

ACCESS TO EARLY LEARNING

GUIDELINES 2020–2022



Education
and Training

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1. OVERVIEW

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE GUIDELINES

These guidelines detail the practice and principles of the Access to Early Learning (AEL) model. They are intended for Department of Education and Training staff, AEL lead agencies and partners, and early childhood services participating in AEL.

AEL guidelines are reviewed and adapted regularly, informed by ongoing evaluations. Excerpts from the most recent major evaluation—a two-year summative evaluation completed in 2017 by Murdoch Children’s Research Institute—are used throughout this document to support understanding.

1.2 WHAT IS AEL?

AEL aims to increase participation in kindergarten by children experiencing vulnerability.

It is distinguished primarily by its outreach service: a dedicated facilitator who visits each family weekly, building relationships with parents that encourage effective in-home learning and a child’s enrolment and sustained engagement in kindergarten.

The AEL facilitator also fosters important connections and collaboration between the family, the early childhood education and care (ECEC) service and its educators, and other services.

Note that AEL is distinct from Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) grants, which fund free access to three-year-old kindergarten for eligible children.

By contrast, AEL provides free access **and** considerable outreach support. Eligibility criteria also varies (see Appendix Nine).

As kindergarten has the greatest impact when children start early, AEL is for children of an appropriate age for **three-year-old kindergarten**.

Each child is enrolled in a quality, funded three-year-old kindergarten program that is planned and delivered by a degree-qualified educator for up to 15 hours per week.

AEL supports at least 16 children, and their families, per site, for one year.

1.3 WHY IS AEL NEEDED?

Early, sustained participation in a high-quality kindergarten program benefits all children, **but children experiencing vulnerability have most to gain**. A substantial body of research shows improved social, learning and development outcomes for these children, not just in the short term, but over the course of their lives.^{1 2 3 4}

Yet too often, vulnerability makes accessing kindergarten problematic. Many families find it difficult to navigate the ECEC system.⁵ Service providers can also struggle to engage families and children experiencing vulnerability,⁶ and educators do not always have the skills or capacity to effectively respond to families' needs and sustain children's participation.⁷

Research has also shown that children's learning and development is significantly affected by the quality of the learning environment at home: indeed, it is more important than parents' social class and level of education.⁸

AEL: 2017 EVALUATION

Formative and summative evaluations have been made of AEL since its implementation in 2011. Most recently, Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) completed a two-year summative evaluation of the model in 2017. The evaluation noted:

- the successful engagement and participation of very vulnerable children in two years of quality education and care
- high levels of attendance sustained over two years
- increased parent capacity and confidence in responding to children's learning and development
- increased confidence and engagement of parents with formal education settings
- increased educator skills, knowledge and confidence in engaging with vulnerable children and families, through collaborative team approaches and individualised in situ professional practice development (PPD)
- strengthened collaborative team approaches using child-focused, strength-based and relational practices.

1 Zaslow M et al (2010), Quality Dosage, Threshold and Features in Early Childhood Settings: A Review of the Literature, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

2 Council of Australian Governments, (2009) Investing in the early years – a national early childhood development strategy, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

3 Council of Australian Governments, (2009) *ibid*

4 Centre for Community Child Health, 'Engaging marginalised and vulnerable families', in Policy brief: Translating early childhood research evidence to inform policy and practice, no.18, Royal Children's Hospital, Parkville, 2010.

5 Hand, K., Baxter, J. A., Sweid, R., Bluett-Boyd, N., & Price-Robertson, R. (2014). Access to early childhood education in Australia: Insights from a qualitative study (Research Report No. 28). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

6 McDonald, M (2010) Are disadvantaged families hard to reach? Engaging disadvantaged families in child and family services, CAFCA practice sheet series, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

7 Policy Brief No 18 2010: Engaging Marginalised and Vulnerable Families 4 www.rch.org.au/ccch/policybriefs.cfm

8 Effective Provision of Education and Care Final Report (2004), p. 57

1.4 THE AEL MODEL

Families are key to children’s ongoing learning and development. An AEL facilitator takes into account a family’s complex needs and focuses on its strengths, rather than perceived shortcomings, to build trust and a respectful relationship. This relationship is the foundation for supporting a child to benefit from early childhood education.

An AEL facilitator works closely with a family to address specific practical and family-related barriers to participation. They help parents or carers build their capacity to provide a stimulating in-home learning environment, and link the family with appropriate additional local services and supports.

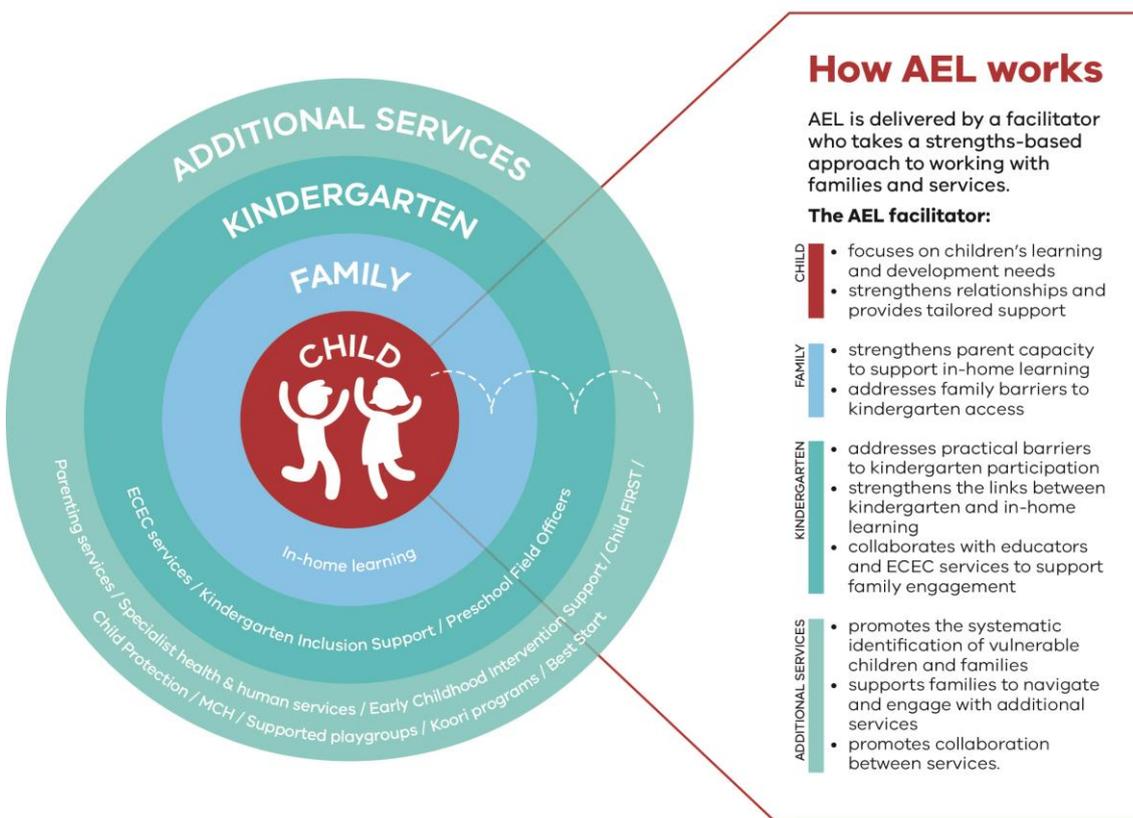
The facilitator also links in-home learning with the kindergarten program, and strengthens the family’s relationship with the ECEC service. The facilitator works with educators and the ECEC, strengthening collaboration and educators’ skills and confidence to support the family’s engagement.

The AEL model emphasises collaboration with other services, to reduce duplication and foster a shared understanding about the particular strengths and needs of children and their families.

An AEL ‘lead agency’ collaborates with stakeholders in the AEL governance group to identify children and families eligible for AEL or ESK (see Appendix Nine). The agency also plans, coordinates and authorises professional development and training related to inclusion and improved learning experiences for children experiencing vulnerability.

In theoretical terms, AEL is a multi-level, ‘ecological’ model—in other words, a framework that reflects how individuals and their social environments mutually affect each other (See Figure 1: Access to Early Learning Model)

Figure 1: Access to Early Learning Model



1.4.1 Addressing barriers to access

Families experiencing vulnerability are less likely to be engaged with or trusting of ECEC services. They are also less likely to have access to information and support that will assist them to navigate the sector without additional supports.⁹

Australian studies have shown that ECEC services are not as accessible or inclusive as they need to be, with a small but significant minority of families under-utilising early childhood services.¹⁰

Families are unlikely to use services that are unfamiliar, intimidating or inconvenient for them to access. The Centre for Community Child Health identifies three types of barriers to families engaging in services:

- **system barriers** (for example, cost, availability, lack of transport and inflexibility)
- **family barriers** (for example, unstable housing and health issues)
- **interpersonal barriers** (examples from the service perspective include staff values, attitudes and skills, and from the family perspective include distrust of services and lack of confidence).¹¹

The AEL model directly addresses these three interrelated barriers to inclusion. AEL providers and facilitators address **system barriers** by:

- addressing cost factors by ensuring kindergarten is free for families, using brokerage and flexible resources where needed
- increasing awareness of the barriers to participation in ECEC in the local service system, and coordinating relevant professional development across organisations
- proactively collaborating with secondary services to systematically identify children from families with complex needs, who may miss out on ECEC without additional supports
- working with other services involved with families to coordinate and strengthen support available for vulnerable children.

AEL facilitators address **family barriers** by:

- addressing specific family factors that are impeding children's participation in ECEC, including by using flexible resources
- linking and reconnecting families to local community supports and services (such as counselling, health, housing and legal services)
- building parents' confidence in engaging with educators to support their children's learning
- providing individualised in-home support to strengthen the skills and confidence of parents as their child's first educator, and building on children's learning and development at the ECEC service.¹²

9 Fox, S and Geddes, M. (2016). Preschool - Two Years are Better Than One: Developing a Preschool Program for Australian 3 Year Olds – Evidence, Policy and Implementation, Mitchell Institute Policy Paper No. 03/2016. Mitchell Institute,

10 Moore et al, 2015, Evidence review: Early childhood development and the social determinants of health inequities, https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/151014_Evidence-review-early-childhood-development-and-the-social-determinants-of-health-inequities_Sept2015.pdf

11 Centre for Community Child Health (2010) 'Engaging marginalised and vulnerable families' in policy brief: Translating early childhood research evidence to inform policy and practice, No.18, Royal Children's Hospital, Parkville

12 Centre for Community Child Health (2010) Ibid
Hand, K., Baxter, J. A., Sweid, R., Bluett-Boyd, N., & Price-Robertson, R. (2014). Access to early childhood education in Australia: Insights from a qualitative study (Research Report No. 28). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies

Interpersonal barriers are addressed by AEL facilitators through:

- promotion of continuity between in-home learning and centre-based learning, sharing goals in regular support group meetings and the facilitation of stronger relationships between educators and families
- increasing families' awareness of the value of early learning and education in their children's development¹³
- professional training using evidence-based practices to engage and support the participation of families experiencing vulnerability, focusing on reflection and strength-based, child-focused relational practices¹⁴
- increasing educators' awareness of families' context, and the impact of their values, attitudes and skills on effective engagement.¹⁵

1.4.2 Frameworks and policy context

AEL delivers family support and in-home learning activities according to the **Best Interests Practice Framework** (see Appendix Two: AEL Policy Context). The Best Practice Principles are outlined in the Child Youth and Family Act (2005)¹⁶ and subsequent 2018 amendments¹⁷. The Act provides an authorising context for information sharing and collaborative practice. The AEL model draws on research regarding the effective principle of strategic interventions with families with multiple and complex issues.¹⁸ In the context of AEL, the strategic focus of intervention is a child's learning and development, and the approach is one that builds respectful, genuine partnerships and shared goals with families.

