

8. EARLY INTERVENTION

Early Intervention is an important investment in the future of children, families and the community. It provides important building blocks that develop resilience to, or skills to avoid, challenges that may be faced, particularly at key turning points and transitions in peoples lives. Government's investment in early intervention also potentially avoids or reduces the need to direct significant amounts of public money in the future toward the lengthy and expensive support programs that are required to address serious and engrained problems.

As one of the ACT Government's service delivery priorities, Early Intervention contributes most significantly to the following Canberra Plan Strategic Themes:

- Investing in our People;
- Building a Stronger Community; and
- A City for All Ages.

2005-06 Budget Highlights:

- **DDHCS – Additional Therapy Support for Children with High and Complex Needs (\$0.200m):** providing a specialised equipments assessment, trial and short-term loan service for children and young people with high and complex needs, including autism;
- **DDHCS – Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre (\$0.338m):** providing a range of early intervention programs and services at the Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre;
- **DET - Increase Preschool Hours (\$1.150m):** increasing preschool education for eligible four year olds from 10.5 hours to 12 hours per week.

What do we mean by Early Intervention:

The primary focus of the services and programs that have been included under the early intervention service delivery priority meet one of the following definitions:

- 1 Early Intervention is a means of **identifying and addressing the physical, emotional, social and educational needs of children from birth to five years**. The focus is on the critical years of growth and transition to increase protective factors and reduce social and environmental risks that may have lifetime implications. Programs can be universal (available to all) or more specifically targeted to those with special needs.
- 2 Early Intervention can also be aimed at **lowering the prevalence of specific problems or issues in a population¹**. It focuses on strategies to resolve issues, aiming to intervene early in the life of a problem, and typically focuses on populations at a higher risk of developing problems or on families that are experiencing problems which have

¹ Early Intervention in this definition is part of secondary prevention. It focuses on strategies to resolve issues and is therefore more interventionist than primary prevention, which aims to decrease the incidence of problems or issues. It is recognised that services and activities often have a mix of primary and secondary prevention.

not yet become well established or entrenched. It is more likely to require individually tailored solutions.

What Early Intervention Programs have been Identified:

The 2005-06 Budget is the first year that early intervention services and resources have been identified in agencies against specific output classes. Consequently, while a significant foundation of services and associated funding and performance measures have been identified and disclosed, it is anticipated that this will be refined and improved over time.

ACT Health (\$16.322m)

| Outputs | Early Intervention Services provided: | GPO \$m |
|---------------------------------------|---|--------------------|
| 1.7 Prevention and Early Intervention | <p>Health programs that prevent or intervene early in health care conditions that result in major acute or chronic health burdens on the community including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - youth smoking; - child immunisation; - newborn hearing screening; - breast screening for women aged 50-69 years; and - cervical screening for women aged 20-69. | 16.322 |

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (\$10.490m)

| Outputs | Early Intervention Services provided: | GPO \$m |
|---|--|--------------------|
| 2.1 EI – Therapy Services | <p>Therapy services for children with delays in development from birth to age 8 and children, young people and adults with disabilities (ie from birth to 65 years), including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - counselling and support; and - assistance with physical, intellectual, communication and other functional disabilities. | 8.590 |
| 2.2 EI – Child and Family Centre Programs | <p>Early intervention and prevention programs for children from birth to age 5 and their families including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - universal and targeted parenting information and support services; - specialist clinical services; and - community development and community education programs. | 1.900 |

Office of Children, Youth and Family Services (\$16m)

| Outputs | Early Intervention Services provided: | GPO \$m |
|---|--|--------------------|
| 2.1 EI – Child Development, Family Support and Prevention Service | <p>Early intervention services to assist children, young people and families to participate in a range of community activities; prevention/intervention services including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Parents as Teachers; – Schools as Communities; – Youth Connection; – Adolescent Day Unit; and – licensing and monitoring of childcare centres. | 16.000 |

Department of Education and Training (\$16.731m)

| Outputs | Early Intervention Services provided: | GPO \$m |
|--|---|--------------------|
| 4.1 EI – Childhood and Preschool Education | <p>Early intervention programs that focus on early childhood development needs, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – early intervention programs for children from approximately 2 to 6 years old who are not enrolled in a primary school and who have a disability or developmental delay; and – preschool education to all eligible 4 year olds aimed at consolidating and extending early learning experiences with a focus on literacy, numeracy and socialisation. | 16.731 |

Department of Urban Services (\$0.128m)

| Outputs | Early Intervention Services provided: | GPO \$m |
|---|--|--------------------|
| 1.1 Customer Services and Information (<i>part</i>) | <p>ACT Library services for children from birth to age 5 and their families, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Bookstart for Babies; – Rhyme time sessions; and – Pre-school Storytime. | 0.128 |

How will Early Intervention Success be Measured Across Government:

