

Victoria's Implementation Plan

NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT ON UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION - 2015

PART 1: PRELIMINARIES

1. This Implementation Plan is a schedule to the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (NP UAECE or National Partnership) – 2015 and should be read in conjunction with that Agreement.
2. The objective of the NP UAECE 2015 is to reaffirm the commitment to universal access to quality early childhood education programme(s), with a focus on improved participation of vulnerable and disadvantaged children, and in a manner that meets the needs of children, parents and communities and ensures that cost is not a barrier to participation.

PART 2: TERMS OF THIS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

3. This Implementation Plan will commence as soon as it is agreed between the Commonwealth of Australia, represented by the Minister for Education and Training, and the state of Victoria, represented by the Minister for Families and Children.
4. As a schedule to the NP UAECE 2015, the purpose of this Implementation Plan is to provide the public with an indication of how universal access is intended to be delivered and demonstrate Victoria's capacity to achieve the outcomes of the NP UAECE 2015 by the expiry of the National Partnership.
5. This Implementation Plan supports the national approach to the regulation and quality assessment of education and care services consistent with the National Quality Framework.
6. This Implementation Plan will cease on completion or termination of the NP UAECE 2015, including the processing of final payments against performance benchmarks.
7. This Implementation Plan may be varied by written agreement between the Commonwealth and State Ministers with responsibility for Early Childhood Education under the overarching NP UAECE 2015.
8. The Parties to this Implementation Plan do not intend any of the provisions to be legally enforceable. However, that does not lessen the Parties' commitment to the plan and its full implementation.

PART 3: STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Project information

9. The NP UAECE 2015 reaffirms the commitment to provide universal access to, and improved participation by, children in quality early childhood education in the year before full-time school, with a focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged children and in a manner that meets the needs of children, parents and communities and ensures that cost is not a barrier to participation.
10. Commonwealth, state and territory governments will collaborate to develop a nationally agreed definition of vulnerable and disadvantaged children over time. This should be progressed through the Early Childhood Policy Group. In Victoria, vulnerable and disadvantaged children are provisionally defined as children living in communities with Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) in the lowest quintile.
11. The project elements planned are as follows:
 - (a) Maintain universal access to 600 hours of quality early childhood education for children in the year before full-time school, including targeted support for vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
 - (b) Targeted activities focused on increasing participation of Indigenous children.

Table 1: Project elements

No.	Short description	Planned start date	Planned end date	Dependent on projects
1	Maintain universal access – Provision of funding to all preschool provider types to maintain universal access to 600 hours of quality early childhood education for children in the year before full-time school, including targeted support for vulnerable and disadvantaged children	1 January 2015	31 Dec 2015	Element 1 of Table 4
2	Targeted activities focused on increasing participation of Indigenous children	1 January 2015	31 Dec 2015	Element 1 and 2 of Table 4

12. Clause 21 (b) of the NP UAECE 2015, requires that jurisdictions address critical gaps in support as identified in the Review of the previous NP UAECE:
 - (a) Victoria currently has a range of grants and programmes which support increased access and participation of vulnerable and disadvantaged children in early childhood education programmes:
 - a. Kindergarten Fee Subsidy – enables eligible vulnerable children to access a funded kindergarten programme for 600 hours in the year before school free of charge or at a minimal cost. Eligible children include:
 - i. Children identified as Indigenous;
 - ii. Children/families who hold particular cards or visas (e.g. health care card, pensioner card, refugee visa, humanitarian visa, protection visa, ImmiCard);
 - iii. Children identified on their birth certificate as being a multiple birth child (triplets or more);