Further, AEL's multi-level holistic approach supports educators through professional training, reflective practice and in situ mentoring by facilitators. This strengthens educators' awareness, skills and confidence to proactively engage with children, build partnerships with parents and collaborate with colleagues, applying the eight evidence-based practice principles of the **Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF)**.¹⁹

1.4.3 Intended outcomes

Intended outcomes for AEL are specified in **Error! Reference source not found..** These are divided into short, medium and longer-term outcomes as follows:

- Short-term outcomes are early signs that the model is on-track to achieving medium and long-term outcomes.
- Medium-term outcomes are what the AEL model is expected to achieve.
- Long-term outcomes are the target for the AEL model as a whole, and in some cases may be aspirational.

13 Fox, S and Geddes, M. (2016). *Preschool - Two Years are Better Than One: Developing a Preschool Program for Australian 3 Year Olds – Evidence, Policy and Implementation*, Mitchell Institute Policy Paper No. 03/2016. Mitchell Institute,

14 MRCI (2017) *Evaluation of Access to Early Learning Implementation Report*.

15 Centre for Community Child Health (2010) *op cit*.

16 <https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-08/the-best-interests-framework-for-vulnerable-children-and-youth.pdf>

17 <https://www.lawlibrary.vic.gov.au/legal-research/legislation/victorian-acts/children-legislation-amendment-information-sharing-act>

18 Whisman M.A Editor (2015) *Brief strategic family therapy: Thirty-five years of interplay among theory, research, and practice in adolescent behavior problems*

19 State of Victoria ,(Department of Education and Training) 2016, *The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*.

Table 1: AEL intended outcomes

	Short-term (0–12 months)	Medium-term (1–2 years)	Longer-term (2+ years)
 Child outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enrolled and attending ECEC regularly Actively participating and engaged in ECEC program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successful transition to year-before-school program, or to school Attending ECEC regularly Increased skills and behaviours that underpin successful learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthy child development Progress made in education and social domains and in achieving developmental milestones
 Family outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased awareness of the value of early childhood education to children's development Increased confidence and skills to support children's learning and development Positive habits and behaviours that support in-home learning Sustained participation at ECEC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement in children's learning, and knowledge and use of strategies to support learning and development at school Connection with community supports, with benefits extending to siblings and extended family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower overall vulnerability Sustained engagement in education Reduced likelihood of becoming client of tertiary service, with related reduction in costs to government
 Early childhood service outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved awareness of the needs of vulnerable families Training delivered on reflective practice and evidence-based relational practices Increased collaboration with services supporting families Program and practices adapted Continuity between ECEC and in-home learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved capacity and competency in engaging with and supporting families experiencing vulnerability Reduced barriers to children experiencing vulnerability to enrol in a kindergarten program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved capacity to identify and support sustained engagement of children and families experiencing vulnerability for years to come
 Local service system outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased collaboration between services to identify children who may miss out on ECEC Improved awareness of barriers regarding ECEC participation for children experiencing vulnerability Ongoing referrals made for AEL and ESK 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved coordination across sectors, including increased referral from Child Protection and family services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly effective coordination across family services and ECEC sector All three- and four-year-old children known to Child Protection are enrolled in ECEC More children experiencing vulnerability are engaged in education

1.5 AEL ELIGIBILITY

Referrals to the AEL program are made by either Child Protection, Child FIRST/family services (including The Orange Door) or Enhanced Maternal and Child Health (EMCH) services.

For a child to be referred, their family must have **two or more** of the following characteristics:

- be known to Child Protection
- include a parent with an intellectual or physical disability
- have a history of family violence
- have a history of mental health issues
- have a history of sexual assault
- have a history of alcohol and/or drug abuse.

In addition:

- children must be aged three by 30 April to participate in a program for the calendar year (note that due to staffing ratios and regulations, in some cases children may not actually attend a kindergarten program until they turn three). In-home learning and family engagement may start prior to the child commencing kindergarten.
- families must be willing to participate in planning and in-home learning activities.

For children born between 1 January and 30 April, it is important to determine with family the year the child will start school.

Working backwards, this will determine the year the child will attend year-before-school kindergarten (four-year-old kindergarten), and therefore the appropriate year to start three-year-old kindergarten via AEL.

Other factors, such as homelessness, young parenthood, social isolation, and refugee status, are considered in addition to determine priority of access.

Note as AEL is designed to work with all points of ecology of a child's life, the number of children and families AEL is able to support each year is restricted to 16 to 20 children.

1.5.1 Prioritisation

The lead agency works with the governance group to establish a process for prioritising access.

This process should be formalised and documented to ensure clarity and continuity. The form of this agreement should be negotiated with the governance group and referring parties and could include referral/practice protocol or a memorandum of understanding (MOU). It is intended that the identification of eligible children will establish and embed a localised process that will also assist in the identification, referral and enrolment of other children who are eligible for ESK.

It is important that the AEL lead agency, through the governance group, engage with central enrolment officers and Early Years Management (EYM) providers to ensure that priority of access processes and identification of children eligible for AEL and kindergarten places becomes systemic, rather than ad hoc.

Children who meet eligibility criteria must be prioritised on the basis of need. In broad terms, families involved with AEL should be those whose participation in kindergarten is unlikely to be supported by the ESK grant alone.

Children should **not** be selected on the basis of their ineligibility for other supports or grants (for example, children of refugees who are not eligible for ESK).

Referred children who are not selected for AEL are supported to access ESK (if eligible) or other appropriate ECEC services.

1.6 SIBLING SUPPORT

Facilitators assist siblings of those accepted to AEL to access quality ECEC services. This could mean supporting families to enrol older siblings in year-before-school kindergarten, or to apply for the Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS). Facilitators can also refer families to smalltalk groups or community playgroups. (Note that support does not extend to paying additional ECEC fees for families.)

Automatic enrolment of younger siblings in AEL in subsequent years is discouraged. AEL intervention is intended to strengthen the in-home learning environment, and a family's capacity to support their child's engagement in formal learning settings, to the extent that it is not needed in successive years. However, where necessary, AEL facilitates access to ESK and/or the ACCS for siblings.

AEL was very successful in terms of engaging with and increasing the attendance of vulnerable children in early learning. This is a significant achievement given the very complex and vulnerable families these children are part of, who, without AEL, may not have attended as much, if any, kindergarten at age three.

AEL was implemented well, with particular strengths in relationship-based practices and holistic support that ensured issues encountered by vulnerable families did not prevent children from engaging in early learning experiences. The program contributed to capacity-building for both parents and educators through in-home learning support and PPD.

MCRI Evaluation of Access to Early Learning Service Model, p. 9.

2. AEL IN PRACTICE

2.1 LEAD AGENCY AND GOVERNANCE GROUP

First, a **lead agency**, funded to implement AEL, employs facilitator/s and establishes partnerships with key stakeholders who directly support children and families. The lead agency will have experience establishing and monitoring effective practice with families experiencing vulnerability, and policies that support outreach and supervision of facilitators (see 4. Lead agency and other stakeholder roles).

The lead agency works with a **governance group** of key stakeholders to establish systems to identify and refer eligible children and families who would benefit from AEL. The governance group also coordinates and authorises professional and practice development to support educators and oversee local implementation of the program.

2.2 AEL FACILITATOR

The facilitator is the conduit between home and the early childhood setting. Outreach to family homes is fundamental to the role. The facilitator develops trusting, respectful relationships with parents to help them build confidence and skills to support their child's ongoing learning and development.

The facilitator fosters collaboration between families and services and integrated understanding and processes. They develop strong relationships with educators and ECEC services, building their confidence and capacity to engage families experiencing vulnerability in early childhood education.

Facilitators **must** have significant experience working with and empowering families experiencing vulnerability, and be well-informed about early childhood development. Suitable tertiary qualifications in early childhood education and development and/or social work are also necessary.

Facilitators work within the practice frameworks of the VEYLDF and Best Interest Principles. They are also guided by evidence-based best-practice for working with children and families experiencing vulnerability. Using evidence-based best-practice, means that 'decision-making integrates the best available research evidence with family and professional wisdom and values'.²⁰ This definition accommodates the breadth of social, emotional and practical support that families may need to provide effective in-home learning and to engage with ECEC.²¹

Facilitators have genuine understanding and expertise in:

- relational practice
- strength-based practice
- family-centred practice (partnerships with families).²²

20 Buysse and Wesley (2006) cited MRC I(2016) Supporting the Roadmap for Reform; Evidence – Informed Practice

21 Moore, McDonald & McHugh-Dillon, 2014 cited 2017 MCRI Evaluation of Access to Early Learning Service Model, pg. 43

22 Further detail on family centered practice can be found at: Murdoch Children's Research Institute (2017), Evaluation of the Access to Early Learning Service Model: Final Report, Department of Education and Training, pg. 35

To support educators and families, facilitators must be familiar with local service systems and supports and have an understanding of:

- VEYLDF
- the Best Interests Practice Framework
- Attachment Theory
- Trauma-informed Practice and the Core Values for Trauma-informed Services²³
- *smalltalk* coordinator training and resources
- structural, familial and relational barriers to access universal services
- reflective practice
- social determinants of health.

23 AIHW clearing house for Closing the Gap Core Values for Trauma-informed Service (2013)
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-australians/trauma-informed-services-and-trauma-specific-care-for-indigenous-australian-children/contents/table-of-contents>

3. STRATEGIC INTERVENTION

Facilitators use strategies at the child, family, service and service-system levels to achieve AEL’s intended outcomes. These strategies are outlined below and show the integration of effort within the ‘ecological’ model.

3.1 PROGRAM INITIATION

Identify eligible children and families.

- Identify eligible three and four-year-old children and families with multiple and/or complex needs.
- Establish shared processes so stakeholders can systematically identify children and families experiencing vulnerability.
- Organise process for completion of Brigance assessments.

Before engaging families, a facilitator will work proactively with secondary and tertiary services—Child FIRST, Child Protection and Enhanced Maternal Child and Health (Enhanced MCH)—to identify eligible children (see 1.5 Eligibility), whose participation in early childhood education may be impeded.

Lead agencies drive formal arrangements, such as MOUs, with key stakeholders and partners via governance groups. This ensures a systematic approach to early identification, referral and prioritisation of eligible children and families (see 4. Lead agency and other stakeholder roles).

Brigance assessments by Enhanced MCH provide critical information, both for children’s referral to additional services and to help focus learning and development goals. Arrangements with Enhanced MCH must be in place to ensure Brigance assessments are completed well in advance of children starting kindergarten (see 4.2.1 Partnerships and protocols in section 4. Lead Agency and other stakeholder roles).

3.2 SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

Engage with families— link and enrol children in ECEC services.

- Proactively match and link eligible children and their families with services offering quality kindergarten programs, delivered by a degree-qualified teacher.
- Undertake/support administration relating to enrolment and engagement. For example, through applying for grants and subsidies, and organising Brigance assessments.
- Support transition to kindergarten.

To establish an effective relationship with a family, a facilitator first explains their role and the support available through AEL to parents. This includes how they will work with the family to support and sustain in-home learning, and the continuity of this learning in an ECEC service.

The facilitator will:

- explain and emphasise parents' important role as their child's first educator
- seek parents' consent to participate in AEL, and to collect their data to assist the Department of Education and Training
- initiate conversations about the value of early childhood learning and education.

Having established the role of the AEL, the facilitator then:

- supports the family to select an accessible, high-quality ECEC service (exceeding or meeting National Quality Standards)
- provides a warm referral for the family to give ECECs
- helps the family visit ECECs and orientation days, and support the family and the ECEC service to complete enrolment and funding administration
- arranges for Brigance assessments as soon as possible (before or at the start of the kindergarten year) and seeks permission to share this information with the ECEC
- proactively builds relationships between the family and the service. With parents' permission, the facilitator gives the ECEC information about their circumstances and those of the child, relevant to supporting their inclusion and participation
- assists transition to the ECEC, supporting the family and educators with strategies to address anxiety and separation where necessary.

