

Early interventions in Australia for diverse children and families: How effective are they?

By

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The purpose of this presentation is to:

- Highlight Australia's standing with regards to provision of early education and family services.
- Justify the need for prevention and intervention programs.
- Review what has been offered through a literature search.
- Include governmental and non-governmental initiatives/programs.
- Provide recommendations for future initiatives.



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Australia's position

Organisation	Measure	Placement	Year
UNICEF	Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	18 th out of 24 countries: 0.4% out of recommended 1% of GDP	2008
OECD	GDP	21 st out of 37 countries	2013
OECD	Access to preschool	30 th out of 34	2011
OECD	Children's wellbeing	Top third in 12 out of 46 measures	2011

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Risk Factors (Edwards et al., 2009)

- Less school readiness is associated with negative life outcomes.
- Risk factors include low-income, child and parental characteristics, parenting style, and home learning environment.
- Mothers in financially disadvantaged families were likely to be single, be less than 26 years old, and have less than 12 years of education (LSAC sample).



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LSAC findings (Edwards et al., 2009)

- Fifteen percent of children are financially disadvantaged (LSAC sample) but this does not include all children that have low school readiness.
- Children in the financially disadvantaged group were likely to have lower receptive language skills (40%) and pre-literacy/pre-numeracy scores than the other children.
- Provision of early education, parenting skills, and adult education is recommended.



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Returns of prevention and intervention programs:

Data from The Benevolent Society report, 2013.

- James Heckman: Highest returns come from interventions in children less than 3 years old.
- Cumulative returns can reach up to 40,000 dollars for each dollar invested (Lee et al., 2012).
- Cost of intensive treatment: A child in secure accommodation costs 134000 UK pounds per year (Powell, 2010). ***Can this be avoided??



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The Literature Search -1

Input variables

- Program name
- Has it been reviewed?
year?
- Where does it take
place?
- Age group?
- Who administers it?
- Does it include Indigenous
families?
- Is it a prevention or
intervention program?
- Criteria for inclusion
- Money involved



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The Literature Search - 2

Output variables:

- Cost benefit
- Number of children
- Parenting skills
- Child development
- Cognitive gains
- Literacy
- Attendance
- Health
- Employment
- Access to services



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Australian Government Programs– As at October 2012

Effectiveness	Prevention	Intervention	Intervention
Good evidence	Let's Read	Communities for children	HIPPY \$2.53 for \$1
Promising practice	Community Playgroups	Australian Nurse Family Partnership Program	
Not available or N/A	National Partnership Agreement on ECE	Communities for children- Indigenous Parenting Services	Aboriginal Child and Family Centres
Not available or N/A		PaCE Program	Supported Playgroups

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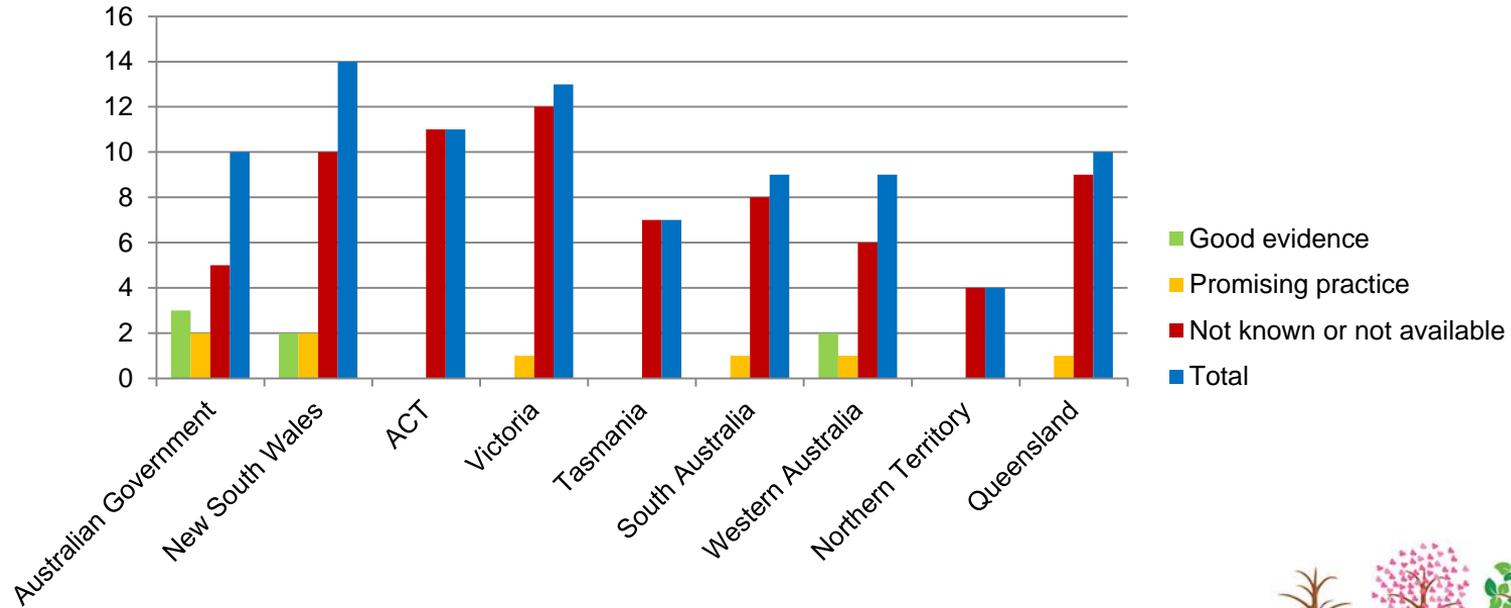
Government Funded Programs: N=87

Provider	Good evidence	Promising practice	Not known or not available	Total
Australian Government	3	2	5	10
New South Wales	2	2	10	14
ACT	0	0	11	11
Victoria	0	1	12	13
Tasmania	0	0	7	7
South Australia	0	1	8	9
Western Australia	2	1	6	9
Northern Territory	0	0	4	4
Queensland	0	1	9	10



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Government Funded Programs -2



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What to look for:

- Programs with a plan for intervention (YES)
- Intervention and control groups; or a pre-/post-intervention design (Often No)
- Clear information about cost-benefit analysis (Often No).
- Data collection measures (often Yes) and relevant outcomes.
- Evaluation procedure (Often No).