- b. Early Start Kindergarten Program – enables Indigenous children and children known to child protection to attend a three-year-old kindergarten programme up to 600 hours per year free of charge;
 - c. Early Start Kindergarten Extension Program – enables Indigenous children and children known to child protection to access a kindergarten programme in the year before school free of charge if they do not have access to the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy;
 - d. Access to Early Learning Program – a targeted service model that aims to build the capacity of education and care services to meet the needs of vulnerable children, to work more effectively with families, and to work more collaboratively with the broader child and family service system;
 - e. Koorie Engagement Support Officers – specialist staff who provide information and support to the families of Indigenous children, communities, kindergarten staff and management;
 - f. Preschool Field Officer Program – provides assistance to kindergarten service providers to support the access and participation of children with additional needs in kindergarten programmes through the provision of consultative support, resourcing and advice to early childhood teachers;
 - g. Koorie Preschool Assistants Program – enhance access and participation of Aboriginal children in kindergarten programmes;
 - h. Indigenous Transition Program – supports Indigenous children not currently participating in an early childhood education to prepare for kindergarten in the year before.
13. As required by clause 21 (e) of the NP UAECE 2015, the following strategies are to ensure that funding is directed to support participation in all preschool programmes, regardless of whether programmes are delivered through schools (government and non-government), standalone preschools or Long Day Care centres:
- (a) Kindergarten in Victoria is delivered by a diverse range of service providers. Victoria funds these providers irrespective of the setting. Victoria will continue to fund its providers at the current funding rate¹.

Estimated costs

- 14. The maximum financial contribution to be provided by the Commonwealth for the project to Victoria is \$97,371,220 payable in accordance with the performance milestones and benchmarks set out in the National Partnership. All payments are exclusive of GST.
- 15. The estimated overall budget (exclusive of GST) is set out in Table 2. The budget is indicative only and Victoria retains the flexibility to move funds between components and/or years, as long as outcomes are not affected. The Commonwealth contribution in Table 2 can only be moved between years with the agreement of the Commonwealth.

¹ Victoria funds kindergarten services in non-government schools at a lower per capita rate, based on the schools' Economic Resource Index rating. While this rate is lower than the standard per capita rate, this funding appropriately supports kindergarten participation as parents have made a choice to enrol their child in a non-government school even though they have the ability to enrol in a community-managed kindergarten or funded long day care centre.

Table 2: Estimated financial contributions

(\$ million)	2014–15	2015–16*	Total
**Total Commonwealth contribution	\$29.2	\$68.2	\$97.4

* Funding for the six month period to 31 December 2015.

** The Commonwealth is using \$1.5 million of the allocated \$406 million under the NP UAECE 2015 for national data development activities.

Note: This table does not include direct child care assistance to parents, by the Commonwealth, to help improve the affordability of Child Care Benefit approved child care services that provide a preschool or kindergarten programme.

Program logic

16. The project elements detailed in this Implementation Plan will achieve the outcomes and objectives stated in the National Partnership including for vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
17. The way in which these project elements will achieve the outcomes and objectives set out in the National Partnership are detailed in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Program logic

Project elements	Outputs (services delivered)	Outcomes	Reform/Project Objectives	Responsibility
<i>Element 1</i> <i>Maintain universal access</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide per capita grants and other programme funding • Provide targeted support for vulnerable and disadvantaged children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving participation in affordable, quality early childhood education programmes, for 600 hours per year in the year before full-time school • Indigenous, vulnerable and disadvantaged children have access to and participate in affordable, quality early childhood programmes for 600 hours per year in the year before full-time school • Cost is not a barrier to participation for children attending kindergarten programmes in the year before full-time school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all children have access to, and participate in, 600 hours of high quality kindergarten programmes delivered by an early childhood teacher for children in the year before full-time school • Ensure cost is not a barrier to participation for targeted vulnerable and disadvantaged children. 	Victoria

<p><i>Element 2</i></p> <p><i>Increasing participation of Indigenous children</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted communications. • Engagement strategy working with local government and key services in areas of higher Aboriginal populations. • Refocus of Aboriginal Best Start to include greater emphasis on kindergarten participation. • Support for services to strengthen culturally inclusive practices. • Improved processes for identification of Aboriginal children. • Improved access to free kindergarten for Indigenous children attending long day care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased identification of Aboriginal children. • Improved awareness and participation of Aboriginal children in kindergarten. • Services are more culturally responsive and all families are better engaged. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all Indigenous children can access and participate in a high quality kindergarten programme delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher for 600 hours in the year before school. 	<p>Victoria</p>
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Risk management

18. The Victorian Department of Education and Training has a risk management plan in place. Risks have been actively identified, entered into a risk log and categorised in terms of impact and likelihood.

Victorian Context

19. The continued well-established and highly valued partnership approach with local government and the Municipal Association of Victoria is critical to achievement of the objectives and outcomes set out in the National Partnership in Victoria.

20. Victoria will continue to invest in infrastructure expansion, workforce development and planning initiatives through State funding.