3.3 SUSTAINING PARTICIPATION

Assess barriers to kindergarten participation.

- Strengthen relationships and provide tailored support.
- Identify families' strengths, goals and support needs, in partnership with educators.
- Address family and practical barriers to kindergarten participation.

To ensure continued attendance and participation, the facilitator carefully assesses the family's strengths and needs, and works with parents to set goals.

A small amount of flexible funding (brokerage) is available to address specific barriers to participation, and can be used to cover costs including transport, equipment, fee debts, home resources and necessary items such as uniforms, bags, lunchboxes and hats.

A facilitator partners with a family to assess barriers to participation, exploring parents' experiences of education and issues that they feel may affect their child's regular attendance. (For suggested questions, see Appendix Three: Goal Setting with Parents.)

A facilitator:

- considers a family's strengths and knowledge of their child
- considers key points of disengagement that families experience in connecting with ECEC services
- seeks understanding of other services supporting the family and helps to link and helps to link (or relink) the family, ECEC services and the broader service system (see 3.2 Supporting Children's Participation)
- assesses and strengthens cultural inclusiveness and cultural safety in the ECEC setting, and links the family and the ECEC to appropriate services and community supports, where appropriate.

Develop strategies to assist families – planning and coordination.

- Establish and implement plan
- Establish a kindergarten support group with each family and educator.
- Monitor each child's attendance.
- Coordinate communication and supports to help each family sustain participation.

The facilitator works with the family and educators on a plan to guide in-home learning. This plan also informs the kindergarten's individual learning plan for each child.

The plan draws on the family's assessment of its strengths (above), and addresses participation barriers as well as other relevant information, such as Brigance assessment results.

The facilitator:

- identifies goals in partnership with the family, building on its strengths and parents' knowledge of their child
- establishes monitoring processes to address changes in attendance, agreed to by educators and parents
- identifies aspects of learning and development the parents would like to work on at home with their child.
- establishes a kindergarten support group, comprising the family, the facilitator and educator/s, as well as representatives from relevant services. Meetings are held each term to:
 - reflect on and update goals
 - provide continuity between in-home and centre-based learning
 - celebrate progress
 - identify additional supports, including family services, in-home learning support and brokerage (funding) to sustain engagement
 - identify emerging issues and plan for potential disruptions to engagement or attendance
- In the case of pressing issues—including those that arise during planning—the facilitator takes immediate action to:
 - liaise with Child Protection, ChildFIRST and family services where there are child safety concerns, and support the ECEC in their mandatory reporting obligations
 - address relationship issues and family violence
 - link the family with health, housing or other community supports
 - support access to parenting programs.

Often, more than one agency supports a family. Facilitators must streamline communication and coordinate effort so that families are not overwhelmed. This includes clarifying each party's roles and responsibilities, including who will be the key worker or case manager for the family. The development of the plan and the support group will assist with this.

Planning with families also takes into account the possibility of future or unexpected transitions. In particular, family violence is a factor that can necessitate sudden change of address. Families are made aware of the availability of support to transition to different local services, including necessary administration and transfer of information (with consent). Facilitators also record multiple modes of contact to ensure they can follow-up and support children's re-enrolment following a sudden change of address.

The plan is a **dynamic** document, updated throughout the year as changes occur and strategies are reviewed and refined.

An early goal, such as a firm morning routine, may take longer to establish than anticipated, or may not be the best way to focus a family's effort.

Facilitators work with families to continually to reflect on outcomes and refine goals, helping families to value and 'own' the plan. (See Appendix Three: Goal-setting with families for templates and other resources.)

3.4 STRENGTHENING THE IN-HOME LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

3.4.1 Building capacity of the home environment

Strengthen parents' capacity to support their child's learning.

- Outreach to the family in the home to strengthen the in-home learning environment and increase parents' confidence and capacity, using *smalltalk* and other evidenced-based resources.
- Help parents increase their awareness of their child's learning and development needs.
- Increase the richness of the in-home learning environment.
- Strengthen parent–child interactions.

Home activities increase parents' awareness of the value of early childhood education. They also increase parents' confidence and skills to support learning and development, and strengthen and model positive habits and behaviours.

Facilitators provide an hour a week of in-home learning support per child. For in-home learning to be effective, parents must have a sense of agency, and ownership over the plan and goals.

Specific in-home learning activities will change over the course of the year. They will reflect the broad goals established with the family, as well as changes to circumstances affecting parents' capacity to support their child's learning and development.

The facilitator observes the nature of parent–child interactions and how the family supports learning and development. They also note the diversity and quality of learning resources in the home, such as books, games and puzzles.

Note that from 2020, facilitators are required to administer pre- and post-measure tools, and collect from parents a 'most significant change' story, based on their observations throughout the year.

The facilitator is expected to be proficient in applying a 'trauma-informed lens' to their practice, and to draw on appropriate strategies to assist parents to understand and support their child.

Using best-practice interventions, appropriate for each family's context and situation, facilitators draw on their expertise as early childhood educators or family support workers to source and share materials with families. The following resources can be useful.

Evidence Based Resources

smalltalk

This program offers a consistent approach to the provision of in-home learning activities. Its materials are not specifically for vulnerable families, but are excellent and easily adapted. Resources regarding routines and self-care, and materials to enhance the in-home learning environment, are particularly useful.

Facilitators are encouraged to undertake *smalltalk* facilitator training, and use resources including the evidence-based strategy to consolidate new skills through practice and self-evaluation. (See Appendix Five: *smalltalk* resources.)

Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE)

The UK's EPPE project highlights improvements in children's learning and development in connection with the following family activities²⁴:

- reading
- teaching and reciting songs and nursery rhymes
- painting and drawing
- playing with letters and numbers
- visiting the library
- teaching the alphabet and numbers
- visits to friends' houses or places of interest
- regular play with friends at home.

Facilitators can encourage families to introduce or increase the frequency of these activities. Further information about the EPPE study can be found by searching the Research Papers Repository on the website of the Institute of Education (United Kingdom).²⁵

Abecedarian

Training in the **Abecedarian** approach has been undertaken by ECEC services and AEL facilitators at one AEL site, providing beneficial games and activities for use by parents. See School Readiness Funding menu of evidence for more information.²⁶

Tuning into Kids

Tuning into Kids training, which helps parents and educators understand and moderate children's behaviour, and strengthen parent-child interactions, may also be useful. Training can provide families and educators with a common language and approach and help inform goals for the home, especially in relation to parent-child interactions. (See Appendix Six: Tuning into Kids).

Other resources

The **Raising Children Network** provides a wide range of free, easily accessible activities videos and articles on parenting and child development.²⁷

24 Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart (2004) Technical Paper 12 The Final Report: Effective Pre-School Education <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10005308/1/EPPE12Sylva2004Effective.pdf>

25 <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/research>

26 <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/program.aspx?queryid=1>

27 https://raisingchildren.net.au/?gclid=CjwKCAiA8ejuBRAaEiwAn-iJ3rTvhZFEMiY9pRT4I39yX_FO6d2TLg_h0pN5XYeFiYOWMIeBjSYsLROCLYMQAvD_BwE

3.5 STRENGTHENING THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE ENVIRONMENT

3.5.1 Building Educator Capacity

Build educators' capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase educators' awareness and understanding of the needs and context of vulnerable children and families, enabling them to consider behaviours and issues through a 'trauma-informed lens'.• Promote partnerships and strength-based relational practices.• Utilise reflective practice.• Support practice and program adaptation.• Increase collaboration and coordination between services.• Support continuity of learning between home and centre.
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AEL builds educators' capacity to support the participation of children experiencing vulnerability through in situ mentoring and through external professional learning.

Facilitators should work with the governance group, Early Years Managers, centre staff, educators and pedagogical leaders to tailor support according to the knowledge and skills of educators and other relevant service personnel.

Professional practice training for educators is supported by facilitators and is tailored to identified needs. Common areas of focus include:

- improved understanding of the impacts of trauma, abuse and neglect, and how to work with children displaying challenging behaviours and/or developmental delays
- improved understanding of issues and responses to complex family situations, such as poverty, unemployment, mental health, addiction and domestic violence
- best-practice principles identified in VEYLDF family partnerships, respectful relationships and collaborative work practice approaches
- programs and environments to meet the specific learning, development and social needs of AEL children
- continuity of learning between home and the centre.

Mentoring

The facilitator supports and challenges educators and service staff to examine their values and assumptions, promoting improved interactions and practices (see 1.4.1 Addressing barriers to access).

MCRI's 2017 evaluation found mentoring an effective approach, resulting in more effective communication, programs tailored to children's needs, and a welcoming and more inclusive environment for families experiencing vulnerability.

Formal professional learning

In addition to mentoring, AEL has a small amount of funding available for formal professional learning to build educators' capacities and skills. A range of professional practice training is available to support these outcomes:

- Australian Childhood Foundation has good programs to strengthen **Trauma-Informed Practice**.
- Child mental health providers can provide help in relation to **Attachment Theory**, and there are a number of free online courses.
- **Tuning into Kids** is an evidence-based parenting program that focuses on the emotional connection between parents and children. Courses benefit both educators and parents.
- The Centre for Community Child and Health (CCCH) and Gowrie Victoria offer training and resources to help develop **Partnerships with Families**.
- **Bridges Out of Poverty** workshops build understanding of vulnerable families and are especially useful in training which brings together a cross section of workers (e.g. administration staff, central enrolment and MCH staff).
- There are a range of consultants and providers who can deliver **reflective practice** training or support communities of practice across services. For example CAFS have used PINARC to deliver reflective practice and support which focused on speech delays and development.

Other evidenced-based tools may also help facilitators support educators' practice, or can be used to stimulate reflection and conversations (see Appendix Four: Dimensions of strong pedagogy, Appendix Five: *smalltalk* resources and Appendix Six: Tuning into Kids).

3.5.2 Support holistic and collaborative team approaches

MCRI's 2017 evaluation indicates that AEL's flexible, holistic approach to supporting families is an important aspect its success. This approach remains vital to ensuring educators understand each child and family's needs, and can adapt their practices and programs accordingly.

Together, the facilitator and educators recognise and seek to address developmental delay, as well as social and behavioural characteristics resulting from trauma or deprivation. They are guided by knowledge of Attachment Theory, as well as trauma-informed and child and family-centred practice. The lead agency and the facilitator work with the governance group to plan professional training and development for educators, according to the identified needs of families and educators.

3.5.3 Continuity between home and centre

Strengthen the links between in-home learning and kindergarten.

- Work closely with families and ECEC services to monitor the engagement, participation and attendance of children in the kindergarten program.

To encourage continuity between in-home and centre-based learning, the facilitator helps parents share their learning and development goals and aspirations for their child with educators. Positive attitudes and good communication processes help strengthen links between families, educators and services throughout the year.

The facilitator mediates and ‘trouble-shoots’ between the family and the ECEC if necessary, and carefully monitors attendance. They may also need to tactfully and respectfully challenge beliefs and values—held by educators or families—that are impeding a child’s inclusion and participation.

Open communication also allows the facilitator, family and educator/s to address specific behaviours more effectively, and to better ‘scaffold’ skills and activities.

Shared observations help the facilitator and educator/s to tailor the kindergarten programs and in-home learning activities with parents and their child. Valuing parents’ knowledge of their child, taking a keen interest in parents’ goals, and routinely following-up with parents, also helps to strengthen the relationship between the family and the ECEC service.

At regular support group meetings, a child’s progress and successes, and those of parents and educators, are shared and celebrated (see ‘Strategies to assist the family’ under 3.3 Sustaining participation).

Recognising that families are often assisted by more than one agency, the facilitator will streamline communication and rationalise strategies, ensuring other services are aware of the education-focus of AEL’s intervention. It may be necessary to increase or decrease services throughout the year to avoid overwhelming families and ensure smooth coordination.