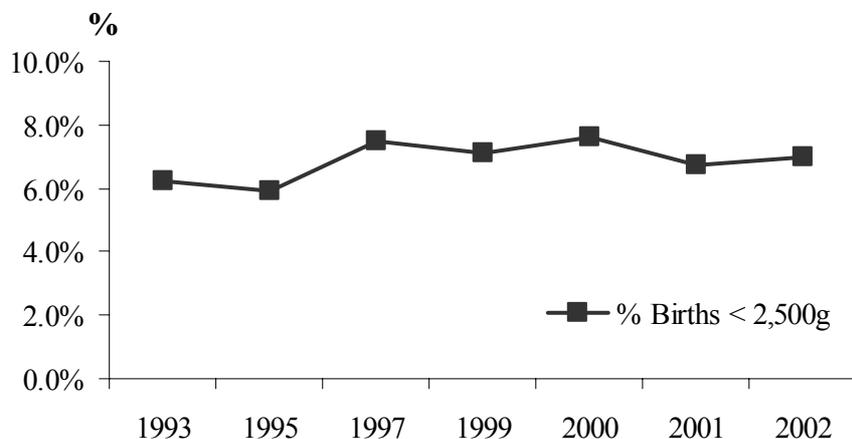
The indicators outlined below are intended as longitudinal indicators of the success of early intervention across Government. The indicators focus on three main areas – health; educational attainment; and family support. The indicators outlined are a few of the key factors associated with positive and adverse outcomes for people and, consequently, provide an indication of where early intervention programs can assist in improving future outcomes.

As mentioned above, the 2005-06 Budget is the first year that early intervention indicators have been articulated at the Government level. Consequently, while the indicators outlined below may provide a significant insight over time into the success of early intervention programs, it is anticipated that these indicators will be refined and improved over time, particularly in line with the emerging trends at a national level.

Birth Weight

Birth weight is a key indicator of likely health outcomes. Babies with a low birth weight (typically less than 2.5 kg) have a higher risk of poor health and developing a disability. Low birth weight is also linked with the later development of major chronic diseases.

Percentage of ACT Births with a Birthweight < 2,500g



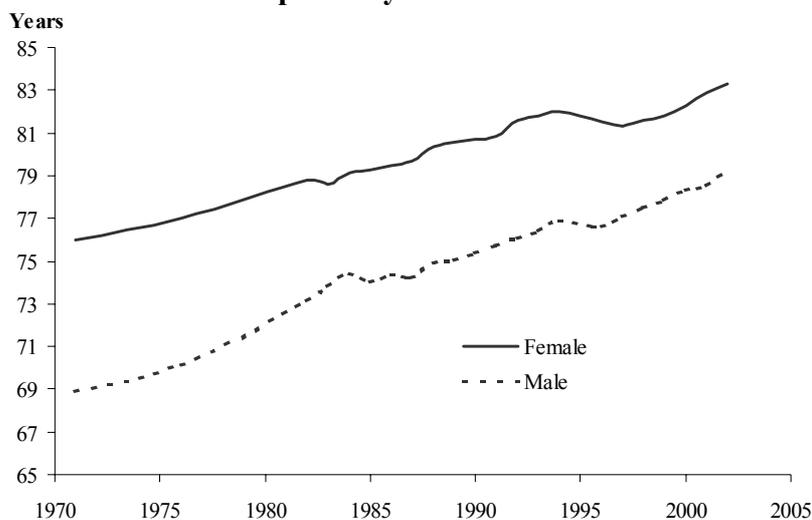
Source: AIHW Australia's Health 1996, 1998, 2000 and National Perinatal Statistics Unit Australia's Mothers and Their Babies 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002.

It should be noted that the above indicator includes cross-border at-risk pregnancies and complex births that are referred from the surrounding region to the ACT, which have an considerable impact on the results outlined above.

Life Expectancy at Birth

Life expectancy at birth provides an indication of the general health of the community, although it also reflects on a range of other factors such as economic and environmental factors. Past improvements in this indicator have largely been influenced by reductions in infant and child mortality rates, as well as reductions in death rates in diseases that largely affect middle aged and elderly people such as cardiovascular disease.

Life Expectancy at Birth – ACT

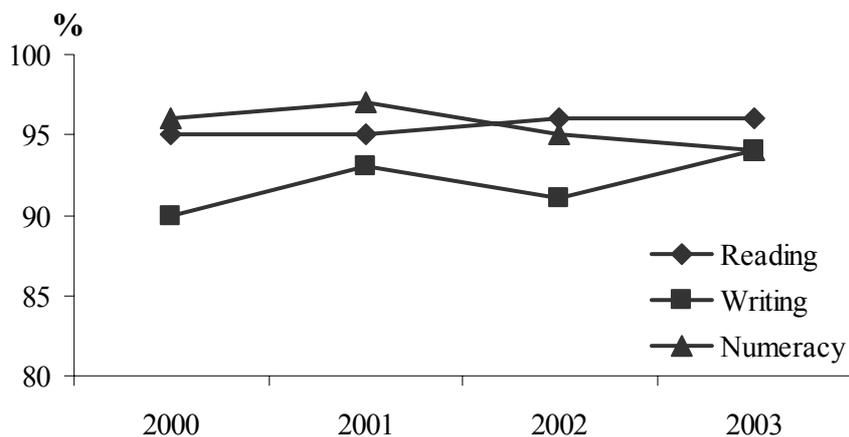


Source: Australian Historical Population Statistics, ABS Cat No. 3105.0.65.001 Published 2004

