to develop flexible models of delivery in small communities where current models are not sustainable.

- 3.14. An effective strategy for increasing capability, knowledge and understanding in services in recent times was a partnership between a remote Aboriginal specific preschool and a metropolitan preschool. This included sharing operational information and practices, resources and exchanging staff for mutual learning and development. Both preschools reported very positive outcomes from the relationship and collaboration. Trials of this type of relationship could be expanded to develop programs and principles with identified and agree outcomes.

Recommendation

That funding models targeting effective inclusion of Aboriginal children allow for flexibility of the application of those funds to provide for a broad range of strategies to be implemented at a local level that facilitates staff development as well as access for children.

4. What are the factors that make it more difficult for families in regional and remote areas to ensure their children participate meaningfully in early childhood education? How can the Department address these factors?

- 4.1. CCSA considers there is a significant difference in life circumstances for those in remote geographical locations in comparison to those in areas identified as regional, and there would be benefit in separating them in the proposed policy. For example, in remote areas there are regularly few children of preschool age across a vast area making it problematic to focus policy narrowly on the years just prior to school and 'preschool-like' experiences for the delivery of services.
- 4.2. Commonly the time needed to travel significant distances to attend a service and taken away from business/farm commitments is prohibitive for remote families. The cost to mobile services to deliver to an individual family or small group is seen as too high by government to be cost effective. This leads to families in these areas to comment that their children are valued less than others. The cost of travel for these families is also seen as prohibitive.
- 4.3. Feedback from CCSA members is that schools should become an integral part of the EC delivery system structure. Schools are well placed to provide the infrastructure and support for specific EC programs in partnership with specific EC providers to deliver integrated EC programs that provide a range of prior-to-school programs. This should not be limited to those in their year prior to school and include programs such as playgroups. It is important that these programs provide genuine play-based programs by qualified EC practitioners.
- 4.4. Schools do not have to deliver the programs, and it is better in if they do not in some communities where concerns exist regarding institutionalising children. However, schools are well placed to be part of an integrated network that sees there is an important role to play working *with*, and not independently of, EC organisations to deliver a broad range of programs that provide prior to school experiences both onsite or as a base for itinerant services.

Recommendation

Schools become part of the EC delivery system providing opportunity and space to deliver prior-to-school experiences such as preschool, playgroup and long day care in partnership with EC providers such as mobile services.

School principles become an integral part of the delivery network. DoE infrastructure management take a positive approach to co-locating such services or their administration on school grounds as part of an integrated approach to service delivery.

5. How effective is distance preschool as a form of early childhood education? How could it be improved?

- 5.1. Distance preschool is seen as an important component of the EC delivery system enabling children to connect and socialise with an appropriate EC curriculum. There was a view expressed by CCSA members that not all the children who could benefit from the program are able to access due to the limited number of places currently available and an expansion of places would increase the impact it can have. Concern was also raised in regard to the amount of face-to-face experiences for the children with the early childhood facilitator or with other children and there would be more benefit to children's learning if this is increased.
- 5.2. The current narrow prior to school funding focus on the year before school and universal access cannot meet the diverse and particular needs of families and children in remote locations.
- 5.3. CCSA members were strong in their view that it is important that distance preschool be designed and delivered by university qualified early childhood teachers. It must deliver authentic play-based experiences based on the Early Years Learning Framework that provides children choice and autonomy and enables the development of positive dispositions for learning. Significant concern was voiced in relation to ensuring there is no 'push down' curriculum developed for primary aged children as is being experienced more generally in the EC sector, in particular where programs are school based.
- 5.4. The program itself could be considered as a part of a broader view of education and development opportunities for children in remote locations in conjunction with the position outlined in question 4. Distance preschool would become part of a co-ordinated program and network of providing prior-to-school experiences by qualified EC practitioners through, and with, department schools and with EC providers including those currently funded such as mobiles. This would enable delivery through small and remote schools in a flexible model that also utilises existing resources in those communities. It would enable services to operate with small and fluctuating numbers.

Recommendation

Distance preschool becomes part of a co-ordinated, diverse and flexible program of remote delivery with EC providers that includes a broader range of prior-to-school experiences delivered on or from school sites utilising the departments infrastructure.