3.5.4 Transitions

Plan transitions

- Support the transition to three-year-old kindergarten, and subsequently to year-before-kindergarten.

Transition to three-year-old kindergarten

Transition to kindergarten can be difficult for children, especially those with limited experience of care outside the family home or children who have had multiple placements in out-of-home care. AEL children often have additional issues that make separation from family and interaction with new people difficult.

Early engagement with families—well before kindergarten starts—can assist. As part of planning, the facilitator works with parents to engage in activities and develop behaviours that encourage and support separation from parents, and interaction with other children and teachers. They also ensure educators and the ECEC service is aware of their child's needs, and the best way to support their successful transition.

Facilitators should also account for the possibility of the need for rapid transition from one kindergarten to another, especially where family violence is a factor. (See 'Strategies to assist the family—planning and coordination' in 3.3 Sustaining participation). Some families may disengage with AEL: in these cases, facilitators should still endeavour to ensure a smooth transition to other services and supports.

Transition to four-year-old kindergarten

It is also important to plan the smooth transition of AEL children and families into a year-before-school (four-year-old) kindergarten program. This is generally delivered by the same ECEC service, but occasionally children will move to another ECEC service for year-before-school kindergarten.

Transfer of information is critical to ensure continuity of learning, particularly in the case of transferring to a different ECEC service. Nonetheless, transition support may still be needed if the child remains at the same service, especially in the case of a new teacher requiring appropriate knowledge and skills.

Transition may also entail application for additional supports such as Kindergarten Inclusion Support or ESK extension grants.

AEL children who have participated in a kindergarten program as part of a long day care service will need support to transfer to a stand-alone service, in the cases where the additional cost to accessing a place becomes a barrier to their continued enrolment and participation (and applications to continue the Additional Child Care Subsidy have been unsuccessful).

Despite careful planning, transitions are not always successful. Careful analysis and reflection supports future practice.

Follow-ups are undertaken in term two of year-before-school kindergarten.

3.6 STRENGTHENING THE LOCAL SERVICE SYSTEM

3.6.1 Building capacity—With Other Services Supporting Families

Promote collaboration between services.

- Collaborate with others to provide a Professional Practice Plan addressing common needs and shared approaches to support vulnerable families.
- Promote understanding of the local service system and increased use of the local services system.
- Support families to navigate and engage with additional services and encourage collaboration between services.

The lead agency develops a formal Professional Practice Plan to be approved/endorsed by the governance group. The Facilitator is not required to personally deliver the training identified in the plan. The plan should:

- have input from EYMs, key referrers (Child Protection, family services and enhanced MCH), educators, and AEL facilitators
- coordinate training offered by LOOKOUT centres, Best Start or other networks and local organisations that actively support vulnerable families and may be delivering training or supporting communities of practice across local services and ECECs.
- utilise data such as family characteristics (for example, in relation to mental health or drug and alcohol issues) and/or common issues from Brigance assessments (for example, in relation to language delay and speech and language development) to target professional training based on the specific features of AEL families and children
- provide certainty in relation to the professional learning activities to be offered, their scheduling and intended audience
- document who will organise and coordinate training or networking events
- specify clear outcomes and actions following learning, to be reinforced through the development of a community of practice among educators
- include the in-situ learning and mentoring delivered by the facilitator which may be designed in collaboration with other programs supporting ECECs, e.g. Preschool Field Officers or other organisations like FKA).

It is important that through mentoring, the facilitator enhances the understanding of educators and ECEC staff about relevant supports and services for families, and model coordination and collaboration when other services are engaged. This could include Child Protection; Child FIRST; integrated family services; family violence, mental health, disability, counselling and parenting services; as well as culturally specific services. Supports to the family may be dialled up or down through this improved collaboration and coordination of efforts.

Continuous Improvement

- The lead agency applies reflective practice to review the implementation of the AEL program, including reviewing quarterly monitoring data and professional training planning with the management group.
- Facilitators use supervision to reflect on AEL functions and outcomes to continuously improve practices.

The governance group and the lead agency (through MOUs and protocols with the key referring agencies) are key vehicles used to develop and strengthen systematic identification of children experiencing vulnerability, the promotion of professional training, and support of collaboration practices.

Annual reflection for continuous improvement of the program implementation should be undertaken with the governance group.

The governance group make regular reviews and reports on these annually (in the quarter four data tool). Generally, reviews reflect on:

- relationships with key referrers
- learnings from administrative data and quarterly reports
- parent and educator feedback
- feedback and future opportunities from professional training and planning
- changes in collaborations and coordination of support across services and with ECECs
- the effectiveness of identification processes and collaborative practices, as reported by facilitators.

To continuously improve practice, facilitators should schedule regular time to reflect on the program's implementation, with supervision and support from their lead agency.

4. THE LEAD AGENCY AND OTHER STAKEHOLDER ROLES

Lead agencies have strong experience and expertise in providing family support through outreach and home visiting. Policies and practises that support these approaches are prerequisites for provision of the AEL program. Robust internal governance and management structures within the lead agency are vital. Lead agencies must have a demonstrated capacity to deliver programs in partnership with other agencies **and** deliver either family services or early childhood services, or both.

Lead agencies are responsible for effective and robust program management, employment practices, including supervision of staff, and reporting and accountability practices. They must establish and maintain effective governance structures to provide strategic advice and direction, and build and maintain partnerships with key stakeholders of sufficient seniority to ensure an authorising environment for planning and leading changes to practice and processes.

4.1 LEAD AGENCY MANAGEMENT

4.1.1 Model fidelity

As the organisation funded to implement AEL locally, the lead agency must ensure all components of the AEL model are planned and implemented in line with these guidelines.

4.1.2 Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the lead agency to:

- employ facilitators with appropriate tertiary qualifications in family services and/or early childhood education. It is expected that facilitators will have extensive experience, allowing them to be authoritative in their work with ECECs and family support services
- provide effective line management, reflective practice and supervision of facilitators
- provide staff with appropriate professional development opportunities and ongoing support aimed at promoting inclusive and family-centred practice
- enter into a service agreement with the Department (if one does not already exist)
- undertake reporting and data collection as required by the Department, including facilitating Brigance assessments of all participating children
- collect completed DET consent forms from participants, allowing the Department to collect data and potentially follow outcomes into school (see Appendix Ten)
- provide the Department with biannual acquittals, at the end of the financial and calendar years
- participate in the ongoing evaluation of the model as required by the Department. support the establishment and maintenance of a governance group.

The establishment of a small operational group is recommended to support operations and to deal with issues promptly. This group should include relevant EYM operations managers and the lead agency manager. The group's experiences and reflection can help inform the governance group about short-comings and best practices to support facilitators.

This governance group is required to provide authoritative leadership for ECEC services and stakeholder organisations to support worker involvement. It is also responsible for the development of systematic identification processes and coordinated training, and regular strategic reviews.

4.2 GOVERNANCE AND PARTNERSHIPS

The lead agency establishes and maintains a governance group comprising key partners working with families experiencing vulnerability. These include representatives from Child Protection, local government, Enhanced MCH services, Early Years Managers, ChildFIRST and family services (and progressively, The Orange Door).

Governance groups build on existing local partnerships in local areas and are critical to driving links and strengthening local collaboration and system development.

Governance groups are expected to reflect on practices at least annually, and report on key changes in the fourth-term administrative tool each year.

Governance groups:

- **ensure sufficient senior authorisation** to establish processes to support implementation of the program and provide strategic advice
- **oversee the program** to ensure it is meeting its stated objectives and delivering services within budget
- **ensure program fidelity**, including by ensuring coordination of all its elements (such as case work, joint planning, identifying professional development needs, and establishing an authorising environment)
- **provide strategic direction and report on annual reflection** regarding actions to remediate any problems or shortcomings (for example, through regular review of AEL implementation data and emerging practice issues)
- **develop a professional practice training strategy** to inform practice change at the ECEC level and improve the engagement of families experiencing vulnerability.

While governance groups usually functioned well and addressed some system barriers for vulnerable children and families, the level of strategic advice provided and the processes and protocols established to support the identification and prioritisation of vulnerable children could be strengthened.

MCRI Evaluation of Access to Early Learning Service Model 2017, p.27

4.2.1 Partnerships and protocols

MCRI's 2017 evaluation noted positive, effective relational approaches at all levels of AEL implementation. The shared responsibility to support each child and family, while maintaining clear roles and limitations, is integral to the model and collaborative practices working effectively.

However, MCRI identified a need for the AEL program to 'promote the development of systematic identification processes and the prioritisation of the most vulnerable children'.²⁸

The lead agency should develop sustainable partnership arrangements and specific protocols with key stakeholders to ensure:

- identification and prioritisation of vulnerable children and families, and identification of suitable ECEC services
- information-sharing across the service system
- establishment of practices to share assessment and referral information, including review of referral forms
- coordinated support for families, and clarity about roles and responsibilities
- coordination of professional practice support with other local strategies.

Establishing a process for the completion of Brigrance assessments is a critical element in the relationship between the lead agency and local government.

28 2017 MCRI Evaluation of Access to Early Learning Service Model, Page 43

Table 1: Partnership arrangements

Stakeholder	Formal agreement could cover:
Child Protection (DHHS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation in the governance group • role in assisting the identification and referral of eligible children • Child Protection professionals’ role in joint case-planning • identification and provision of Professional Practice Training • role of lead case worker in relation to AEL.
Local government (as provider of MCH services)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation in governance group • role of Enhanced MCH in identifying and referring children • conducting of Brigance assessments for all AEL children in Term 1 (and option to re-test in Term 4) • back-payment to cover time for testing.
Early Years Manager(s) and other ECEC providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation in governance group • joint identification of suitable ECEC services to place children • joint identification and assistance in planning and delivering professional development opportunities for educators • expectations of educators as participants in AEL, including adapting the delivery of the ECEC program to engage and meet the needs of participating AEL children, attending professional practice training opportunities, mentoring, and participating in family case-planning meetings
ChildFIRST and other family service organisations, for example, disability support and mental health and family violence services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation in governance group • role in assisting the identification and referral of eligible children • how existing family services will work with the facilitators to coordinate support for the family • participation in learning plans as required • role in the identification and provision of professional practice training.

4.3 THE EDUCATOR AND SERVICE PROVIDER

4.3.1 Understanding expectations

ECEC services must have a clear understanding about expectations for participation in AEL, formalised in writing. This includes formalising expectations for relationships with facilitators and the lead agency in regard to professional practice, engagement of families, monitoring and reporting, and reservation and payment of ECEC places (see 5.1.2 Payment for kindergarten Places Early Childhood Education and Care services).

The kindergarten program needs to be planned and delivered by an early childhood educator who can engage both the child and family in an inclusive and positive manner. Ideally the educator should have:

- knowledge of and demonstrated experience in working with children and families experiencing vulnerability, including an appreciation of common issues
- demonstrated skills and experience delivering ECEC learning and development strategies, including those related to adapting strategies to engaging families and meeting individual needs
- strong communication, stakeholder engagement and management skills
- a demonstrated pedagogical background
- an ability to communicate effectively with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures.

Educators work in close partnership with the facilitator to:

- facilitate the engagement of the child and their family in completing the enrolment process
- proactively develop a curriculum and learning environment to meet the needs of the child
- monitor the level of engagement of the family (for example, through monitoring attendance)
- adapt the ECEC environment to ensure it is welcoming, engages the family and meets the child's needs
- participate in quarterly planning meetings with the family and other services involved with the family (for example, Child Protection) to ensure a coordinated approach in supporting the family
- promote alignment or continuity between in-home learning and centre-based learning
- support the family's capacity-building by involving them in planning common strategies and making connections with in-home learning and kindergarten activities
- identify how flexible resources can be used to purchase practical supports to help sustain children's engagement
- participate in professional training opportunities.

