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Preface

This guide provides an overview of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) and how it can be used by all early childhood stakeholders, including central and regional staff from across Victorian Government, community leaders, local government managers and planners. It also outlines the planned DEECD resources that will support the use of the AEDI data for planning and policy decisions.



1. Introducing the AEDI

1.1 What is the AEDI?

The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) is a population measure of how young children are developing in Australian communities. It measures children's development across five domains.

The first national implementation of the AEDI took place between 1 May and 31 July 2009, providing the first national measure of the developmental status of almost every child in their first year of school. In Victoria, 94.2 per cent of the eligible population of children were surveyed, providing a powerful opportunity to better understand developmental status at a local community level.

The AEDI results will be a valuable resource in planning for service delivery, both in early childhood and in school settings.

1.2 What are the AEDI domains?

The AEDI measures children's developmental status across the following five areas, or domains:

- **Physical health and wellbeing** measures children's physical readiness for the school day, physical independence and gross and fine motor skills.
- **Social competence** measures children's overall social competence, responsibility and respect, approaches to learning and readiness to explore new things.
- **Emotional maturity** measures children's pro-social and helping behaviour, anxious and fearful behaviour, aggressive behaviour, and hyperactivity and inattention.
- **Language and cognitive skills (school-based)** measures children's basic literacy, interest in literacy/numeracy and memory, advanced literacy and basic numeracy.
- **Communication skills and general knowledge** measures children's communication skills and general knowledge, based on teacher observations of developmental competencies and skills in the school context.

These are important areas of child development and also good predictors of health, education and social outcomes in later life. The domains are broad and, with the exception of the 'communication skills and general knowledge' domain, can all be further broken down into descriptions of sub-constructs or sub-domains.

Further information about the issues encapsulated by these five domains, including the sub-domains where relevant, is available on the AEDI website and in the AEDI National Report.¹

1. Refer to 'Bibliography and Links' section at the end of this guide.

1.3 How are the data collected?

Data were collected nation-wide by teachers via an online checklist on children in their first year of formal schooling. The average age of these children was five years and seven months. Although the checklists were completed at the school, results are mainly reported for the community where the child lives.

Between May and July 2009, AEDI checklists were completed for 61,187 children in Victoria, 94.2 per cent of the estimated five-year-old population. Further information about the data collection and children surveyed is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: AEDI data collection summary, Victoria and Australia, 2009

Selected characteristic	Victoria	Australia
Number of children surveyed	61,187	261,203
Proportion of estimated equivalent population (per cent)	94.2	97.5
Number of children included in AEDI analyses ²	57,492	245,380
Number of teachers involved in completing checklists	3,783	15,528
Number of schools where checklists were completed	1,765	7,423
Percentage of children who are Aboriginal	1.1	4.8
Percentage of children with a language background other than English	19.6	18.0

Source: AEDI data collection 2009.

1.4 What do we mean by a population measure?

The AEDI has been designed as a population measure; it is not designed to provide an individual assessment of a child's development. As such, the AEDI focuses on all children in the community and examines early childhood development across the whole community. By shifting the focus from an individual child to all those in the community, the AEDI can drive efforts at the community level.

² Analysis of AEDI results excludes children with special needs, children with an invalid age and children for whom there were a low number of responses across the checklist.

1.5 How is vulnerability defined?

Children are given a domain score that is calculated from the relevant questions on the AEDI checklist that make up that domain. Domain scores range from zero to 10, where zero is the lowest score and 10 is the highest score, on each of the five domains.

AEDI results are then presented as proportions of children who are considered to be 'on track', 'developmentally at risk' and 'developmentally vulnerable' as further described in Figure 1.

Figure 1: AEDI developmental cut-offs

On track		Children developmentally 'on track' are those who score above the 25th percentile (in the top 75 per cent) of the national AEDI population.
On track	← 50th percentile	
Developmentally at risk	← 25th percentile	Children developmentally 'at risk' are those who score between the 10th and 25th percentiles of the national AEDI population.
Developmentally vulnerable	← 10th percentile	Children developmentally 'vulnerable' are those who score in the lowest 10th percentile of the AEDI population. These children demonstrate a much lower than average ability in the developmental competencies measured in that domain.





Exclusion criteria – data collection and analysis

The following criteria determine when AEDI scores are not calculated for some children:

- The teacher indicates that the child has been in class for less than one month.³
- Too many AEDI checklist questions are left blank or have a response option of ‘don’t know’. (A domain score cannot be calculated without sufficient responses on the relevant questions.)
- Children who were less than four-years-old at the time of the survey were not considered eligible for inclusion in the results.