6. How effective is mobile preschool as a delivery method for early childhood education? How could it be improved?

- 6.1. Mobile services are a critical delivery type in the overall early childhood system that includes a variety of delivery types to meet the broad range of family and child needs. They are well placed to deliver services that respond effectively to small communities and the changing circumstances of regional areas within which they are located. Their mobility enables servicing in more remote locations where

distance and the number of children do not support more mainstream services such as those that are centre-based.

- 6.2. Mobile services fill the gap where more mainstream services are not viable. This includes:
- when the number of children in a community will always be low,
 - enrolment numbers fluctuate, such as for seasonal or economic reasons,
 - developing communities that are not yet able to support a more mainstream service, including regional centres that are experiencing growth.
- 6.3. Mobiles offer the flexibility to provide a range of prior-to-school experiences that respond to the diverse needs of communities. Their ability to provide preschool, playgroup and long day care provides responsiveness to actual and changing situations. Their mobility provides the opportunity to enter and withdraw from locations where suitable venues exist such as community halls and schools. In this regard it is important that funding models support the cost of withdrawing from one location and setting up in one where more children can benefit from the programs.
- 6.4. It is important that all children are recognised in these models rather than a narrow focus on the year prior to school as currently exists. However, the benefit of a more flexible funding arrangement will mean that more children in their year prior to school have a program to attend. It is also important that mobile programs are developed and implemented by qualified early childhood professionals. Certainty of funding also supports the recruitment and retention of staff in these programs enabling children to benefit from this continuity, as outlined as an important element in the EYLF.
- 6.5. Mobile funding should acknowledge the particular needs of smaller communities and support the provision of a range of services and not be narrowly focused as is currently the case regarding universal access based funding. Funding models should consider various early childhood pathways including playgroups, parenting programs such as Parent and Community Engagement (PACE) and EC community outreach programs. The focus on the preschool model does not support sustainability for those children who are yet to reach that age and will not be helped by services such as mobiles closing because of fluctuating numbers. Those fluctuations have always existed and will continue and funding arrangements need to respond to the actual situation for families in these regions.

Recommendation

The Safety Net funding arrangement available to preschools be extended to mobile services to ensure sustainability for smaller and remote communities.

- 6.6. A further complicating factor is the legislative changes to Commonwealth funding models such as the Budget Based Funding (BBF) model under the Jobs for families Package. This will inevitably have significant impact on these small communities and children living in remote locations across NSW due to lower funding levels.

7. Overcoming barriers to access associated with distance and remoteness will be a key priority of the Strategy. What are some examples of effective methods to address the impact of distance?

This question has also been addressed in the previous and following answers where the issues and circumstances experienced by services are related.

- 7.1. A significant challenge for regional and remote services is the cost of upgrade and installation of IT hardware and software. Where improvements in internet have occurred, services are not always able to take advantage due to out-dated equipment and software that would enable more efficient and effective management and administration. It also supports improved delivery of programs and communication that can address the issues that greater distances present. An example is contemporary web-based communication software that facilitates information sharing across IT platforms facilitating improved collaboration and relationships with, and between, families.

Recommendation

A capital grants program be developed to assist services to upgrade ITC capability to make use of improved internet where services where this becomes available.

8. How can the Department offer greater support to the early childhood education workforce in regional and remote areas?

- 8.1. One of the challenges for staff is the availability, accessibility and cost of quality training. Many CCSA members consider face-to-face training as the best delivery method, providing for engagement and interactive sessions that have contextual application that delivers both knowledge and meaning. Though there is acknowledgement that the cost of this delivery method is higher, the *value* is considered much greater due to the benefit generated.
- 8.2. While the previous point is true, there is recognition that delivery of training through ITC can be cost-effective with advances in technology. However, unreliable and slow internet makes it impractical in many areas and is a continuing frustration for staff in services. Solving this issue would make a considerable contribution towards the ability of centres to train local people for educator and allied positions.
- 8.3. Though there have been incentives offered for staff to gain university EC teacher qualifications, there is no incentive for others to gain the required compulsory minimum Certificate III or Diploma qualification. Though these may be acquired with the support of a traineeship in certain qualifying circumstances, there is no universal assistance available that would address the regional and most particularly remote circumstances that exist.

Recommendation

- An incentive program be developed to encourage and support individuals working in services or seeking a career in EC to train for Certificate III and Diploma level qualifications.
- RTO's be provided additional funding to provide appropriate support to enable students, including Aboriginal people, to participate effectively in distance learning.