4.3.2 Early Years Managers

Facilitators work closely with ECEC management to ensure opportunities for ECEC staff to participate in training and reflective practices (particularly those that build capacity to support the inclusion of vulnerable children and their families).

Early Years Managers are important stakeholders. They are able to authorise the participation of staff in training and practice reflection, and can take a more strategic view on strengthening processes and practices within their services.

The facilitator, in partnership with the pedagogical leaders, and the governance group, should draw on sector training (for example, LOOKOUT or Best Start) and coordinate efforts to develop a professional practice training strategy to support the capacity of educators (see 3.6 Building Capacity Mentoring and professional training).²⁹

4.3.3 Quality matters

Identifying the most appropriate ECEC service for a child is important. It is strongly recommended that AEL children are placed at a minimal number of services within a locality, to ensure an ongoing relationship can be established with each ECEC service. Building on these relationships with ECEC services over a number of years will enable the best outcomes for children.

The identification of appropriate ECEC services should be made in partnership between the family, the facilitator, the EYM organisation and the central enrolment officer, where applicable.

The quality rating of an ECEC service may also indicate the suitability to support an AEL child and family. Each service's National Quality Standard (NQS) rating is published on the 'My child' website (visit <http://ifp.mychild.gov.au/mvc/Search/Advanced>).

An AEL child cannot be placed in a service with an overall NQS rating that is “working towards”. In addition, careful consideration should be made before placement in a service with a 'working towards' rating for Quality Area 2 (Children's health and safety) and Quality Area 5 (Relationships with children). Placement at the service should be reconsidered if the service has a 'working towards' rating in Quality Area 1 (Educational program and practice) and Quality Area 6 (Collaborative partnerships with families and communities).

4.4 THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Department actively supports the implementation of AEL at each site through:

- regional Department officers, serving as the key contact for AEL sites. Regional officers monitor and support implementation by providing advice, answering questions and helping to make connections at a 'system' level—for example, with MCH services, Child Protection Area Managers and Child FIRST
- Implementation Working Group meetings, hosted centrally. These meetings provide a forum for sharing innovative practice and an opportunity to problem-solve with other AEL sites
- reviewing the quarterly data collection tool and monitoring the expenditure reported in the six-monthly acquittals.

The Department leads the ongoing evaluation of AEL and policy development

²⁹ MCRI (2018) op cit pg 5. The evaluation of the Access to Early Learning model indicated that educators consistently valued the in-situ support, observations and mentoring of the Facilitators to develop these skills.

5. FUNDING AND RESOURCES

5.1 FUNDING

5.1.1 Indicative funding

Funding for the lead agency to implement the AEL program is calculated as a calendar year sum and paid via SAMS. Advice is provided regarding the funding rates which are confirmed annually and communicated to the lead agency.

From 2020, AEL will fund a child's kindergarten place through direct payments to the Kindergarten Information Management (KIM) system.

Lead agencies are funded for a minimum of 16 children and their families per annum to take part in the AEL program.

5.1.2 Indicative funding breakdown by model elements (GST excl)

Payments made via SAMS are required to be acquitted bi-annually. There may be some small cost variations, within the ranges indicated in Table 4 below, these should be discussed with and approved by regional DET support officers. This helps to ensure that the budget of each AEL site matches available funds, and that underspent funds are carried forward.

The cost of the 16 targeted ECEC places will be paid directly via the KIM system, see below.

The bulk of the funding is provided to the lead agency to employ a facilitator. Costing of the facilitation function of the AEL model has been aligned to the DHHS costing model for similar programs in Family Services, allowing for salary, standard salary on costs and non-salary management costs per FTE to be budgeted.

A small amount of flexible resources / brokerage is available to address barriers to participation, other sources of resources should also be explored where necessary.

A small budget for professional training is provided in addition to the in situ mentoring by facilitators.

It is expected the lead agency will manage the implementation of the model within the funding envelop and according to the guidelines.

Where there is underspend in the previous year it is expected that funds will be carried forward to engage additional children and that a plan to spend funds is agreed with the regional DET contact.

See Appendix Eight: Funding breakdown, for more detailed descriptions of funding by element.

Table 3: Indicative funding by element (excl. GST)

Element		% of total cost AEL	Element
Cost of place in quality early childhood education and care		36%	Paid directly to ECEC via KIM
Program Implementation		64%	Paid to lead agency via SAMS
Program elements	Facilitator (may be split between two workers) includes On Costs	42%	
	Professional and practice development/ support	2%	
	Flexible resources/ brokerage	1%	
	Non Salary Management Costs	19%	
Total		100%	

5.1.3 Payment for kindergarten Places Early Childhood Education and Care services

From 2020, kindergarten places for AEL children will be paid for through the KIM system. The details of the child will be entered via the Early Start Kindergarten page. The AEL lead agency will no longer require separate invoicing of parents. Where there is disengagement of children and families, additional children and families should be engaged.

Sessional services

The cost of 15 hours of kindergarten will be covered by the payment in KIM. The child will be entered as 'ESK Access to Early Learning'. The ECEC will need to indicate which AEL lead agency is supporting the child.

Long day care services

At the point of referral, agencies referring children to AEL should identify the harms, risks and ongoing nature of the need, to assist in the application to the ECEC.

AEL facilitators will support the parents of children enrolled in long day care services to apply for ACCS (child wellbeing). To claim, parents need a Centrelink Registration Number. Information about applying for ACCS can be found at <https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-provider-handbook/5-additional-child-care-subsidy>

Advice about Centrelink for parents and families can be found at <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/additional-child-care-subsidy>

If an ACCS application is unsuccessful, or if applying is not applicable, the AEL facilitator should explore options to cover the **additional** hours required to access the 15 hours of the kindergarten program or seek placement in another service where additional fees are not charged.

5.2 FLEXIBLE RESOURCES/BROKERAGE FUNDS

Each lead agency is provided funding to use as brokerage. Brokerage is to be used to provide additional practical support for children and families that is not available through other means. The aim of brokerage funding is to support the child's participation in the service.

Brokerage can be used to support and coordinate access to services that address relevant background factors. It can also be used to connect families with services that assist with engagement in the ECEC service. Using brokerage in these ways helps families overcome practical and structural barriers to participation.

The funding model allows for one per cent of the location's total funding to be used as brokerage. Brokerage funding may be allocated through identification of need by the facilitator, or by the ECEC service. Creative solutions to identify and remedy barriers to the child's participation are encouraged. The lead agency is responsible for authorising all expenditure of brokerage funding.

Brokerage funding may be used for items in the home or the ECEC setting, including:

- items to help the child participate in the ECEC, including hats, uniforms, excursion costs,
- provision of nutritious food
- in-class assistance, such as specialised equipment to assist a child with a development or speech delay, or provision of professionally developed visual aids
- temporary additional assistant time to build capacity of educators. If brokerage is used in this manner, the transfer of skills from the additional assistant to other educators must be part of a documented plan to support the ongoing needs of the child
- resources to build connections between the formal and home-learning environment (such as toilet training aids and books or educational activities)
- transport costs, such as taxi vouchers or a myki pass, to allow the family to travel to the ECEC service
- outstanding ECEC fees, within reason and with consultation with a regional DET officer
- resources to communicate about the child's development, such as digital cameras or iPads.

6. APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE: GLOSSARY

ACCS	Additional Child Care Subsidy (child wellbeing)
AEL	Access to Early Learning
AEL-SRF	Access to Early Learning - School Readiness Funding
CCCH	Centre for Community Child and Health
CLASS	Classroom Assessment Scoring System
DET	Department of Education and Training
DHHS	Department of Health and Human Services
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ESK	Early Start Kindergarten
KFS	Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
MAV	Municipal Association Victoria
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
MCRI	Murdoch Children's Research Institute
NEYLDF	National Early Years Learning and Development Framework - Belonging, Being and Becoming
PPD	Professional and Practice Development
SRF	School Readiness Funding
VEYLDF	Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

APPENDIX TWO: AEL POLICY CONTEXT

The Victorian Government has undertaken significant reforms within DET (the Early Childhood Reform Plan) and DHHS (the Roadmap for Reform) to promote evidence-informed practices and strengthen collaboration across departments.

In addition, a Compact with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), DET and DHHS was made to provide a platform for collaboration in monitoring improved outcomes.

The AEL model is an example of a targeted, place-based, evidence-informed intervention that strengthens collaborative cross-sector efforts between secondary and universal services. These efforts support vulnerable children and families, and set them on a path of lifelong learning.

The AEL model provides a local link between the secondary service system of DHHS, and the universal ECEC services of DET.

Roadmap for Reform: Strong Families, Safe Children

The Victorian Government's Roadmap for Reform program includes a significant reform of the provision of services by DHHS.

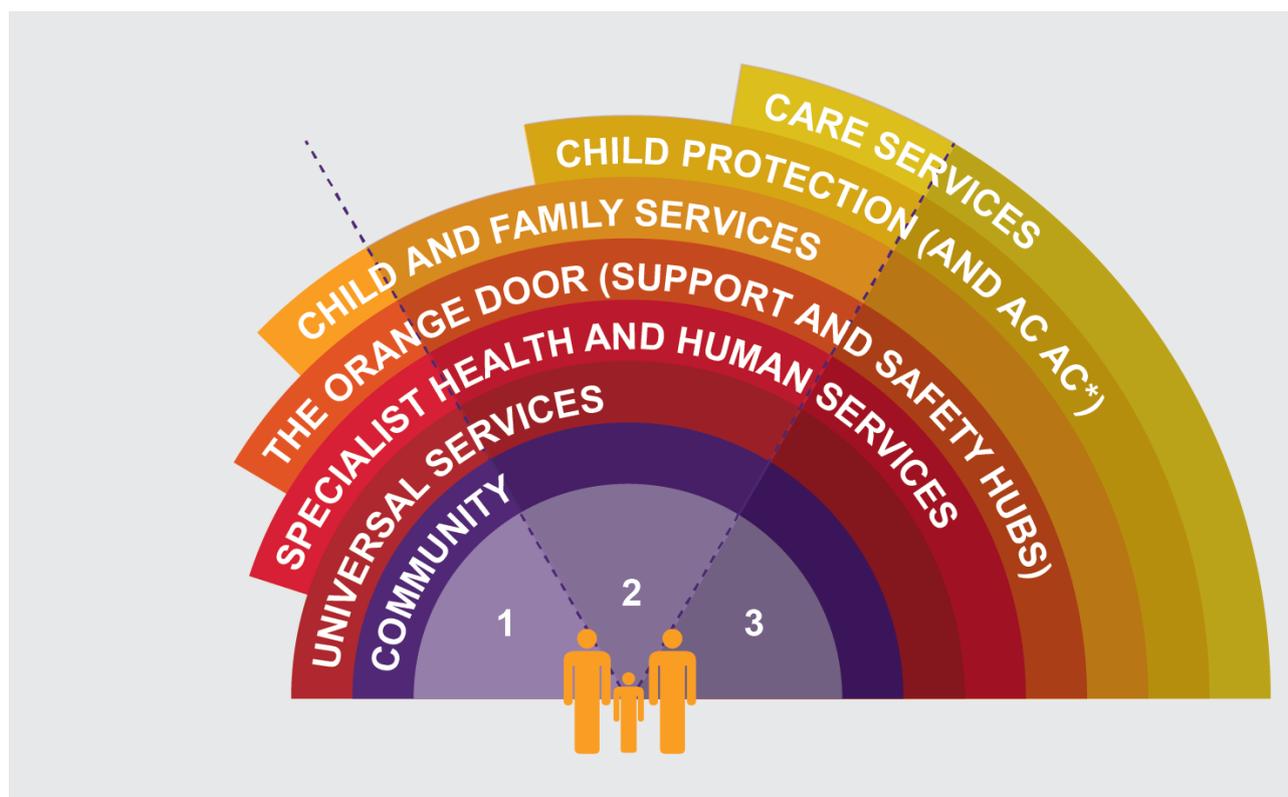
The Roadmap for Reform sets directions and practical steps for long-term reform of the Victorian child and family services system. This includes Child Protection, early intervention services and out-of-home care services.

