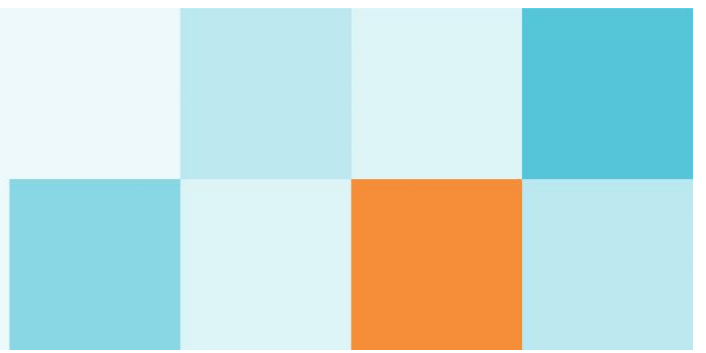February 2024

Response to Productivity Commission draft report
Inquiry into Early Childhood Education and Care

Restacking the Odds

Summary

Restacking the Odds uses evidence to address intergenerational disadvantage through equitable delivery of a 'stack' of five evidence-based services. To improve health, development and wellbeing and reduce developmental children and families require high-quality continuous services in every community, complemented by additional programs designed to support those facing disadvantage. We have drawn from our research, evidence, and implementation in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services and contributions from our partners to provide the following response to the Productivity Commission inquiry into ECEC draft report (the Report).

This response builds on our [previous submission](#) to the inquiry. RSTO's work is based on the idea that quality ECEC forms one critical part of a continuity of early childhood services, designed together to put children on an equitable footing by grade 3. As the Commission acknowledges, "a universal ECEC system means making quality services accessible to all children and families". When services are underused, unavailable or vary in quality, they can't fully meet the needs of children or families, especially those who will benefit most. More equitable delivery of the existing system is possible, but timely data is fundamental to enable change at the pace needed to make a real difference to equitable outcomes for Australian children, by school entry within a generation.

We focus on the following areas both in response to the findings, recommendations and requests posed by the Commission and to outline areas we believe are necessary to achieve a universal and equitable – but not uniform ECEC system that improves outcomes for all children.

1. Support to embed key indicators of quality, quantity and participation data at all levels

Opportunities to enable data-driven decision making exist at all levels of the ECEC system. It is particularly important to put data in the hands of frontline workers who can act to improve equity for children. Data-driven decision making should be embedded through a systematic and consistent framework of quality, quantity, and participation indicators. Data collection and use should be enabled by clear protocols, accessible technology, and ongoing professional development.

2. Foster a culture of continuous improvement across the ECEC sector

A high-quality ECEC system requires a culture of continuous improvement, where services are empowered to identify issues of quality and participation, and course-correct in real time. The ECEC workforce requires dedicated time to undertake continuous improvement activities and support to thrive in their profession. Continuous improvement efforts should be focused on supporting children who experience disadvantage, to improve their access to high-quality ECEC.

3. Improve access to ECEC for children experiencing disadvantage

Children and families need access to a 'stack' of supports that can address their holistic needs in early childhood to address inequity. System navigators, place-based initiatives and Integrated Child and Family Hubs each play an important role in reducing barriers to ECEC and to other health, education and social supports. These structures are especially important for children and families who are experiencing disadvantage.

About Restacking the Odds

This submission is made on behalf of the [Restacking the Odds initiative (RSTO)](#), a collaboration between the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) at Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI), Social Ventures Australia (SVA) and Bain & Company.

Nationally, 1 in 5 children arrive at school developmentally vulnerable. RSTO aims to redress the effects of inequities and disadvantage in the early years that can span generations. It does this by providing a data driven methodology to help essential services across the early years (antenatal care, sustained nurse home visiting, early childhood education and care (ECEC), parenting programs and early years of school) track quality, quantity and participation, underpinned by a framework of evidence-based lead indicators. This work is underpinned by a comprehensive theory of change, outlined in figure 1 on the next page.

The approach builds capacity and capability of communities and service providers, by enabling data-driven decision making at the front line, where it matters most. Our framework of [evidence-informed indicators](#) also provides a consistent methodology for measuring what matters across ECEC services, which, when aggregated at a regional, state or national level, provides valuable evidence and insights necessary to inform and measure progress against policy and funding reform. Our ECEC indicator framework is underpinned by analysis of the evidence to understand the most impactful Quality Areas, most beneficial starting age and attendance amount and what constitutes an adequate quantity of ECEC for children, including children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This analysis is outlined in the [Restacking the Odds technical report for ECEC.](#) RSTO is building towards wider adoption of the RSTO framework through co-designing a model to support consistent collection and use of lead indicators with ECEC providers and place-based initiatives. A more extensive suite of our work to date including research publications and case studies is available on the [RSTO website.](#)

