CAMPAIGN IN BRIEF 1/2020

A New Nation-Building Commitment – Let’s #buildbackbettertogether for children and young people.

NATION-BUILDING infrastructure to build secure and resilient children and young people beyond COVID-19.

The year 2020 in Australia is a defining moment. All Australians are impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. To emerge from this crisis, we need to address the gap in our current recovery plan: ensuring that children and young people develop well. If we want to build a more resilient and prosperous future, there is no better investment than the wellbeing of children and young people.

Australians are united through the sense that “we are all in this together.” Social cohesion and confidence in governments is high as decisions are based on evidence and expert advice. To fend off deep recession and hardship, Australian Governments have largely put ideology aside, rolled up their sleeves, and rolled out the most significant economic stimulus and social support packages this country has ever seen.

The pandemic has compounded existing inequalities. Youth unemployment rose to 13.8% in April and more than 20% of this group are also underemployed (ABS). The Reserve Bank reported GDP has fallen by 10% in the first half of 2020. Children and young people in jobless households, without decent housing and those with disabilities, have been at particular risk of hardship.

The time for action is now. There are distinct ‘windows of opportunity’ in childhood that determine how children develop – early childhood and the middle years. We know children’s education has been affected. We know that children are experiencing more anxiety (UNICEF Australia, 2020).

Instead of ‘snapping back’ to pre-existing systems after the pandemic, we must maximise this opportunity to build back Australian communities with economic infrastructure (such as affordable housing) and program infrastructure that significantly improves the resilience and quality of life for all children, young people and families. The case for change has never been stronger. The National Cabinet must continue and we must prioritise a new Nation-Building Commitment- infrastructure and investment that enables all Australian children and young people to be secure and confident.

What are the features of a New Nation-Building Commitment for Children and Young People?

Every Child calls on governments to support and implement a New Nation-Building Commitment with 6 main features:

1. Continue the National Cabinet – This mechanism has been highly effective in driving timely decisions that promote economic stimulus and public health.

2. Elevate the wellbeing and prosperity of children and young people with increased investment in infrastructure for children and young people.

3. Implement an Every Child Support Guarantee – Ensure that every child will have access to quality child care and early learning; education and health services, and a decent home and family income.

4. Large scale national roll-out of Early Years Centres – A flagship program of child and family, health and well being centres that offer integrated health, education, housing, disability, home visitation and related support services in regions across Australia, will improve child development.1,2,3

5. Invest in a 20 year nation-building Affordable Housing Strategy – Ensure that all children and young people have a secure place to call home.

6. Report annually on a Prosperous Children Report Card – This must feature wellbeing targets for children and young people alongside GDP as a measure of progress and guide to investment.
Prosperous Children Nation-Building Commitment – 6 Key Actions

A Nation-Building Commitment: Every Australian Child: Secure, confident and prosperous

1. Continue the National Cabinet –
   The evidence-based decision-making of federal, state and territory leaders has increased public confidence and social cohesion. We need this co-operation through the COVID-19 recovery and rebuilding stages.

2. Elevate the wellbeing and prosperity of children and young people as a nation-building priority –
   We can no longer accept that 20% of children persistently miss out and fall behind in their development milestones before they start school and beyond. The COVID-19 experience has compounded the hardship and divide in Australia among children. The divide between the children who have access to computers and internet; stable, safe home environments; decent family income, and those that don’t, is stark. We must increase investment in infrastructure for children and young people.

3. Implement an Every Child Support Guarantee –
   Ensure that every child will have access to quality child care and early learning; education and health services, and a decent home and family income.

4. Large scale national roll-out of Early Years Centres –
   A flagship program of child and family, health and wellbeing ‘hubs’– including community controlled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services – can offer integrated health, education, housing, disability, home visitation and related support services in regions across Australia. This model enables innovation in add on services as needed, such as financial planning, digital communication and other material or emotional supports.

continued on next page
Case Examples of Integrated Services

Early Years Places – The Benevolent Society Qld

Early Years Places are one stop hubs supporting the health, development and safety of families who have children up to 8 years. The multi-agency supports, home-visiting support, such as the home nurse and volunteer based programs (VFC), are based on the evidence that early support works. Evaluation of Early Years Centres showed that integrated services, based on multi-agency partnerships, offer a range of universal and specialist services to families that improve child development outcomes over the longer term. The model enables add on services in the one stop shop in a place based response.

The Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs).

ACCHs provide a range of primary and public health services (eg. Healthy Kids checks, mental health and referral services to specialists and allied health professionals) in regional and urban centres across Australia. The ACCHSs Report Card (AIHW, 2016) showed significant improvements in the number of antenatal visits before 13 weeks and health assessments for children, yet noted that the social determinants of health (adequate housing, employment and access to early childhood education) need improvement to close the gap on Indigenous health outcomes.

Invest in a 20 year nation-building Affordable Housing Strategy –

Ensure that all children and young people have a secure place to call home.

Report annually on a Prosperous Children Report Card -

This must feature wellbeing targets for children and young people alongside GDP as a measure of progress and guide to investment.

Principles to guide action

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<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Implications</th>
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<td>1. Build back better</td>
<td>Identify areas of structural reform that will build the personal and institutional capacity to bounce back from disasters (such as secure housing, reductions in the number of vulnerable children).</td>
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<td>2. Population health approach</td>
<td>Take an integrated approach to population health across welfare, housing, education (to address the social determinants) that also takes account of the life-course.</td>
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<td>3. Proportionate universalism</td>
<td>Make sure our policy setting addresses the needs of all children and introduce extra supports for those who need it.</td>
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<td>4. Institutional and governance arrangements</td>
<td>Involve people in decisions that affect them and their communities. Place based responses, co-designed by local people are to be encouraged.</td>
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<td>5. Evidence-based responses</td>
<td>New responses for children and families need to be evidence-based and provided with sufficient implementation support and guidance.</td>
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Why do we need a nation-building commitment for children of this scale?

Despite our relatively high quality of life and access to quality services, major challenges face around 20% of Australia’s children and families.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to face significant disadvantage across a range of domains relevant to their rights and wellbeing, including in health and education, discrimination, exposure to family violence, and overrepresentation in child protection and youth justice systems.
- More than one in eight adults and one in six children live below the poverty line in Australia. 774,000 children under the age of 15 live in poverty.
- Overall in Australia in 2018, 21.7% of children in their first year of full-time school were developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain(s) of the AEDC.
- Australia falls below the OECD averages for enrolment in early childhood education and care (ECEC). Only 15% of three-year-olds in Australia participate in a pre-primary education program compared with the OECD average of 68.6%.
- In June 2017, there were around 339,000 jobless families with dependants, accounting for 11% of all families with dependants. In 2017, an estimated 576,900 children aged 0-14 years were living in jobless families.
- In 2017-18, nearly 3 in 10 clients presenting to Specialist Homelessness Services were aged under 18 (29% or over 83,000). 1 in 6 were children under the age of 10 (17% or more than 47,700 clients).
- Suicide and self-inflicted injuries and anxiety disorders were the leading causes of burden in young people aged 15–24. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 4–17 accounted for 19.2% of all child deaths due to suicide between 2007–15.
- The rate of children for whom there are concerns about abuse or neglect continues to rise. In 2017-18, around 158,600 – or 1 in 35 – children received child protection services (investigation, care and protection order and/or were in out-of-home care).

The time to act is now to ensure that the conditions are in place for children to develop well.

#Buildbackbettertogether

Investing in the infrastructure to enable children and young people to develop well is a nation building commitment that will set us up to emerge from COVID-19 stronger and more resilient.

Many of the conditions that support the wellbeing of children - housing, family income, healthcare, strong families – will support the lives and livelihoods of all Australians. There is, however, a very specific window of opportunity for very young children – in the first 2000 days – that demands a particular call on our attention. We know what children need to thrive and we also know that the sudden economic downturn and social distancing measures place real pressures on the ability of families.

We welcome a dialogue across Australian sectors and communities about how we can build back better.

For more information contact Every Child info@everychild.co
Sign up to the Every Child campaign and join our national alliance