The three pathways to support illustrated in Figure 2 are:

1. **Early help** for children and families with emerging needs and vulnerability.
2. **Targeted and specialist support** for children and families experiencing a range of needs with increasing vulnerabilities or risks.
3. **Continuing care** for children in enduring care arrangements who have experienced significant harm and will not be returning to their birth family.

More detailed information can be found on the DHHS web page at <https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/roadmap-reform-strong-families-safe-children>

Figure 2: The Three Pathways to Supporting Vulnerable Children and Families



School Readiness Funding

School Readiness Funding (SRF) was announced in 2018, and six DET Areas implemented SRF in 2019. Funding will be rolled out to all 17 DET Areas by 2029. The funding aims to improve learning and development outcomes for all Victorian children, especially those experiencing educational disadvantage, with additional funding supporting kindergartens in most need.

SRF addresses three priority areas that research has shown that investing and focusing on these areas are key to ensuring all children are prepared to start school:

- communication (language development)
- wellbeing (social and emotional regulation)
- inclusion and access (creating supportive and inclusive learning environments and making sure all children can participate in quality early learning programs).

The AEL—SRF Facilitator

Whereas the current AEL sites are centrally funded centrally to a lead agency, in the future expansion of the program is expected to occur primarily via use of AEL SRF funding.

The SRF menu of evidence now includes the item 'AEL-SRF Funding facilitator'. This means that a number of kindergartens can choose to pool their funds (or EYM direct their SRF funding) to purchase the delivery of the AEL model via agreement with a suitably qualified provider. (This inclusion is in response to AEL feedback and findings in the 2017 MCRI evaluation model).

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/srf.aspx>

Universal three-year-old kindergarten

The roll-out of universal Three-Year-Old Kindergarten begins in 2020. It is anticipated that every Victorian child will have access to at least five hours of subsidised three-year-old kindergarten by 2022, progressively increased to 15 hours per week over the next decade, with full implementation by 2029.

For more information see

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/three-year-old-kinder.aspx>

The Early Years Compact

Supporting Children and Families in the Early Years: A Compact between DET, DHHS and Local Government (represented by MAV) is a 10-year agreement, signed in 2018.

The compact is a commitment between the Victorian Government and local governments to work together to improve outcomes for young children and their families. It clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the three parties—DET, DHHS and local government.

For more information see

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/educationstate/Pages/theearlyyearscompact.aspx>

The VEYLDF NEYLDF and the Best Interests Practice Framework

Both the VEYLDF and the National Early Learning Development Framework: Being, Becoming and Belonging (NEYLDF) share a holistic and contextual approach to understanding the outcomes for children and providing guidance on strength-based collaborative practices with the Best Interests Practice Framework (used by the Department of Health and Human Services).

Early years education and care services may use both the VEYLDF and the NEYLDF. The VEYLDF is intended to support the work of all early childhood professionals, while the National Early Learning Development Framework: Being, Becoming and Belonging (NEYLDF) is designed specifically for early childhood educators.

For more about VEYLDF information see

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/learning/Pages/veyldf.aspx#link36>

For more about the national framework Being, Becoming and Belonging see

<https://www.education.gov.au/early-years-learning-framework-0>

For more information about Best Interests Practice Framework see

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/best-interests-case-practice-model-summary-guide>

These frameworks provide a shared language for educators and ensure that each child participates in a program that caters to their individual needs, interests and experiences. The five learning outcomes (identity, community, wellbeing, learning and communication) are supported by eight practice principles, which are central to the operation of the AEL model.

APPENDIX THREE: GOAL-SETTING WITH FAMILIES

Respectfully assessing each family's resources

Assessing capacity and needs of families should be sensitively conducted and draw on multiple sources including the family, and observations of the facilitator and other colleagues and services.

Goals setting builds on assessing individual context and capacities, the following questions may assist facilitators in assessing the family strengths and barriers to learning before prioritising actions. The list is intended as a prompt for the facilitator and not intended to be a check list.

Family circumstances

- Who are the significant people in your child's world who play an active role in parenting?
- What other services and workers are supporting your family?
- What were your experiences of education?

Child's learning style

- When/where/how/with whom does your child learn best?
- What activities does your child enjoy?
- Are there any concerns and/ or challenges for your child's learning?
- Has your child been referred to further services by MCH or your GP?

Communication preference

- How does your child communicate with significant adults?

Behaviours

- What are some of the triggers that your child has when confronting a challenge?
- What works best for you when you are changing your child's behaviour?

Social cultural connections

- Do you identify with any cultural group?
- Are there cultural activities that you and your child attend?

Strategies and tools

- What strategies helps your child to calm down?
- What tools, activities or learning strategies bring out the best in your child?
- How does your child respond to learning opportunities in the home?

Barriers

- What things might get in the way for you in getting your child to kindergarten?
- What else do you think might be important to consider in strengthening in-home learning support?

What are the most important things that you would like us to work together on this year?

Goal-setting

The AEL Learning Plan document is a 'living' document and the goals will be revisited with family and educators over the course of the year. Not all strategies will work, reflection with families about the outcomes will help refine the goals each term and help the family to value and own the plan. The goals should align with the five VEYLDF outcomes:

1. Children have a strong sense of identity.
2. Children are connected with and contribute to their world.
3. Children have a strong sense of wellbeing.
4. Children are confident and involved learners.
5. Children are effective communicators.

SMART goal setting came from George T. Doran's work in the 1980s providing guidance to effective goals in recognition that many endeavours failed not from want of effort but from lack of clarity about goals. Setting goals with families means they are Specific, Meaningful, Assignable /or Action Oriented, Realistic and Timely. However, Doran explains, it should also be understood that the suggested acronym doesn't mean that every objective written will have all five criteria.³⁰

Specific—What do you want to achieve in the area of focus?

Meaningful—Why is this goal important to you?

Action-oriented—What steps will you take to achieve it?

Realistic—How do you know that you can achieve this goal?

Timely—By when do you want to achieve this goal?

The goals in the child and family learning plan will focus on the areas that facilitators and families identify and are likely to cover the following areas:

- transitions
- stimulating play, games and activities
- reading, singing and stories
- social interactions with peers & community
- self-regulation
- parent/child interactions
- routines
- self-care.

30 Doran, G. T. (1981). "There's a S.M.A.R.T. Way to Write Management's Goals and Objectives", *Management Review*, Vol. 70, Issue 11, pp. 35-36.

AEL Learning Plan			
Child name	Mary Billah	Group & teacher	Blue Wrens/ Karen Murdoch Janice Craig assistant
DOB		Sessions	Mon-8.30am-1.30pm
Parent name	Zorajj		Wed-8.30am-1.30pm
Preschool name	Coolaroo Kindergarten		Thur-8.30am-4.30pm
Referral	Speech O/T	Cultural identity	Australian Turkish
Other services working with the family	Anglicare – Family violence	Court orders	Intervention order XXX ex-partner may not contact Zorajj or Mary

GOALS: In-Home Learning and Preschool:

Term 1 – Transition to Kindergarten & Building the relationship/Preschool-Settling In

Term 2 –

Term 3 –

Term 4 –

Learning goals T1	Informed by	Learning supports resources	How will we recognise success	Outcomes achieved / progress to date
Mary attends 80 % or more of possible days	AEL requirement Educator	SMS check in	Level of attendance Parents advise services when child is not attending	Mary attended 75% Zorajj found the SMS helpful and was able to organise a neighbour to take Mary when she was ill. Aim to improve this next term.
The transition to Kindergarten is a positive experience for Mary and (mum) Zorajj VEYLDF outcome three	Parent AEL Facilitator	Met family at Preschool Met with Preschool Teacher Provided Welcome Pack Funded additional Educator in room	Educator monitors and shares which transition activities are most effective. Mum (Zorajj) monitors and communicates her perspective Support group in place	Zorajj felt supported and comfortable in Preschool setting Mary was able to leave parent and play individually Educator established support routines for transitions at drop off pick up Support group established
Family and educator have a shared understanding of Mary's Development VEYLDF Outcome five	AEL requirement information from Zorajj regarding learning approaches	Conversation with Zorajj 3-year-old Brigance assessment Support Group meeting	Support group working with educator (Karen Murdoch) and Zorajj . Zorajj has identified learning areas she would like to work on in home development for Mary	Support group is working well Areas identified in Brigance assessment are addressed through the AEL program and follow up assessment demonstrates progress

Learning goals T1	Informed by	Learning supports resources	How will we recognise success	Outcomes achieved / progress to date
Zaorajj will be more confident as Mary's first teacher Building family and child relationships VEYLDF outcome one VEYLDF outcome three	Parent AEL Facilitator	Wooden Train set <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Smalltalk</i> resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Warm and Gentle ○ Tuning In ○ Following Your Child's Lead ○ Listening and Talking More ○ Teachable Moments 	Zorajj can use the teaching technique modelled especially teachable moments and draw out conversation about play Plan is reviewed	Zorajj had informed AEL F that Mary loved trains- AEL F guided by parent engaged Mary in play with the train set. Mary engaged in activity for 35 minutes. Zorajj stated that this has been the longest that Mary has sat and played with the same toy/activity. Discussed some of the learning that came from activity-fine motor, language development, measurement, colours, imagination, following the child's lead. Zorajj reports practicing play activities modelled
Learning goals T2	Informed by	Learning supports resources	How will we recognise success	Outcomes achieved / progress to date
•	•	•	•	•

Safety plan

Alternative contact Name phone	Neighbour Jillian Webb 33333 6666		
Circle of security members	Jillian	Zelda	Sanja

APPENDIX FOUR: DIMENSIONS OF A STRONG PEDAGOGY

The facilitator will be supporting educators to improve their pedagogical practice as well as strengthen the inclusive environment of the kindergarten program. Research about mentoring and coaching practice indicates that coaching is critical in practice change for educators.

Experimental design in studies consistently demonstrated that professional development combined with intensive coaching can substantially improve the quality of teacher-child interactions, with these changes translating into improved performance of children.³¹

Effective coaching focusses on teaching new skills, reinforcing these new skills, supporting adaptation of skills, crafting knowledge to fit the personal style of the practitioners (changing form, not function) and providing support during stressful times.³²

Coaches need to guide teachers towards learning to use strategies in contexts where they are most likely to be used effectively. Some teachers may display effective strategies at some times, in some settings, and not in others. Careful observation might help coaches identify settings where teachers are most effective, thereby providing a base from which to extend those skills.³³

The table on page 47 draws on the CLASS observation tool and may assist facilitators to think about how they might target feedback and support educators in their practice development.

The CLASS Kindergarten Observation tool arranges 10 dimensions of evidence-based pedagogy into three domains. The questions posed under “what can educators do?” provide facilitators with prompts for possible reflection and practice changes.