THE NEED

Inequities emerging in early childhood often continue into adulthood, contributing to low educational attainment, poor mental and physical health and low income. In some cases, this experience is part of a persistent cycle of intergenerational disadvantage. Inequities constitute a significant and ongoing social problem and – along with substantial economic costs – have major implications for public policy.
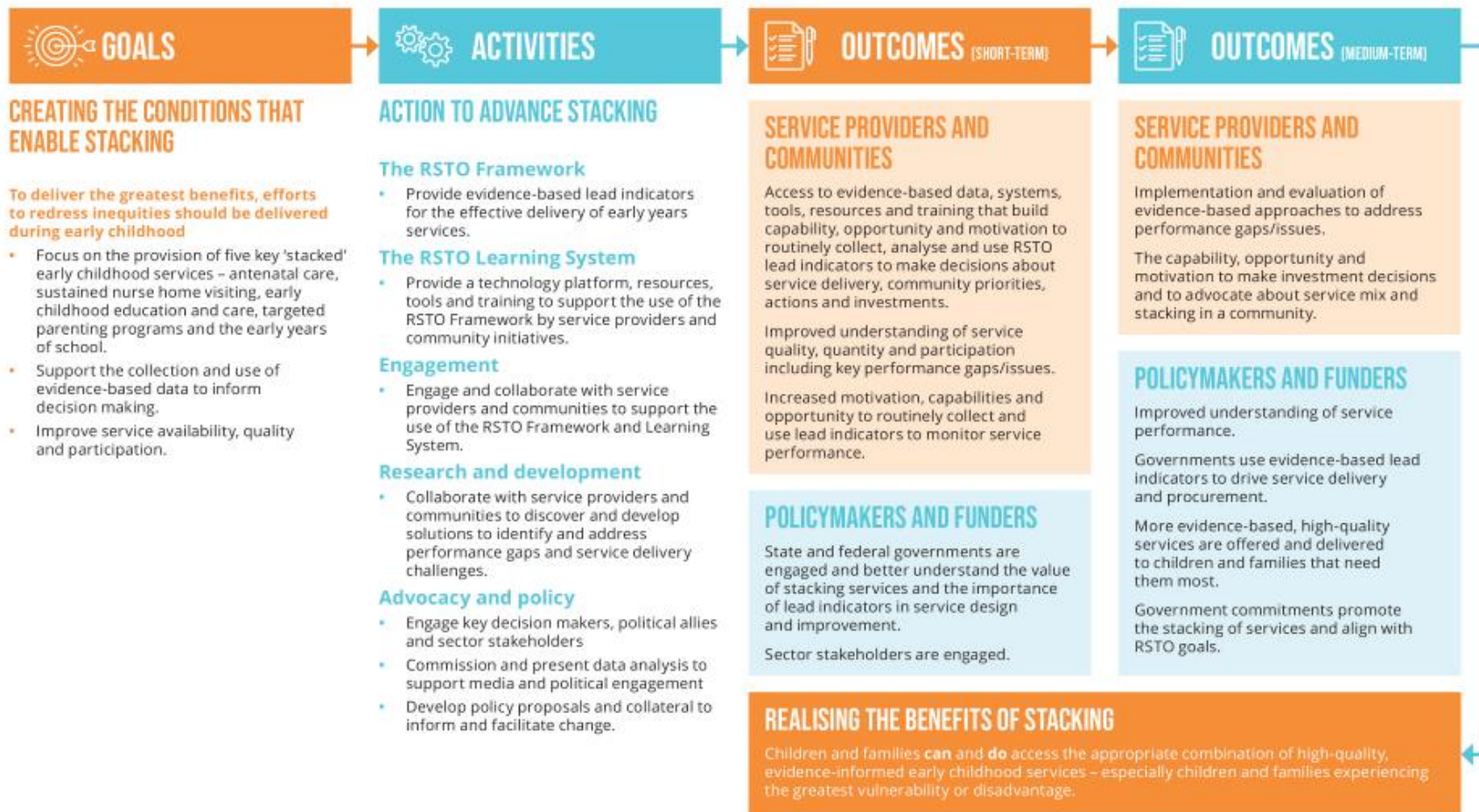
GOALS

CREATING THE CONDITIONS THAT ENABLE STACKING

To deliver the greatest benefits, efforts to redress inequities should be delivered during early childhood

- Focus on the provision of five key 'stacked' early childhood services – antenatal care, sustained nurse home visiting, early childhood education and care, targeted parenting programs and the early years of school.
- Support the collection and use of evidence-based data to inform decision making.
- Improve service availability, quality and participation.

ACTIVITIES

ACTION TO ADVANCE STACKING

The RSTO Framework
- Provide evidence-based lead indicators for the effective delivery of early years services.