- 8.4. In regard to workforce strategies as indicated above, workforce strategies could be explored collaborative with the commonwealth government. This would be an appropriate strategy and align with the findings of the Productivity Commission in regard to addressing workforce issues.
- 8.5. An ongoing issue in the sector that is exacerbated in regional remote locations is support for effective organisational management and leadership, at both the governance and operational level of services. From an operational perspective the issue has its origin in individuals who are in management positions training as educators and not having the opportunity to gain the skills and knowledge necessary for the role that is critical for the adaptability and sustainability of organisations.

Recommendation

A targeted fund be developed specific to increasing and maintaining the capability of the governance and management of Not-For-Profit providers.
Mentoring and coaching for service Directors and early childhood teachers be available as part of a suite of training options.

9. What can the Department do to help early childhood services in regional and remote areas recruit and retain early childhood teachers?

- 9.1 Outer regional and remote locations need to be able to provide incentives to attract and retain staff including providing income parity with teachers in schools. Pay is the most significant issue in the early childhood sector together with significantly less attractive working conditions. Until this is addressed the problem of recruiting and retaining teachers will continue. Small numbers in services don't provide the operating margins to support it, particularly preschools with the current funding cohort targets.
- 9.2 Other incentives need to be provided in very remote locations such as accommodation and meeting the travel costs to return home periodically or drive from other towns in the area.

Recommendation

Outer regional and remote services be provided additional funding to a level that supports teachers to be paid at the same rate as those in schools including those situations where local staff are training to be teachers. Funding supports the additional cost of providing other incentives such as accommodation or meeting additional travel costs.

This could be part of a deliberate program, publicly supported by government, as is the case for encouraging doctors to work locally.

- 9.3 The solution in some locations will be to support local people to train whilst being employed. The support framework will need to include ongoing mentoring and local or onsite support such as release from face-to-face work to study or complete course requirements. Services will need to be funded to back fill these positions and the support framework.
- 9.4 It is important to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers through expanding existing programs that have appropriate support frameworks in place. Training local people who are likely to stay in communities is likely to be more successful.
- 9.5 A sector problem, that is exacerbated in regional and remote locations, has been the broadening of the age for which training qualifies teachers. Early Childhood needs teachers trained for birth to five. Teachers in Birth to eight or birth to twelve

programs look for placements in schools because of the higher pay and better conditions. Though there is an interaction here with university funding, this is a fundamental problem in the sector that becomes more prominent with the additional challenges of teaching in remote locations. CCSA members have identified a trend that teachers can take on EC positions 'while waiting for a position in a school to become available'.

- 9.6 An improved availability of bridging courses for primary trained teachers to add early childhood to their qualification may assist. It is important to recognise the difference in teaching strategies, so the requirements of the course need to be robust to meet the requirements of the NQF and learning in children's early years.
- 9.7 Additional funding for Registered Training Organisations and incentives for services to support Aboriginal students to complete Certificate 3 and Diploma qualifications would help by starting people down the training pathway. This would be part of long-term planning to enable students to eventually move in to higher education qualifications. The program should include mentoring by other Aboriginal teachers who have successfully completed training.
- 9.8 The transition of early childhood teachers into the teacher accreditation through the NSW Education and Standards Authority (NESA) needs consideration when employing an ECT in remote communities. Employers need to have an effective system that supports the registration and maintenance of teacher accreditation in relation to the 100 hours of professional development required over the five year period allowed. The ECT must be assured that employment in a remote location will not disadvantage their ongoing professional development and its assessment in order to maintain registration. Developing and supporting a robust system with NESA will be critical in supporting the ongoing employment of ECT in rural and remote communities.

10. What would an effective incentives program to reward innovation in delivering ECE in regional and remote settings look like?