31 Dickinson, D. K., Darrow, C. L., & Tinubu, T. A. (2008). Patterns of Teacher-Child Conversations in Head Start Classrooms: Implications for an Empirically Grounded Approach to Professional Development. [Article]. *Early Education & Development*, 19 (3), 396-429

32 Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S. F., Blase, K. A., Friedman, R. M., & Wallace, F. (2005). Implementation Research: A synthesis of the literature (L. d. I. P. F. M. H. Institute, Trans.) (pp. 1 - 119). Tampa, Florida: University of South Florida

33 Dickinson (2008) op cit

CLASS Observational Tool

Domains of support	Dimensions of pedagogy	What can educators do?		
<p>Emotional Support (do children feel safe to learn?)</p>	<p>1. Positive Climate The emotional connection between the educator and the children, and among the children; and the warmth, respect and enjoyment communicated by verbal and non-verbal interactions</p>	<p>Educators can create a positive climate by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • remaining in close physical proximity to children • matching the “affect” of children • engaging in social conversation with children • smiling, laughing and being enthusiastic with children • communicating positive expectations • being verbally and physically affectionate towards children • using polite and respectful language and using a warm, calm voice • using children’s names 		
	<p>2. Negative Climate The overall level, intensity, frequency and quality of expressed negativity in the classroom</p>	<p>Educators can reduce or avoid the following</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>Negative affect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • irritability • anger • harsh voice • peer aggression <p>Punitive control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • yelling • threats • physical control • harsh punishment </td> <td style="vertical-align: top; padding-left: 20px;"> <p>Sarcasm/disrespect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sarcastic voice/ statement • teasing • humiliation <p>Severe negativity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • victimisation • bullying • physical punishment </td> </tr> </table>	<p>Negative affect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • irritability • anger • harsh voice • peer aggression <p>Punitive control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • yelling • threats • physical control • harsh punishment 	<p>Sarcasm/disrespect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sarcastic voice/ statement • teasing • humiliation <p>Severe negativity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • victimisation • bullying • physical punishment
<p>Negative affect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • irritability • anger • harsh voice • peer aggression <p>Punitive control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • yelling • threats • physical control • harsh punishment 	<p>Sarcasm/disrespect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sarcastic voice/ statement • teasing • humiliation <p>Severe negativity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • victimisation • bullying • physical punishment 			

Domains of support	Dimensions of pedagogy	What can educators do?
	<p>3. Teacher Sensitivity Educators who are aware of and responsive to children's academic and emotional needs. High levels of sensitivity facilitate children's ability to actively explore and learn because the educator consistently provides comfort, reassurance and encouragement</p>	<p>Educators can do this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • anticipating problems and planning appropriately • noticing when children do not understand or are having difficulty • acknowledging children's emotion • providing comfort and assistance to individual children • resolving problems genuinely and in an efficient way.
	<p>4. Regard for Child Perspectives Educators' interactions with children, and classroom activities; place an emphasis on children's interests, motivations, and points of view; and encourage children's responsibility and autonomy</p>	<p>Educators can do this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being flexible in your planning and following children's lead • incorporating children's ideas • allowing children to decide how to spend their time and how to complete and engage with activities • allowing children to lead lesson • giving children meaningful and formative responsibility within the room • encouraging children to talk • asking children for their ideas and perspectives • allowing children to move freely.

Domains of support	Dimensions of pedagogy	What can educators do?
Organisational Support (is the architecture in place to support learning?)	5. Behaviour Guidance The educators' ability to provide clear behavioural expectations and use effective methods to prevent and redirect misbehaviour	Educators can do this by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing clear and achievable behavioural expectations consistently and clearly enforcing the expectations • anticipating problem behaviour and planning ahead • monitoring behaviour and planning ahead • attending to positive behaviour • using subtle cues to redirect behaviour
	6. Productivity How the educator manages instructional time and routines, and provides activities for children so that they have the opportunity to be involved in learning activities	Educators can do this by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring there are activities and experiences for the children to engage with • completing managerial tasks efficiently • adjusting pacing so it is not too fast or too slow • making sure children know what to do during routines and transitions • providing clear instructions • providing learning opportunities within transitions • having materials ready and accessible.

Domains of support	Dimensions of pedagogy	What can educators do?
	<p>7. Instructional Learning Formats How educators maximise children's interest, engagement, and ability to learn from lessons and activities</p>	<p>Educators can do this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being involved in the children's play • asking questions to facilitate children's involvement in activities, experiences and discussions • ensuring a range of auditory, visual, and movement opportunities are available • providing interesting and creative materials for children to manipulate and explore • using advanced organisers • summarising learning • reorienting children's attention to the learning objective.
<p>Instructional Support (is learning being actively promoted?)</p>	<p>8. Concept Development The educators' use of instructional discussions and activities to promote children's higher order thinking skills and cognition; and the educators' focus on understanding rather than on rote instruction</p>	<p>Educators can do this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • asking why and how questions • providing opportunities for children to solve problems, predict, experiment, classify, compare and evaluate • providing opportunities for children to brainstorm, plan and produce • connecting concepts • integrating previous knowledge • connecting new ideas to the 'real world' and to children's home lives.

Domains of support	Dimensions of pedagogy	What can educators do?
	<p>9. Quality of Feedback When educators provide feedback that expands learning and understanding and encourages children's continued participation</p>	<p>Educators can do this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing verbal and physical hints and assistance • prompting children's thought processes by asking them to tell you why or how they know something • clarifying concepts or tasks that the children are having difficulty understanding • expanding and elaborating on children's existing knowledge • providing children with individualised and specific feedback • recognising children's effort or accomplishment.
	<p>10. Language Modelling The quality and amount of language stimulation and facilitation techniques the educators use</p>	<p>Educators can stimulate and facilitate language development by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engaging in back-and-forth exchanges with children • asking open-ended questions • repeating children's language • extending and elaborating on children's responses • describing your own actions with language • narrating children's action with language • using a variety of words and/or descriptive vocabulary • labelling objects and actions • connecting new words to familiar words and ideas.

APPENDIX FIVE: SMALLTALK RESOURCES

Training in *smalltalk* is available through the Parenting Research Centre. Training for facilitators in the use of the *smalltalk* material is recommended. Contact DET's, Early Learning Participation and Access unit to assist in accessing this training.

smalltalk provides facilitators with resources that are evidence-based to support parents and educators. The experience of AEL facilitators is that *smalltalk* materials are useful as part of the toolkit of interventions, activities and resources that a facilitator might draw upon and share with families. Some families may have been part of a *smalltalk* supported play group and be able to share how they use the materials, what has been useful to them, and what they would like more help with doing with their child.

***smalltalk* resources and brochures**

The *smalltalk brochures* are noted below under each relevant practice phase.

1. Engagement
 - Getting to Know Your Child
 - Me and My Community
2. Strategies to assist family participation in early learning
 - Routines
 - Looking After Yourself
3. Enhancing the early in-home learning environment
 - Warm and Gentle
 - Tuning In
 - Following Your Child's Lead
 - Listening and Talking More
 - Teachable Moments
 - Exploring Books and Reading
 - Words are Everywhere
 - Watching TV together

smalltalk resources designed for families include:

4. *smalltalk* Parent DVD³⁴ illustrating examples of each of the *smalltalk* strategies being used by families
5. Conversation Cards (CC)
6. Opportunity Sheets (OS)
7. Parent Worksheets
 - Getting to Know your Child
 - Family Map
 - Me and My Community
8. Parent tip sheets supporting your child
 - Warm and Gentle (CC & OS)
 - Tuning In (CC & OS)
 - Following Your Child's Lead (CC & OS)
 - Listening and Talking More (CC & OS)
 - Teachable Moments (CC & OS)
 - Reading (CC)
 - Reading with Your Child (CC)
 - Shared Reading (OS)
 - Language and Literacy at Home (OS)
 - Words are Everywhere (CC)
 - Watching TV Together (CC)
9. Parent tip sheets self-care
 - Wide Awake Parenting: Charging your Batteries
 - Wide Awake Parenting: Healthy Eating
 - Wide Awake Parenting: Helpful Thinking
 - Wide Awake Parenting: Keeping Active
 - Wide Awake Parenting: Saving Energy
 - Wide Awake Parenting: Sleeping Better and Resting
 - Wide Awake Parenting: Taking Time out for Yourself

A key feature of effective teaching and consolidation of new skills involves practice and self-evaluation. A significant part of the *smalltalk* delivery in the family home involves encouraging parents to practice the application of a new skill, having it filmed and then participating in a guided review of the filmed practice.

34 *smalltalk* Parent DVD segments can be accessed directly from the *smalltalk* website www.smalltalk.net.au

APPENDIX SIX: TUNING INTO KIDS

AEL facilitators have found that the *Tuning into Kids* (TIK) program was an accessible evidence-based program assisting families, carers and educators to understand children's behaviour and how to support behavioural regulation. The program is included on the School Readiness Funding Menu of Evidence-Informed Practices in the domain of wellbeing (social and emotional).

Tuning into Kids is a parenting program developed in Victoria to train parents to tune into their child's emotions while managing their own emotions. TIK aims to equip parents with knowledge that recognises and understands the underlying cause of their child's emotions.

The program intends to strengthen parents' empathy and address their own experiences of parenting in their family of origin. The overall goal is to improve and enhance parent-child relationships, parenting practices, and children's emotional competence and behaviour.

Longitudinal research by Gottman and colleagues (1996; 1997) has provided one of the more detailed descriptions of some of these different parenting styles and how they affect children's emotion regulation and other aspects of development. Gottman et al. found that the way positive and negative emotions are managed and coached (a way of teaching children about emotions) by the parent was a crucial part of emotion socialisation.

Parents who supportively coached their children's emotional learning tended to display greater levels of warmth, were less critical of their children's emotions and behaviour, and were more likely to use teaching styles that structured and praised their children's attempts to resolve emotionally evoking situations. When parents were unable to tolerate their children's expression of emotions or could not teach their children about their emotional experiences (which Gottman termed emotional dismissing), children had poorer emotion regulation skills.

The key aspects of emotion coaching identified by Gottman and colleagues were:

- being aware of children's emotions
- viewing children's display of emotions as a time for intimacy and teaching
- helping children to verbally label the emotions being experienced
- empathising and validating children's emotions
- helping children to solve problems (and setting limits where appropriate).

Other parenting styles that these researchers identified were:

- Emotion dismissing — where the parent does not attend to emotions, or minimises emotions. This parent may still be warm and attentive to the child but avoids talking about or allowing the child to express difficult emotions
- Emotion disapproving — where the parent judges or is critical of emotions in the child, often by criticising the child when they express difficult (or positive) emotions
- Laissez-faire — where the parent permits all emotions and their expression, but does not help the child to regulate these emotions or resolve problems that have led to these emotions.

These three parenting styles were found to be associated with poorer outcomes in children.

APPENDIX SEVEN: PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES

AEL facilitators have found that *Partnerships with Families* training has been effective in shifting educators practice to become more strength-based, and child and family focused in supporting inclusion of families and children experiencing vulnerability. This approach supports the holistic ecological approach and the practice principles of the VEYLDF, especially *Principle One: Partnerships with families* and *Principle Four: Respectful relationships and responsive engagement*.

There are a number of courses available. The foundation course explores the evidence-based Family Partnership Model and uses activities to build participants' skills. The Family Partnership Model is based upon an explicit model of the 'helping' process that demonstrates how specific 'helper' qualities and skills, when used in partnership, can enable parents and families to overcome their difficulties, build strengths and resilience and fulfil their goals more effectively. The course explores all aspects of the model, including ways to work with families to identify their needs, to build a genuine and respectful 'partnership', to set goals and to help families to achieve these goals.

A number of research trials have demonstrated the positive benefits of this model to the developmental progress of children, parent/child interaction and the psychological functioning of parents, families and children.

APPENDIX EIGHT: FUNDING BREAKDOWN OF TOTAL COMMITMENT OF FUNDING VIA SAMS AND KIM

	Funding break down	Description	Other information
Early Childhood Education and Care	36%	Funding for this element provided through KIM from 2020. 16 children should be engaged in AEL at each site for 15 hours of a funded kindergarten program.	Where additional AEL children are supported by the lead agency (replacement children, underspend additional targets etc.) DET will cover ECEC via KIM Children can be placed at stand alone kindergartens or long day care services which have a funded kindergarten program. Children in long day care services eligible for AEL should be able to access ACCS. It is intended that where possible in LDC ACCS – child Wellbeing is utilised.
Facilitation (including In-Home Learning)	42% (may be one or two workers. This includes 6% salary on costs)	The facilitator must work with each child, family and their ECEC.	The lead agency should ensure that the facilitator(s) have tertiary qualifications and experience in working with vulnerable families, as well as expertise in learning and development. On costs include such items as leave, supervision, super
Professional and practice development	2%	A minimum of 5% of the facilitator's time must be allocated per child for in-home learning. Maximum of 3 % of the funding should be spent on PPD.	It is expected that each child will receive one hour a week of in-home learning support. This component cannot be spent on PPD for facilitators.