1.6 What is the AEDI geography?

The AEDI geography comprises the geography units or places the AEDI data collection has been designed around:

- **AEDI Local Communities** – the smallest areas for which AEDI data were available. These are, in most cases, equivalent to suburbs as gazetted by the relevant Geographic Place Name authority.
- **AEDI Communities** – the second geographic level for which AEDI data were available. These usually consist of one or more adjacent AEDI Local Communities; however, in some cases an AEDI Local Community may fall into more than one AEDI Community. AEDI Communities map directly to Victorian Local Government Area boundaries.

In addition, DEECD will produce information for planning and reporting purposes using the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ Australian Standard Geography Classification (ASGC).⁴ The two commonly used units are:

- **Statistical Local Areas (SLAs)** – there are 209 SLAs in Victoria, which map directly into the 79 Victorian Local Government Areas (in either a many-to-one relationship or a one-to-one relationship). Some AEDI Local Communities fall into more than one SLA.
- **Local Government Areas (LGAs)** – There are 79 LGAs in Victoria. The AEDI Communities map directly to these, as do the SLAs (but as noted, AEDI Local Communities can fall into more than one AEDI Community).

3. The teacher has the choice of skipping the AEDI checklist for a child who has been in class for less than one month or continuing with the checklist if they feel they know the child well enough.

4. Refer to the ‘Bibliography and Links’ section at the end of this guide.



1.7 How are the AEDI results reported?

AEDI results are most commonly reported as the proportion of children who are ‘developmentally vulnerable’ on:

- a particular domain
- one or more of the five AEDI domains
- two or more of the five AEDI domains.

Exclusion criteria – reporting

AEDI scores are not published when:

- the AEDI Local Community has less than 15 children, or
- less than two teachers have contributed to the AEDI results for that AEDI Local Community.

While the AEDI data collection includes children with special needs, these children are not included in AEDI reporting. Because the needs of these children are diverse and unique to each child, AEDI data cannot be used to adequately plan the services required for them as a group. However, children with special needs will benefit from any positive changes that come from the AEDI within their own community, just as any other child would.

1.8 How can the AEDI results be used?

The AEDI has been developed as a ‘summary indicator’ around children’s progress. It is a population measure and has not been designed to provide an individual assessment on how a child is faring.

The AEDI is most suited to mapping patterns of relative need, particularly geographic comparisons. As described, the AEDI data can be reported at very fine grain levels of geography and therefore is a powerful and valuable resource in planning for local service delivery for children and families.

Victoria is in a unique position in regards to the available information on children before school entry and in the early school years, with a wealth of evidence about their health, wellbeing, learning, safety and development. The AEDI data present an exciting opportunity to enhance this evidence base in Victoria and provide valuable national comparisons. In order to glean the maximum value from the AEDI, AEDI data should be used as part of a suite of information, in conjunction with other available resources and the forthcoming ones described in the next section.



2. Resources to Support Planning



The first wave of AEDI results was published in December 2009 by the AEDI National Support Centre. This first national release comprised community level data and interactive mapping of results for all eligible communities, accompanied by a range of resources to support the use of the results.

Through the Victorian AEDI State Coordinating Committee, the Victorian Government has chosen DEECD to be the custodian of Victorian AEDI data on its behalf. As such, DEECD has responsibility to promote and maximise the use of the AEDI data in Victoria and to support their integration into state and local planning. The Data, Outcomes and Evaluation Division has this role within DEECD.

2.1 What data does DEECD hold?

Two data files⁵ have been provided to DEECD:

- A Confidentialised Unit Record File (CURF) for all children in Victoria for whom the AEDI was conducted. This file provides information on the developmental status of children across each of the five domains, coupled with demographic information, including suburb of residence. The file has been confidentialised, which means that individual children have been de-identified.
- A government schools data file with aggregated data on each of the government schools that participated in the AEDI in 2009.



2.2 What resources will be available?

The Data, Outcomes and Evaluation Division are co-ordinating the development of a number of resources catering for different audiences to support the use of AEDI in planning and policy decisions. These resources include:

- A Victorian report on the AEDI data to present statewide findings
- Mapping statistical local areas results for Victoria
- Regional summary sheets to present LGA level AEDI results for each DEECD region
- LGA summary sheets to present the community level data relevant to each LGA
- School Network Reports to integrate the government schools AEDI data into these existing resources for Regional Network Leaders
- Expanded *Early Childhood Community Profiles* to integrate AEDI data into these existing resources to support LGA planning
- Community forums
- Case studies and tools to support community planning

These resources are detailed in Table 2.

⁵ Access to this underlying data is on request via the AEDI national support centre website. Refer to the 'Bibliography and Links' section at the end of this guide.