- 10.1 Few organisations have developed the capability to innovate successfully, and already exist and effectively deliver prior-to-school programs in regional and remote locations. CCSA contends it would be innovative to recognise the continuity of the learning and development journey for children from birth and support their attendance at existing models. This would be viewed as an innovative approach and the sector and families would reward the department for this approach.
- 10.2 Few organisations have developed the capability to innovate successfully, and where innovation can be considered. Recent uncertainty regarding funding and its related sustainability have not placed preschools in a position to develop internal operating environments where innovation is a consideration or indeed a goal. The apparent increase in operational certainty provided by these increases in funding provides a platform for innovation to be introduced as a possibility.
- 10.3 Few organisations have developed the capability to innovate successfully, and particularly in a sector like early childhood that is heavily regulated. Innovation relies on a significant level of capability in a service- understanding what it is in context- a way of operating, an approach that is not necessarily common. It is critical to develop a culture of generating and interrogating new ideas. Training is required to enable the development of organisational processes that facilitate

innovation and increase the likelihood that it will occur on an ongoing basis. One-off training is insufficient to imbed innovation and alternate operating practices as part of an improvement framework in a service's operation. Ongoing opportunities to develop knowledge and skills are necessary such as mentoring/coaching programs to bring people into this space- enabling, utilising current resources and including everyone in the search for innovation.

- 10.4 Early childhood services generally do not have the funds to support trialing new ways of operating without some certainty of success. An incentive scheme suggests rewarding for change that proves to be successful. What will actually be required is financial support to implement trials of innovative practice very much like new business 'start-ups'. In this way services are encouraged to try something different having developed a business plan based on reliable information that supports the change. A program structured in this way will support and encourage new ideas by eliminating/reducing the risk.

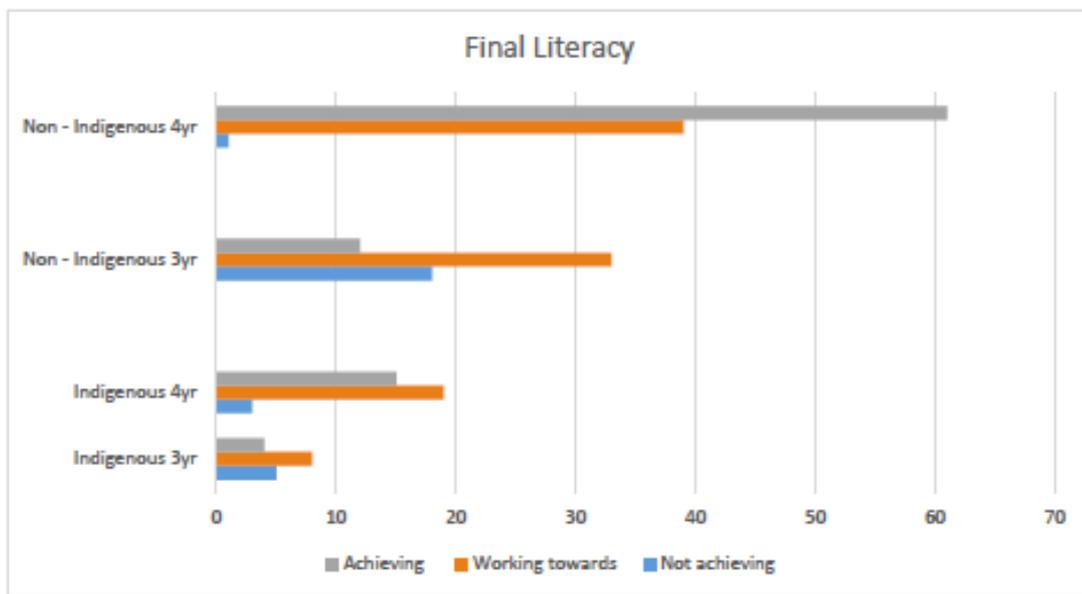
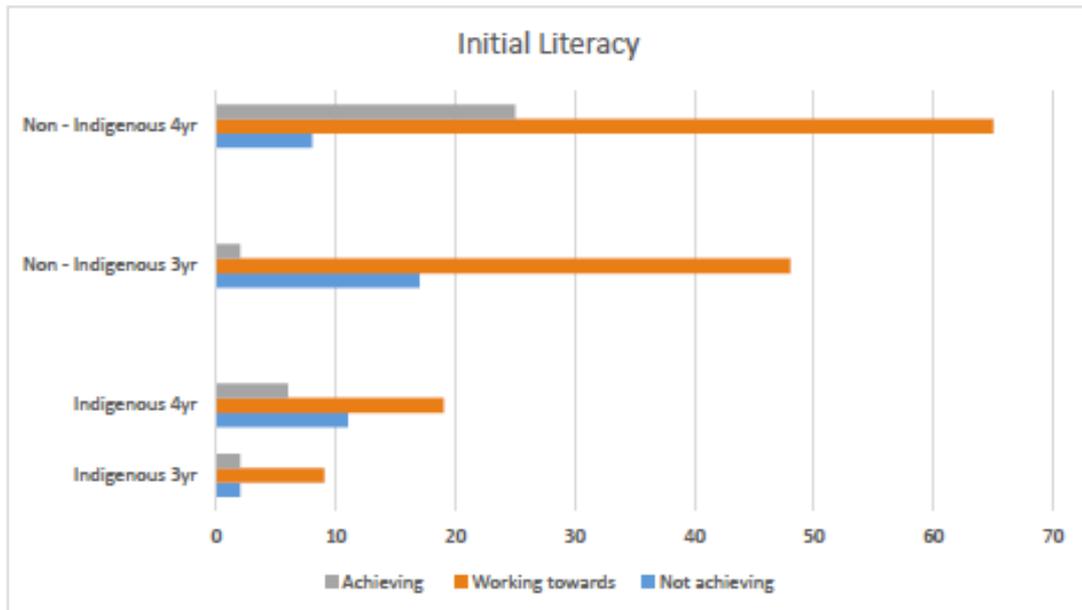
Recommendation