Reading, Writing and Numeracy

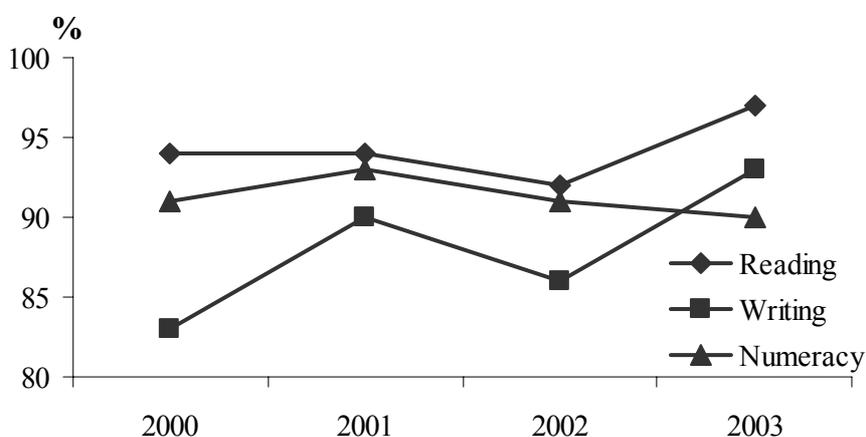
Positive, stimulating and nurturing early childhood experiences have a strong influence on students' achievements at school, including those in the areas of reading, writing and numeracy. Early success in these areas can also encourage ongoing engagement in learning, not only through school but also later in life. The following graphs provide an indication of ACT school students' achievements in these areas.

Year 3
Students who achieved the Reading Writing and Numeracy Benchmarks



NB The benchmark results in 2000 are for government schools only. The results for 2001, 2002, and 2003 include government, catholic and independent schools.

Year 5
Students who achieved the Reading Writing and Numeracy Benchmarks



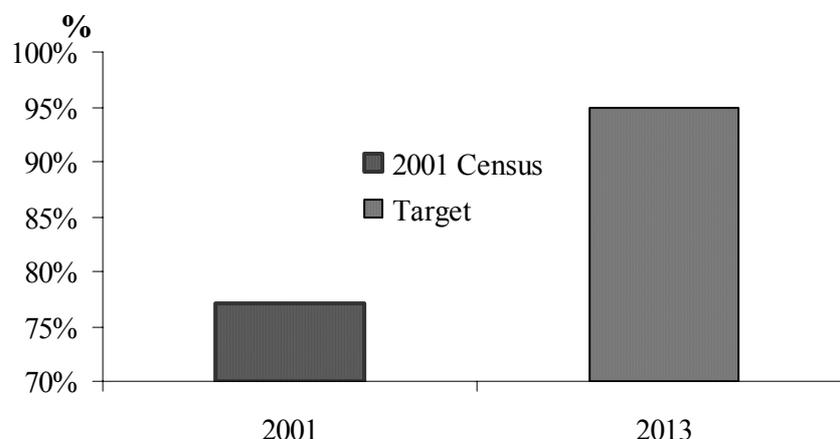
NB The benchmark results in 2000 are for government schools only. The results for 2001, 2002, and 2003 include government, catholic and independent schools.

Year 12 or Equivalent

Completion of Year 12 or equivalent provides an indication of students' engagement with learning at and potentially beyond normal schooling. People who have completed Year 12 or an equivalent have a recognised foundation that supports their transition into work or further study and consequently, are much less likely to experience prolonged periods of

unemployment, which without early and effective intervention potentially leads to a range of adverse outcomes including social isolation, poor health, substance abuse and crime.

Proportion of ACT 19 year olds with a Year 12 Certificate or Equivalent



Source: ABS 2001 Census of Population and Housing, ACT Government The Social Plan 2004

Family Support

Families play a key role in setting the foundations of children's health and developmental needs. Consequently, access to appropriately focussed services can support and assist families to minimise risk factors and develop and enhance those protective factors that support children throughout their life.

The numbers of families accessing parenting programs and support services across government will be used as the initial indicator of family support. This indicator will encompass the number of families who have face-to-face contact with staff in support programs such as the Family Support Program; Child and Family Centres; Schools As Communities; Parents As Teachers; and Youth Directions. However, the indicator will exclude the use of general information and referral services such as ParentLink.

The Government agencies will begin measuring this indicator from 2005-06.