

Children & Families

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is currently a major focus of new policy and programs at both State and Federal levels – with an aspiration to transition to a universal ECEC system nationally by 2026. However, the path forward and how Federal and State systems and commitments intersect and align, remains unclear.

These are important developments and we welcome prioritisation of early development. Major challenges remain to navigate a smooth transition to address workforce challenges, build new services, and reform funding. Our major priority is to ensure equity, access, and inclusion, particularly for vulnerable children, low-income families, and regional and remote areas.

WA Labor 2025 Election Commitments

Election Commitment	Establishment of Office of Early Childhood
Status	Office establishment and some initiatives Funded (possibly more to come) (BP2, V1, P62)
Investment	\$1.96 million
Description	Targeted reform involving the establishment of the Office of Early Childhood in Department of Premier and Cabinet to enhance early childhood development and cross-government coordination. Recruitment underway. Funds come into effect on 1 July 2025.
Implications	<p>WACOSS advocated in recent budget submissions for the creation of such an Office with a broad, whole-of-government remit to better oversee integrated responses to early child development.</p> <p>Timing is also critical with the need to engage with the national reforms and leverage our share of the \$1 billion National Building Early Education Fund to create new ECEC services in disadvantaged and unserved areas, particularly regional and remote WA.</p> <p>We are engaging with the team establishing the office, and recommending creation of an advisory committee with senior representation from relevant public agencies and the sector to oversee a ten year whole of government strategy with clear outcomes and reporting.</p>

Initiative	Expanding Four-Year-Old Kindergarten
Status	Pilot program funded for ten sites. (BP2, V2, P61 & BP2, V2, P62) (BP2, V2, P61 & BP2, V2, P62)
Investment	\$24.4 million from 2025-26 to 2028-29 (BP3, P103)
Description	<p>The Government will trial free full-time kindergarten on school sites at ten pilot sites across the State (5 regional, 5 metro).</p> <p>"The total amount includes \$16.9 million spent by the Department of Education for curriculum development, workforce training and attraction</p>

	<p>incentives and per-student funding to schools for education services at the pilot sites." (BP3, P103)</p> <p>\$7.5 million until 2028-29 (BP2, V2, P61) to the Department of Premier and Cabinet for planning state-wide rollout, and evaluation of the pilot program.</p> <p>A further \$4.5 million of asset investment for the Department of Education has been approved over 2025-26 to 2027-28 for minor accommodation upgrades at the pilot sites. (BP3, P103)</p>
Implications	<p><i>Commitment to the eventual state-wide roll-out of this initiative is implied in the Minister's and Premier's statements, but no timeline is confirmed. Full-time here refers to normal school hours – but there are also resources budgeted to support out of school hours care service infrastructure as needed.</i></p> <p><i>Sites have not been selected. We understand the selection criteria prioritises unserved areas – nevertheless, there is concern among existing ECEC providers about how the program may impact the sustainability of existing services in catchment areas. The current national funding formula relies on a cohort of 4-year-olds within services to cross-subsidise more intensive care provided to younger children. This can be particularly challenging in regional and remote areas. Access to out of school care can also be critical for working parents.</i></p> <p><i>So far, there has been little engagement with the sector around planning and potential impacts. It is also unclear how state commitments to kindy on school sites will interact with the broader national roll-out of universal ECEC services.</i></p>

Election Commitment	New and Improved School Infrastructure
Status	<i>Funded as listed – includes planning for future infrastructure that will require further funding. (BP2, V2, 306 & BP2, V1, P360)</i>
Investment	\$789.6 million
Description	<p>An infrastructure program to build new public schools, plan for future schools and undertake upgrades of existing sites. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$130 million for New Brabham Senior High School; • \$800k to plan new secondary schools in Alkimos and Dawesville; • \$316 million for upgrades to 17 primary and secondary schools; • \$89 million for the Cool the Schools program – providing air conditioning at 45 schools; • \$83 million for upgrades and minor works at 61 schools; • \$10 million to upgrade out of school hours care facilities in schools; • 4.5 million for infrastructure upgrades at the ten full-time kindy sites; • \$8 million to upgrade remote non-Government schools in the Kimberley. (BP2, V1 360-365)