The department consider a program that finances innovation on the basis of an approved business case and includes approved evaluation and measurement of results.

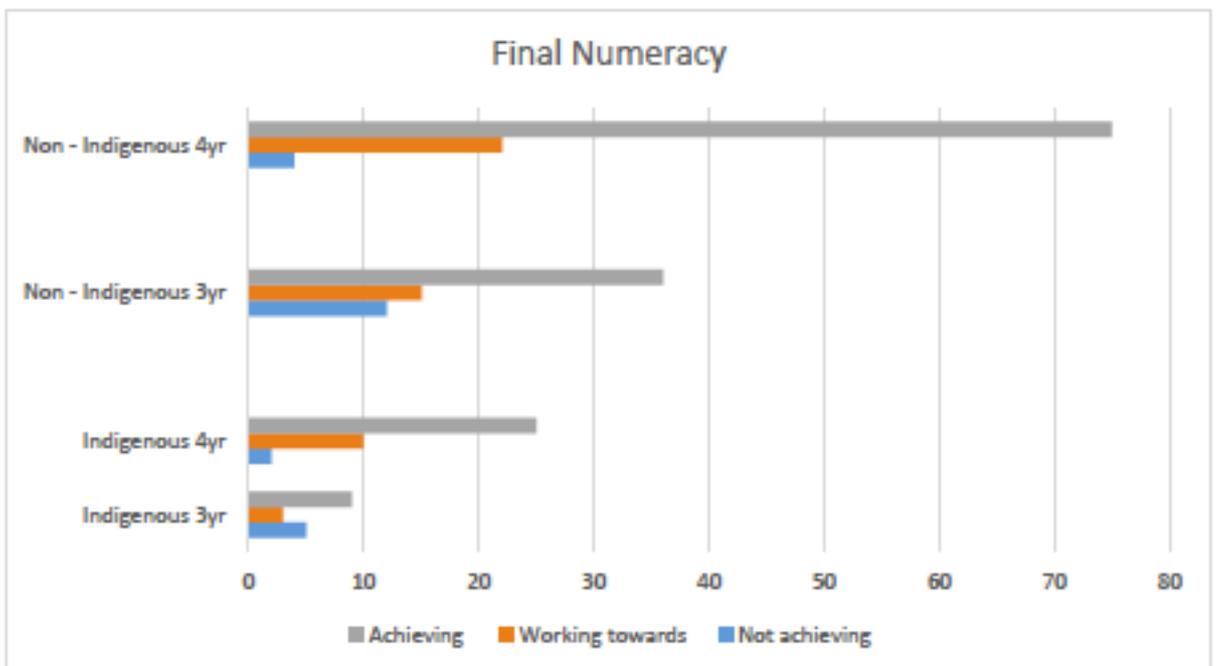
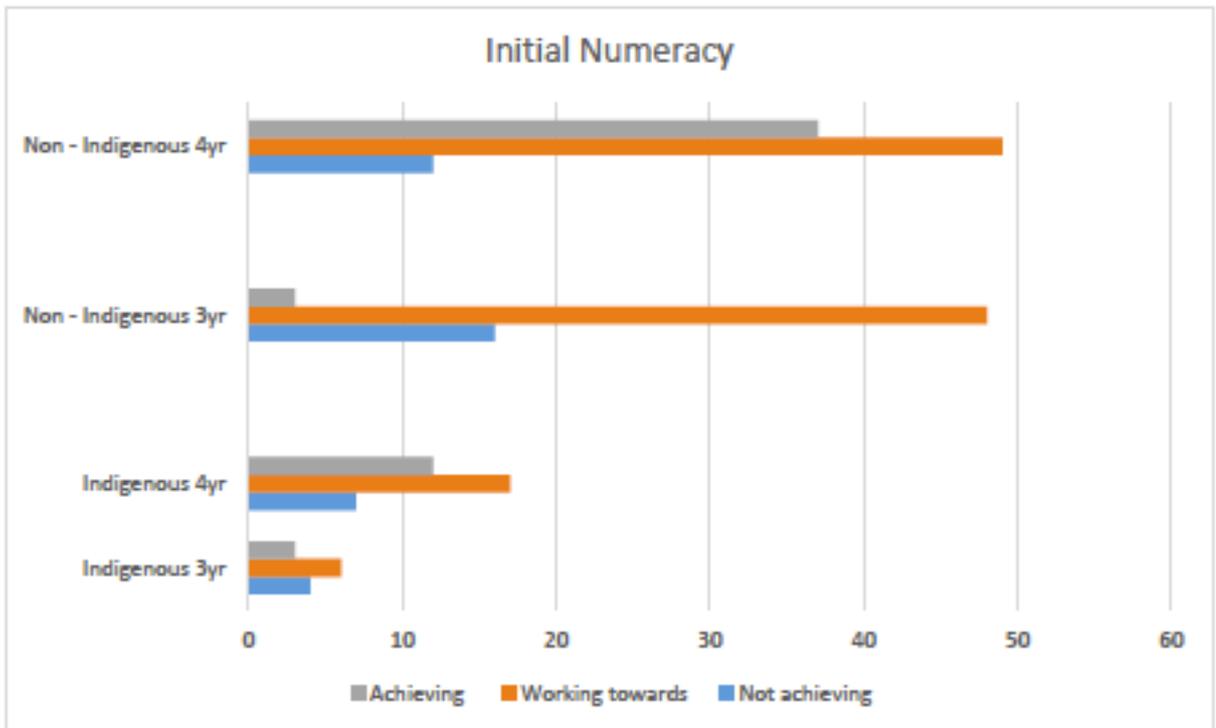
11. What data and information sources should be considered to better inform the Strategy?