21. In developing this Implementation Plan, consideration has been given to relevant contextual information to aid interpretation:

- a. the historic community ownership of kindergartens;
- b. the maturity of the kindergarten system which is operating at close to full capacity (spaces and teachers);

- c. the extent to which the full range of early years services (kindergarten for both 3 and 4 year olds, playgroups, etc.) are embedded in and valued by local communities;
- d. anticipated continuation of the high participation rate in Victorian kindergarten programmes;
- e. the parallel reform processes from the National Quality Agenda;
- f. a period of significant population growth in Victoria;
- g. a significant increase in Indigenous population estimates in Victoria; and
- h. the current Enterprise Bargaining Agreement negotiations in Victoria.

22. Key factors that have influenced the proposed direction are set out in Table 4.

Table 4: Links with existing reforms or projects

Proposed project elements	Existing reforms or projects	Complementary nature of activities
Element 1 Maintain universal access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kindergarten Cluster Management • Kindergarten Fee Subsidy • Early Start Kindergarten • Access to Early Learning • Preschool Field Officer Program • Kindergarten Inclusion Support 	Supports delivery of kindergarten programmes in Victoria.
Element 2 Increasing participation of Indigenous children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous Transition Program • Improved identification of Indigenous status • Targeted communications to increase participation of Indigenous children • Koorie Engagement Support Officers 	Supports participation of Indigenous children in kindergarten programmes in Victoria.

PART 4: PERFORMANCE AND REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS

Performance indicators, benchmarks and targets

- 23. Key indicators, data sources and benchmarks for assessing and monitoring performance are set out in Part 4 and Schedule A of the NP UAECE 2015.
- 24. With regard to reporting on attendance, Victoria has agreed a target for 2015 with the Commonwealth, as set out in Table 5 below, and will report on progress towards this target as part of the National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection (National Collection).

Table 5: Bilaterally agreed attendance target/s

Baseline data	2014 Target	2015 Target	Nationally Agreed Target
96% ²	90 per cent	90 per cent	90 per cent of enrolled children attending an early childhood education programme to be achieved over time

Monitoring and reporting

25. Commonwealth and State based collections or data sources and methodologies, agreed by both the Parties to this Plan, to measure progress against the performance milestones and benchmarks and targets in the NP UAECE 2015, are set out in Schedule A of the NP UAECE 2015.
26. These data and performance specifications will be used to report Victoria's performance, except for the supplementary data agreed by the Parties to this Plan in Schedule C.1 of this Plan and any additional data provided in accordance with Clauses 27 and 28.
27. It is recognised the data measures used are a 'best fit' across states and territories that have variable preschool profiles and starting age for preschools and schools. Subject to privacy provisions, the Commonwealth will provide access to relevant data – extracted from the Child Care Management System (CCMS) for the purposes of the annual National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection – to enable Victoria to effectively monitor and demonstrate its progress against the Performance Indicators.
28. State based collections or data may be used to supplement the National Collection where it is agreed with the Commonwealth for the purposes of reporting and measurement of performance. In addition, States may provide contextual information to aid interpretation should they wish to do so.
29. Supplementary data reports must contain the following details for each Performance Indicator where the method is inconsistent with the Early Childhood Education and Care Minimal Data Set (NMDS):
 - Performance Indicator calculation description (numerator, denominator, computation and presentation)
 - Numerator Information (collection name and population description)
 - Denominator Information (collection name and population description)
 - Calculation Notes (including any information about how the PI is calculated)
 - Methodology
 - Rationale for supplementary data and reporting (including any additional information to explain how and why the specifications for the supplementary data differ from the specifications in the NMDS).

² 2013 National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection. The figures above are calculated by dividing attendance by enrolment. Attendance is the number of children aged 4 and 5 years old as at 1 July of the collection year who are attending a kindergarten programme in the year before school. Enrolment is the number of children aged 4 and 5 years old as at 1 July of the collection year who are enrolled in a kindergarten programme in the year before school.