Studies/Programs with an evaluative component

- Early Impact Program (Larmar, 2008).
- Let's Start project (Robinson et al., 2012).
- Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (Phillips et al., 2008).
- Parent-Child Mother Goose Program (Terrett et al, 2013).
- Partnership in Early Childhood programs (Valentine, Thomson, and Antcliff, 2009).



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Studies/Programs with an evaluative component

- Spilstead Model (Gwynne et al., 2009)
- Triple-P Positive Parenting Program (Turner and Sanders, 2006).
- Child and Family Services Outcomes Survey, funded by the Victorian Department of Human Services (Queensland University of Technology and the Social Research Center, 2013).
- In addition to reports from AIFS, The Smith Family, and Mission Australia.



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Let's Start Project (Robinson et al, 2012)

- Sample drawn between late 2004 and 2008.
- Let's Start project: 8- to 10-week, manualised parenting programme designed for four- to six-year-old children with behavioural difficulties.
- Out of 225 referred children, 86 attended half or more sessions from Aboriginal (20%) and non-Aboriginal (40%) children in urban Darwin + Aboriginal children (47%) in three communities of the Tiwi Islands, near Darwin.



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Let's Start Project -2

- Measures: At referral, program completion, and at the six-month follow-up assessment.
- Results: Statistically significant reduction in the mean values of problem behaviour and parental distress. Effect sizes ranged from .20 to .62.
- Most benefit was seen among non-Indigenous boys and Indigenous (mainly Tiwi) girls.
- Focus should be on the cultural appropriateness of the intervention.



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Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (Phillips et al., 2008)

- Participants: 43 families with children aged 19-52 months who were referred for treatment of disruptive child behaviours.
- Intervention: PCIT treatment at the Karitane Toddler Clinic, in Sydney, Australia between April 2005 and October 2006).
- Pre- and post-treatment ratings.
- Improvement in child's behaviours and maternal well-being.



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Parent-Child Mother Goose Program (Terrett et al., 2013)

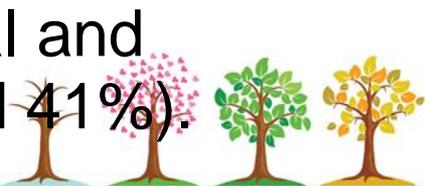
- Participants: 29 parents/30 children in PCMGP and 22 parents/25 children in control group.
- Children's ages ranged from 1 to 46 months old.
- Pre-test and a post-test, 15 weeks later.
- Improvement in children's language skills, especially their expressive communication skills.
- More positive impact on parents' perceptions of their child's demandingness.



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Spilstead Model (Gwynne et al., 2009)

- Participants: 23 families and 39 children under 5 years during 2005/2006.
- Program is over a 12-month period.
- Pre/post-test design; no control groups.
- Improvement in parental stress status, parent-child interaction, and family functioning.
- Children moved from having developmental and language delays to normal range (71% and 41%).



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Child and Family Services Outcomes Survey, 2013

- Surveyed by phone 973 parents and carers who accessed services from Child Protection, Family Services, and Out of Home Care.
- Included information on Victoria's population.
- High level of residential and school mobility: “between six and 11% had been enrolled in at five or more schools in their life.”
- Carers enrolled the child in child care centres, kindergarten, and preschools.



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Child and Family Services Outcomes -2

- The Family Services system has been cited as improving parenting skills, relating better to children, and managing better.
- Parents and carers related child's improvement to receiving services.
- The child's safety, mental health and behaviour have improved.
- There was a high level of program and service consistency.



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AIFS reports (2005, 2006)

- Reported on and evaluated many programs.
- Most programs in Australia did not have outcomes built into them.



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Food for Thought ...

- Early interventions in Australia for diverse children and families: How effective are they?
- The present review provided information that interventions work but the extent to which they do is not available for the majority of initiatives.



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Needs for Family and Early Childhood Interventions

Where do we need to intervene based on the research done in Australia?

- Cultural and language needs?
- Being exposed to coercive parenting (Bor and Sanders, 2004)?
- Living in an area?
- Being financially disadvantaged?
- Programs that combine high quality early education and parent support give the most return (Edwards et al., 2009)



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Conclusions:

- Programs should be part of a need-assessment plan based on the characteristics/context of the area.
- Programs should have an evaluative component.
- Attrition is a problem facing interventions.
- Support for staff involved in the interventions and partnerships between different organisations need to be further investigated.



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A final note:

- Is the 1% of GDP recommended by UNICEF a buffer that when implemented in early education and care in Australia, there would be no need to investigate other things?
- The efficacy of family and child interventions will be enhanced when they include a plan and an evaluative component.



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Abbreviations - 1

- AIFS: Australian Institute for Family Studies.
- GDP: Gross Domestic Product.
- HIPPY: Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters.
- LSAC: Longitudinal Study for Australian Children
- OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.



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Abbreviations -2

- PaCE: The Parental and Community Engagement Program.
- PCIT: Parent-Child Interaction Therapy
- PCMGP: Parent–Child Mother Goose Program
- Triple-P: Positive Parenting Program with five levels.



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