Table 2: improving outcomes for children: turning AEDI data into action

Resource	Audience	Purpose	Timelines
Victorian AEDI report with statewide analyses	All early childhood stakeholders: central and regional staff from across state government, community leaders, local government managers and planners	To support statewide planning, a report on the AEDI findings will provide information on outcomes for key population groups.	Available April 2010
Statistical local mapping supplement	All early childhood stakeholders: central and regional staff from across state government, community leaders, local government managers and planners	The maps will facilitate a place-based overview of how communities across Victoria are faring on the AEDI.	Available May 2010
Regional summary sheets	DEECD central and regional staff	To support local level planning, summaries of the AEDI results will be produced for DEECD regions, providing information on children (in each LGA of that region) who are vulnerable on each domain with region and state comparisons.	Available April 2010
Local Government Area summary sheets	All early childhood stakeholders: central and regional staff from across state government, community leaders, local government managers and planners	To support local level planning, summaries of the AEDI results will be produced for every LGA in Victoria, providing information on children in each suburb of that LGA who are vulnerable on each domain with LGA and state comparisons.	Available April 2010
School Network Reports	Central and regional staff, school principals, Regional Network Leaders (RNLs)	To support school and network access to data at the level of which other planning data are provided. Network reports will be based on the Victorian government schools data only.	Available late March 2010
Early childhood community profiles	Victorian government central and regional offices, Local Government Areas, Best Start Partnerships, Regional Network Leaders, Family Service Alliances, Non-Government Organisations	To provide a comprehensive picture of how children are faring in a local areas, the AEDI data will be integrated into the next update of the Early childhood community profiles.	Available from July 2010
Forums: Improving Outcomes for Children: Turning the AEDI Data into Action	All early childhood stakeholders: central and regional staff from across state government, community leaders, local government managers and planners	To provide a detailed understanding of the AEDI data available at a local level; an opportunity to discuss the strengths and challenges arising from local planning; and knowledge of forthcoming strategies to support the use of AEDI data and other children's wellbeing data.	Held April and May 2010
Case studies and tools to support community planning	Victorian government central and regional staff, local communities, Best Start Partnerships, Family Service Alliances and non-government organisations	To provide an opportunity to show how local communities are using AEDI data and other complementary data held by DEECD to improve outcomes children and families.	June 2010 (ongoing)

2.3 How can I access the AEDI data?

The planned resources will meet the needs of most users; however, some may require access to the underlying data and the capacity to build their own reports.

In the first instance the AEDI data will be available to DEECD central and regional staff and planning will be publicly available through VCAMS later in 2010.

A set of principles and protocols for data sharing is being finalised to facilitate use of AEDI data by other Victorian government departments, agencies, partner organisations and researchers.

2.4 What complementary data are available?

Victoria is in a unique position regarding the available information on children before school entry and in the early school years, with a wealth of evidence about their health, wellbeing, learning, safety and development. The AEDI is best used as part of this broad suite of information.

The Victorian Child and Adolescent Outcomes Framework provides the basis for regular reporting of outcomes for Victorian children at a state and local level.⁶

At a state level, users can refer to the annual State of Victoria's Children Reports⁷; and at a local level users can also refer to the Early childhood community profiles and the Aboriginal early childhood community profiles.

2.5 Who can I contact for more information?

For further information please contact:

Victorian AEDI State Coordinator –

Cathie Nolan on 96513539 or at nolan.catherine.m@edumail.vic.gov.au

Data, Outcomes and Evaluation –

Joyce Cleary on 99471852 or at cleary.joyce.e@edumail.vic.gov.au

6. The Victorian Child and Adolescent Outcomes Framework – refer to the 'Bibliography and Links' section at the end of this report.

7. <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/children/annualreports.htm>



Bibliography and Links

AEDI online maps	http://maps.aedi.org.au/
AEDI Results Guide	http://training.aedi.org.au/
AEDI website	http://www.rch.org.au/aedi/index.cfm?doc_id=13051
<i>A Snapshot of Early Childhood Development in Australia – AEDI National Report 2009</i>	Centre for Community Child Health and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, 2009, Australian Government, Canberra.
Australian Standard Geographical Classification 2006 (ABS cat. no. 1216.0)	http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/ABS@.nsf/Latestproducts/1AE106C101420508CA2571A900170741?opendocument
Data Zone	Accessible to DEECD staff only via their intranet.
Domain fact sheet	http://www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/australianedi/AEDI_Domains_Fact_Sheet_2009.pdf
Understanding the AEDI results fact sheet	http://www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/australianedi/Understanding_AEDI_Results_Fact_Sheet_December2009_WEB.pdf
About the AEDI fact sheet	http://www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/australianedi/AEDI_Fact_Sheet_December2009__WEB.pdf
<i>State of Victoria's children reports</i>	http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/children/annualreports.htm
<i>Victorian Child and Adolescent Outcomes Framework</i>	http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/govrel/Policy/children/vcamsframework.pdf
Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS) online	http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/children/vcams/default.htm



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