Sign off

The Parties have confirmed their commitment to this agreement as follows:

Signature

Date

The Hon Jenny Mikakos MP
Victorian Minister for Families and Children

Signature

Date

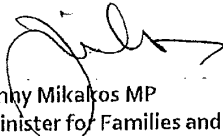
The Hon Christopher Pyne MP
Minister for Education and Training

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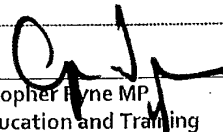
SCHEDULE C

Sign off

The Parties have confirmed their commitment to this agreement as follows:

Signature 
The Hon Jenky Mikakos MP
Victorian Minister for Families and Children

Date 4/6/15

Signature 
The Hon Christopher Pyne MP
Minister for Education and Training

Date 15/6/15

Schedule C.1

Supplementary Data

Table 1: Victoria's supplementary data specifications

Increase in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population estimate

The 2011 Census of Population and Housing recorded a large increase in the number of people identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) compared to the 2006 Census count. As a result of this, there has been an increased projection of approximately 300 Indigenous children in Victoria³. Increased efforts by the ABS to encourage Aboriginal people to identify their Indigenous status can explain up to 30 per cent of the increase in Aboriginal population. The *Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2013* notes "...analysis by the ABS suggests that 70 per cent of the Aboriginal population increase can be explained by demographic factors (growth), and the majority of the balance due to an increase in the preparedness of Aboriginal people to identify."

Despite improvements to Indigenous identification in the ABS Census of Population and Housing, there are widely recognised and continuing problems with the under identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in service level data collections (such as ECEC services). Most face-to-face administrative collections will not have the same resources and trusted anonymity as the ABS Census of Population and Housing and will be subject to a higher level of under-reporting.

The ABS information paper, *Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Identification in Selected Data Collection Context* details research that has revealed a number of factors discouraging identification. The paper notes that these factors are intensified in face-to-face data collection situations because "identification may be more sensitive in this context" and it "may be a more confronting context in which to consider disclosing their Indigenous status".

The 2014 Victorian Indigenous population projection for four year olds increased from 925 to 1207 with the release of *Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2001 to 2026* in April 2014. Based on the evidence above, up to 30 per cent of this apparent growth — 85 children or 7 per cent of Victoria's total four year old Indigenous projected population — is likely due greater self-identification. Supporting information which illustrates under-reporting of Indigenous status in Victorian kindergarten programmes is provided below.

Victorian Aboriginal organisations have reported that some families make a deliberate choice not to identify their Indigenous status to avoid potential discrimination or because they don't want to accept free kindergarten based on their cultural background. Indigenous families with Health Care Cards are able to access a free kindergarten programme without revealing their Indigenous status.

³ Increase calculated on the difference in estimated Victorian ATSI four-year-olds in *Experimental Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians 1991 to 2021* and *Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2001 to 2026* (cat. 3238.0 released in 2014)

As noted in the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report *Taking the next steps: identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status in general practice* “choosing to disclose one’s Indigenous status is voluntary. People may or may not be prepared to disclose their Indigenous status depending on the situation; others may be discovering or acknowledging their Indigenous status for the first time”. Further evidence that indicates that the lower numbers of children identified as Indigenous in Victorian funded kindergarten services are linked to under-reporting rather than non-attendance is provided below.

Action is being taken to increase identification and participation of Indigenous children in funded kindergarten services at enrolment from 2015 onwards to better align kindergarten and Census numbers. This includes:

- Piloting of a transition program to support Indigenous children not currently in early childhood education to prepare for kindergarten in the year before school.
- Collaborative work with the Municipal Association of Victoria and local governments to identify and engage Indigenous families with young children.
- Dedicated work by the DEECD regional Koorie education workforce in identified areas to provide outreach and support for families to access kindergarten.
- Use of new Kindergarten Information Management system to improve monitoring of Indigenous kindergarten participation at a local scale.
- Establishment of a targeted, culturally appropriate communications project regarding the value of kindergarten and how to enrol.

However, in the short-term, there will be a disparity between numbers of Victorian Indigenous children in *Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2001 to 2026* and those identifying through face-to-face enrolments in kindergartens.

Victoria is able to submit supplementary data for any Indigenous children who were enrolled in a kindergarten programme in 2015 but not included in August census.