- 11.1 Examples of effective, measured programs exist in the sector and may currently be facilitated by funding from other sources. The graphic below shows children's progress is from Dubbo West Preschool Inc. The program targets access to the preschool and the literacy and numeracy levels of Aboriginal children. It is implemented through funding from the commonwealth Indigenous Advancement Strategy and demonstrates that results can be effectively measured using appropriate assessment methods where knowledgeable and capable EC managers are in place.
- 11.2 The identification and collection of data in relation to strategies already in place that are developed and implemented focusing on outcomes is necessary within the data collection process in the EC system.

Further information in regard to Dubbo West can be provided if required.



NUMERACY



Conclusion

CCSA appreciates the opportunity to bring its almost 50 years of experience supporting regional and remote communities to contribute to this consultation process. CCSA's vision is of a capable and effective EC delivery system, including how it is structured and funded, that recognises the different and changing needs and circumstances of regional remote services and does not, of itself, have a negative impact on sustainability. The system needs to recognise the importance of effective governance and management and the flow-on benefit to communities from the continual use and re-use of this knowledge and skills in other contexts.

CCSA will continue to work with all levels of government to this end and offers the knowledge, skill and networks it has developed to contribute to solutions that lead to better outcomes for children and families. We will continue our work to ensure services are well managed and business-like, delivering professional practice in relation to both management and children's learning and development, working with partners and agencies in a collaborative manner to that end.

We hope the strategy developed will provide a support framework that takes a long-term view that provides certainty for providers and recognises the diversity of communities. Such a system should acknowledge the need for a set of diverse delivery types and enable flexibility to fit the differing contexts that exist in regional and remote locations. Within this frame should sit the recognition that capable management is the cornerstone of adaptability and sustainability in an operating environment of regular change.