	The Government has also committed to opening new primary schools, including Eglinton, Yanchep, Treeby and Vasse (2028), Byford and Anketell (2029), and Brabham (2030). Planning will also commence for a long list of school sites listed on BP2 V1, P360.
Implications	<i>This is welcome investment in core public education infrastructure that reflects the pressures on our school system of rapid population growth over the last 5 years.</i>

Election Commitment	School Breakfast expansion
Status	<i>Funded (BP2, V1, P353 & P354 & BP3, P129)</i>
Investment	\$28.5 million over 4 years
Description	The Government will invest an additional \$28.5 million over 2025-26 to 2028-29 to expand the School Breakfast Program from two to five days per week for schools currently participating in the program, and to expand the program to additional schools under broadened socio-economic eligibility criteria. The program will be available at over 670 locations under the expanded program. The Budget Papers further commit to funding beyond the four years, with a total investment of \$37.2 million over 2025-26 to 2029-30.
Implications	<i>This targeted cost of living relief will meaningfully reduce food costs for families doing it tough. It will also encourage school engagement and set kids up to learn. The most effective programs are inclusive – making breakfast a social event for all children within the school community, not singling those out whose families are doing it tough.</i>

Election Commitment	Early Childhood Education and Care Expansion (BP2, V2, P494)
Status	<i>Funded (BP2, V2, P494)</i>
Investment	\$181,000
Description	No description is provided – we assume this is funding to increase regulation capacity for early childhood education services by the Department of Communities.
Implications	<i>Recent Four Corners reports have highlighted the critical importance of strong state regulation and enforcement in overseeing and maintaining child safety and care standards. Increased capacity is welcome – more evaluation is needed to understand its adequacy.</i>

Election Commitment	Student Assistance Payments
Status	<i>Funded (BP2, V1, P354 & BP3, P295)</i>
Investment	\$87.9 million 2024-25 & 2025-26
Description	This is the second round of the Western Australian Student Assistance Payment through the ServicesWA App to provide financial support to

	Western Australian families to help cover school-related expenses. This closes July 2025.
Implications	<i>This provides a small rebate to families with school age children.</i>

Other Significant Investments

Initiative	Boosting Before and After School Care in School
Investment	\$3 million total \$750 each year from 2025-26 until 2028-29 (BP2, V2, P493 & BP2, V2, P509)
Description	To deliver grants to attract and retain early childhood educators for the early childhood education and care sector, including the <u>outside school hours care (OSHC)</u> sector. This is part of a broader Government commitment of \$15 million to the Department and Education to boost OSHC services." BP2, V2, P495
Implications	<i>OSHC services are critical to support working parents, while quality services and continuity of care are needed to ensure they support the trust and attachment with carers needed to deliver strong development outcomes.</i>

Initiative	Child Protection Workers
Investment	\$60 million from 2024-25 to 2028-29 (BP2, V2, P495)
Description	Commitment of a further 28 child protection workers and 3 Aboriginal Practice Leaders (31 total) in this budget as a part of the total \$60 million to 2028-29.
Implications	<i>Increased capacity within the Department of Communities to support rising numbers of children and young people within the state care system. While this capacity is needed and these workers play important roles in supporting and case managing kids in care, we would like to see additional investment in prevention and early intervention services to reduce child removal rates, more services delivered by ACCOs and community based services, and a greater focus on family reunification and support.</i>

Initiative	Child Sexual Abuse Therapeutic Services and Indigenous Healing Services
Investment	\$650,000 over two years* (BP2, V2, P494) (future funding required)
Description	The budget papers show a significant drop in future funding compared to the 2024-25 Budget allocation. This reflects the fact that we are part way through the commissioning process.
Implications	<i>CSATS & IHS services are currently being recommissioned and a codesign process is underway with existing service providers, led by the Department</i>

of Communities with support from WACOSS and input from the Australian Centre for Child Protection.

These services are crucial to broader State commitments to implement Royal Commission recommendations, The National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse and respond to the findings of the Australian Child Maltreatment Study (with 1 in 4 Australians victims of child sexual abuse) and have been identified as a major priority.

WACOSS and the CSATS service network developed case studies of sustainable funding and a consultation and survey process is underway with existing services to develop a pricing and costing tool and inform a new bid for sustainable funding and service growth to meet unmet need.