Table 1: Victoria’s supplementary data specifications – ATSI under-reporting

Performance Indicator	Supplementary data specification
<p><i>PI 2</i> <i>Proportion of children enrolled in the year before full-time school in quality early childhood education programme(s)</i></p> <p><i>Indigenous disaggregation</i></p>	<p><u>Source:</u> Indigenous status update in the Kindergarten Information Management (KIM) system</p> <p><u>Supplementation Rationale:</u> While efforts by the ABS to encourage Aboriginal people to identify as Indigenous have resulted in a large increase in the population count of Indigenous people, there are continuing problems with the under identification in other data collections undertaken without the same resources and without the trusted anonymity offered by the ABS. Victoria has sent all funded services a request that staff check that children known to be Indigenous are identified correctly in the KIM system and ask families to identify their cultural background if this has not already taken place. Any updates to Indigenous status received after the VIC URL Child file has</p>

Performance Indicator	Supplementary data specification
	<p>been sent to the ABS will be submitted as supplementary data.</p> <p><u>Numerator Impact:</u> The additional 4 and 5 year old children in the VIC URL Child file identified as Indigenous in the KIM system by December 2015 to be included in the numerator for this performance indicator.</p> <p><u>Denominator Impact:</u> Estimated number of Indigenous children aged 4 years (not affected)</p> <p><u>Impact on other Performance Indicators:</u> This data supplementation will also affect the Indigenous disaggregation of PI 3 and PI 4.</p> <p><u>Key Definitions:</u> The Kindergarten Information Management (KIM) system is the Victorian Department of Education and Training's (DET) new online web-based system for kindergarten funding applications, data collection, and reporting.</p>

Table 2: Victoria's supplementary data specifications – Indigenous enrolments not recorded by August census

Performance Indicator	Supplementary data specification
<p><i>PI 2</i> <i>Proportion of children enrolled in the year before full-time school in quality early childhood education programme(s)</i></p> <p><i>Indigenous disaggregation</i></p>	<p><u>Source:</u> Victorian funded kindergarten enrolment data updates</p> <p><u>Supplementation Rationale:</u> Funding applications and associated enrolment information can be sent to the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) up until December for children enrolled throughout the year. Therefore some records for 4 and 5 year old children in kindergarten programmes are not available at the time of the National Collection. These records are not part of the VIC URL Child file and will be provided as supplementary data.</p> <p><u>Numerator Impact:</u> The additional 4 and 5 year old children identified by December 2015 to be included in the numerator for this performance indicator.</p> <p><u>Denominator Impact:</u> Estimated number of children aged 4 years (not affected)</p> <p><u>Impact on other Performance Indicators:</u> This data supplementation will affect all other performance indicators.</p>

Under-reporting of Indigenous status in Victorian funded kindergarten services

Evidence of under-reporting in Victorian funded enrolment data:

- Victorian Kindergarten Census data, calculated according to National Partnership Performance Indicator 2, shows 100 per cent of children aged four and five years are

enrolled in an early education programme delivered by qualified teacher. Preliminary Indigenous figures show a substantially lower proportion of Indigenous children enrolled. This indicates that there are a number of Indigenous children in the Victorian data that are not identifying their Indigenous status.

- Comparison of Victorian funded kindergarten enrolment data across 2013 and 2014 has shown that identification of Indigenous status is not consistent across years. Children that are identified as Indigenous in 2013 data are not identified in 2014 and vice versa. This indicates under-reporting is an issue for Victoria.
- Victorian LGA level participation analysis based on child address indicates under-reporting of Indigenous status. Several LGAs show a very low ATSI participation which is at odds with the overall participation rate of 100 per cent. A sample of this data is shown below.

LGA	Indigenous kindergarten participation (prep enrolment denominator)	Overall kindergarten participation rate
MELTON	25%	99%
WYNDHAM	30%	102%
BRIMBANK	52%	97%
BALLARAT	54%	99%

As a comparison the method of identifying Indigenous status in CCMS data, as confirmed by the ABS, leverages existing information recorded in the Commonwealth social benefit system records (e.g. Centrelink) to determine the Indigenous status of the person receiving the CCB (i.e. the child's parent or guardian). The identification of Indigenous status of enrolments in Victorian funded services is required, but can only be recorded if a parent or guardian is willing to identify their child as Indigenous leading to a greater risk of under-reporting.

Data limitations/barriers

Lack of information

Victoria only has access to data from services that receive kindergarten funding. There are approximately 300 long day care services in Victoria that have chosen not to apply for this funding. Lack of access to CCMS data means Victoria has limited knowledge and capacity to influence whether children have access to 600 hours of kindergarten in these services.

Indigenous population estimates are only available at state level. The lack of information available about where Indigenous children reside creates difficulties for the implementation of localised strategies for Indigenous participation.