	Funding break down	Description	Other information
Brokerage	1%	Maximum of 1 % of the total funding can be spent on brokerage costs.	The aim of the brokerage funding is to support the child's participation in the ECEC service. Each lead agency is provided funding to use as brokerage to flexibly provide access to additional practical support for children and families that is not available through other means.
Other Non-Salary Management costs	19%	Maximum of 19% of funding can be spent on management fees or other costs associated with delivering AEL.	This includes the costs associated with managing the program such as phones office etc.

Lead Agency SAMs Payment Proportions Broken Down for Acquittals

AEL Element	Funding break down
Facilitation and In-Home Learning (including On costs)	56% 10%
Other Non-Salary Management costs	29%
Professional and practice development	2%
Brokerage	1%
Total	100%

APPENDIX NINE: COMPARISON OF FUNDED THREE-YEAR-OLD KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS

Early Start Kindergarten, Access to Early Learning, Access to Early Learning – School Readiness Funding Facilitator, Universal Three-year-old Kindergarten

Intervention	Eligibility cohort	Resourcing	Funding	Location	Amount of Funding
Early Start Kindergarten	<p>Children aged three by 30 April who are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander known to Child Protection 	<p>Funding for 15 hours a week of free or low cost kindergarten</p> <p>Annual one off payment paid per rata to enrolled hours per week</p>	<p>Applied for by ECEC on behalf of the family</p>	<p>Statewide</p>	<p>Access to 15 hours of funded kindergarten for all ESK enrolments will be maintained until 15 hours of funded three-year-old kindergarten has completely rolled out across the State.</p>
Access to Early Learning	<p>Children aged three by 30 April</p> <p>Eligible children are from families with two or more of the risk factors below, as identified by Enhanced MCH, Child Protection or Child FIRST professionals, indicating a reduced capacity of parents to support their child's sustained engagement and attendance in universal ECEC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> known to Child Protection child or parent intellectual or physical disability parental mental health issues drug and alcohol issues family violence sexual assault 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cost of ECEC places for 16+ children and for 15 hours a week paid directly to ECEC via KIM employment of facilitator who provides in-home learning and support for parents and educators brokerage to address barriers to access Professional Practice Development /training for capacity building and support of educators <p>Children's places will be administered via the KIM system and access to ACCS in Long Day Care services</p>	<p>Annual funding to lead agency (annual payment rates are confirmed with the kindergarten funding brief each year)</p>	<p>Seven sites</p>	<p>The program has ongoing funding paid to a lead agency from Central DET.</p>

Intervention	Eligibility cohort	Resourcing	Funding	Location	Amount of Funding
Access to Early Learning-School Readiness Funding Facilitator (AEL- SRF)	<p>Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> aged three or four by 30 April eligible for ESK and KFS and enrolled in selected services where additional risk factors have identified the family as being in need of additional support to maintain access and participation in universal ECEC. <p>Risk factors include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> known to Child Protection child or parent intellectual or physical disability parental mental health issues drug and alcohol issues family violence sexual assault Additional factors such as homelessness, parental trauma (refugee), young parenthood, or very large families may also be considered. 	<p>Children access funded kindergarten programs via KIM using both ESK for three yearolds and KFS for children in the year before school for 15 hours a week.</p> <p>Lead agency uses SRF to employ facilitator who provides in-home learning supports for parents, and offers support and builds the capacity of the educators.</p> <p>Children's places are available only through KIM funding system.</p>	<p>SRF from a group of ECEC services or EYM is used to purchase the AEL-SRF program from a suitably credentialed agency or by direct employment of a facilitator.</p>	<p>Optional program selected through SRF in targeted localities throughout 2019- 21. SRF will be released in three tranches with whole state coverage in 2023.</p>	<p>The program will be trialled as part of the suite of interventions through SRF</p>
Three-year-old Kindergarten	<p>Children aged three in universal ECEC programs delivered by a degree qualified educator</p>	<p>Staged roll-out of hours and locations according to capacity.</p> <p>Initially up to 15 hours a week in six rural LGAs in 2020, five hours a week in 15 more LGAs in 2021, and to all LGAs by 2023 subsequently building up to 15 hours a week across all LGAs by 2029.</p>	<p>ECEC elect to provide service and number of hours until full roll-out is complete.</p>	<p>Progressively rolled out</p>	<p>Funding rate to be determined in 2019</p>

Early Start Kindergarten

Eligibility

The ESK grant provides 15 hours per week of free or low cost kindergarten to two groups of disadvantaged three-year-old children:

1. All three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
2. All three-year-old children known to Child Protection

In the year before school all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children may access the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS) or an ESK extension grant to ensure they can access 15 hours of free kindergarten.

In the year before school, children known to Child Protection may access an ESK extension grant if they are not able to access KFS and have previously accessed ESK.

Referral

A parent or professional may verbally or by writing refer a family for ESK. The ECEC service applies for ESK on the families' behalf.

Payment

Services apply for ESK via KIM on behalf of families so there is no cost to the family.

Access to Early Learning

AEL is an early intervention prevention model that is designed to support sustained participation of vulnerable children and their families in quality universal education and care; strengthen in-home learning environments; and build capacity in the local service system.

AEL addresses the barriers of cost AND barriers of complex family situations. It addresses specific needs for the family which inhibit access to kindergarten, and addresses PPD needs and supports early childhood services require to sustain engagement and participation of vulnerable children and families in their kindergarten programs.

Eligibility

Children must be three-years-old and they must come from families where the family has two or more complex needs. That is, families where additional support is required to sustain engagement and participation within ECEC. Complex needs include:

Known to Child Protection	Child or parent intellectual or physical disability
Family violence	Parent mental health issues
Sexual assault	Parent alcohol and drug abuse

Referral

Referral to AEL is from Child FIRST/family service professionals, Child Protection practitioners or from Enhanced MCH Nurses.

Referral must indicate families have two or more of the six risk factors outlined on page 59 (in addition there may be other risk factors) which make it likely that the ESK grant alone would not be able to sustain the participation of the family and their child in an ECEC.

Payment

The AEL lead agency is funded via SAMS to engage a facilitator. The ECEC service applies via revised KIM to provide for free 15 hours per week of kindergarten. Facilitators assist services to complete the Commonwealth Government's Child Care Subsidy or ACCS application where necessary.

Support

AEL brings together four interrelated service components that are designed to work together at child, family and service system levels. These are quality early education and care; AEL facilitators; PPD; and flexible resources and brokerage funding. AEL brings key local services together in a governance structure to systematically identify eligible children and design and support the delivery of PPD.

Access to Early Learning—School Readiness Funding (AEL-SRF) Facilitator

The AEL- SRF facilitator's role is designed to address the critical steps in identifying, engaging and supporting vulnerable children to participate in high quality kindergarten programs.

The AEL-SRF facilitator addresses individual and multiple barriers to participation, and effects change within the family home and the education settings.

The facilitator works collaboratively to increase parents' and educators' knowledge, skills and confidence to provide support to the child's formal and informal learning and development.

The AEL-SRF facilitator will:

- identify the children and families who are likely to miss out
- engage with families and link them to ECEC services
- address barriers to participation
- strengthen in-home learning and parental capacity to meet the child's needs
- support holistic and collaborative team approaches to a child's learning.

Payment

Funding of the AEL-SRF facilitator is through arrangement with ECEC (using annual SRF funds) and the AEL provider. The total cost to the service will be \$130,000 per year. The model is intended to draw on resources from six to eight kindergarten services and support one facilitator with a case load of 16-20 children, and utilise ESK and KFS or ACCS to access 15 hours per week of free kindergarten. The unit cost per child is \$8,125.

Referral

Referral to AEL-SRF is from Child FIRST/ family service professionals, Child Protection practitioners or from Enhanced MCH Nurses.

Referral must indicate families have two or more of the six risk factors outlined on page 60.

Eligibility

To be eligible for AEL-SRF, children must be three or four-years-old by 30 April. Referrers identify children from families with a minimum of two relevant characteristics (known to Child Protection, intellectual or physical disability, family violence, mental health issues, sexual assault, and alcohol and drug abuse). The families referred to AEL experience complex family circumstances that mean the ESK grant alone would be unlikely to be sufficient to sustain attendance.

Additional factors (including homelessness, parental trauma (refugee), young parenthood, or very large families) may also be considered as part of the referral.

APPENDIX TEN: PARENTAL CONSENT FORM: ACCESS TO EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM

Information for families

Why should my child go to kindergarten?

Kindergarten is an important stepping stone for young children. Kindergarten improves children's health and wellbeing, helps them to develop strong social skills and encourages a love of learning. Children who attend kindergarten are more independent and confident and are more likely to make a smooth transition to primary school (Prep).

What should I expect from the Access to Early Learning program?

Your child will receive a head start to kindergarten as a three-year old. They will be able to access 15 hours of free kindergarten a week for 40 weeks a year, and be supported to enrol in a year before kindergarten program which will also be free for 15 hours a week.

You will be supported by an Access to Early Learning facilitator who will:

- help find a kindergarten service for your child and support you with the enrolment process
- work with you to identify your family's strengths, goals and support needs and help support you with ideas to encourage your child's learning at home.

As part of Access to Early Learning, your child's development will be assessed by a **Maternal and Child Health nurse**.

You may be asked for information about your family and the impact of this program on you and your child, for example this may be collected by the Agency in a referral document. This information will be analysed by the Department of Education and Training ('the Department') and by evaluators to help us make sure the program meets your needs and that the program is working as it is intended.

Any information that the Department collects from the lead agency about each family and child, and the activities that are undertaken, is handled by the Department in an unidentifiable format.

What information is collected?

Information about your family's circumstance from referral agencies including Child FIRST, family services, Enhanced Maternal and Child Health and Child Protection, about the types of issues your family may have or are experiencing.

Information collected as part of your child's enrolment and attendance in the kindergarten program.

Information about the support provided to your family by the Access to Early Learning facilitator.

Information about your child's development, collected through Brigance assessments, undertaken by your Maternal and Child Health service at two points during the year.

How is information collected?

The Department regularly collects information about children's enrolment, attendance and family characteristics in the annual kindergarten census and through referral. It also collects school data about transition, attendance and performance of children.

The Department monitors the participation and performance into school years of groups of children who have accessed specific programs (such as Access to Early Learning). It may disclose this information to selected service providers to assist with this analysis.

Who can I contact to find out more?

If you would like to ask any questions about the program or the information being collected please contact:

Rosie Pizzi, Manager, Early Learning Access and Participation, Department of Education and Training

Phone: **03 5215 5268** or

Email: pizzi.rosie.r@edumail.vic.gov.au

How will my privacy be protected?

To protect your privacy, the Department will endeavour to use you and your family's information in an unidentifiable way. It will be labelled using a unique identification number and the data will be stored separately from your name. The Department groups (aggregates) this information so that it is able to follow the learning progress of groups of children who have had different early learning educational experiences.

Access to Early Learning – Parental Consent

By signing this form I agree to participate in the AEL program. By agreeing to participate in the program I understand that I am consenting to the collection of information described above.

I understand that:

- The Department will use my family's information in an unidentifiable way where it is reasonably possible
- The Department will handle information it collects in accordance with the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and the *Health Records Act 2001*
- The Department will use the data for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating the AEL program
- The Department may use the information for reporting on government led strategies seeking to address the health, welfare and wellbeing of children and families.

I also understand that I have the right to request, access and correct the information collected.

SLK

Child's name

Parent or guardian's name

Parent or guardian's signature

Date



Education
and Training