The RSTO Learning System
- Provide a technology platform, resources, tools and training to support the use of the RSTO Framework by service providers and community initiatives.

Engagement
- Engage and collaborate with service providers and communities to support the use of the RSTO Framework and Learning System.

Research and development
- Collaborate with service providers and communities to discover and develop solutions to identify and address performance gaps and service delivery challenges.

Advocacy and policy
- Engage key decision makers, political allies and sector stakeholders
- Commission and present data analysis to support media and political engagement
- Develop policy proposals and collateral to inform and facilitate change.

OUTCOMES [SHORT-TERM]

SERVICE PROVIDERS AND COMMUNITIES

Access to evidence-based data, systems, tools, resources and training that build capability, opportunity and motivation to routinely collect, analyse and use RSTO lead indicators to make decisions about service delivery, community priorities, actions and investments.

Improved understanding of service quality, quantity and participation including key performance gaps/issues.

Increased motivation, capabilities and opportunity to routinely collect and use lead indicators to monitor service performance.

POLICYMAKERS AND FUNDERS

State and federal governments are engaged and better understand the value of stacking services and the importance of lead indicators in service design and improvement.

Sector stakeholders are engaged.

OUTCOMES [MEDIUM-TERM]

SERVICE PROVIDERS AND COMMUNITIES

Implementation and evaluation of evidence-based approaches to address performance gaps/issues.

The capability, opportunity and motivation to make investment decisions and to advocate about service mix and stacking in a community.

POLICYMAKERS AND FUNDERS

Improved understanding of service performance.

Governments use evidence-based lead indicators to drive service delivery and procurement.

More evidence-based, high-quality services are offered and delivered to children and families that need them most.

Government commitments promote the stacking of services and align with RSTO goals.

REALISING THE BENEFITS OF STACKING

Children and families **can** and **do** access the appropriate combination of high-quality, evidence-informed early childhood services – especially children and families experiencing the greatest vulnerability or disadvantage.

Figure 1 *Restacking the Odds Theory of Change*

Introduction

We commend the Commissioners for centering children and families in the draft report and for acknowledging that affordability, accessibility, flexibility and inclusion may prevent or enhance the potential benefits of early childhood education and care (ECEC). The findings and recommendations can support the Government to steward a high-quality ECEC system which reduces inequities in children's early development.

We were pleased to note the draft report references research supplied through our first submission. This included supporting our findings that children who experience disadvantage are missing out on quality ECEC that would benefit them, and the evidence that National Quality Standard (NQS) quality areas 1, 4 and 5 are most important to support children's development.

RSTO acknowledges the recommendations to achieve a universal entitlement of 30 hours per week of ECEC for all children, including the removal of the activity test for 30 hours, and a proposed system stewardship model. We encourage a continued examination and emphasis on guiding the system to redress inequities, so that all children can benefit from high-quality ECEC that meets their needs, age and circumstances. Services must be of high quality for children, and particularly those experiencing vulnerabilities or disadvantage, to receive the full benefit.

We welcome the Commissions' findings on the benefits of integrated child and family services as particularly important to reduce barriers to ECEC access. RSTO identifies a fairer and stronger ECEC system as one essential component of a 'stack'[1] of early childhood services, which when offered together have even greater impact on equitable children's outcomes and the potential to break cycles of intergenerational disadvantage.

A continuous and concurrent 'stack' of services – with ECEC as a crucial connector – offers soft entry and reduces barriers or delays to accessing support. Integrated Child and Family Hubs are one model that brings together a combination of services to work together, improving families' access to a range of supports.
The role for integrated services to reduce inequity are also explored in related submissions from the National Child and Family Hubs Network exploring critical role, core components and need for funding of the integration function, and from Social Ventures Australia which proposes recommendations for funding models that enable integration and coordination between funding streams.

To enable stewardship of progress to universal ECEC, system stewards and decision makers need to be equipped with lead indicator data that provides system oversight of:
- **participation**: children's attendance, their hours of attendance and whether they are receiving an appropriate 'dose' of quality ECEC
- service **quantity**: supply of centres, places, and workforce
- **quality**: whether services delivered at the standard the evidence says is required.

Our feedback in this submission responds to the draft findings, recommendations, and information requests. It is based on insights gained from RSTO research evidence and the co-design and implementation of the RSTO framework with ECEC providers and place-based practitioners working across the early childhood development system supporting children and families in vulnerable communities.

This includes input from representatives of RSTO partner ECEC providers and place-based initiatives from Logan Together, Gladstone Region engaging in action Together, Gowrie Victoria, Gowrie South Australia, The Hive Mt Druitt, Bourke and District Children's Services, By Five Wimmera Southern Mallee, Go

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[1] C Molloy, M O'Connor, S Guo, C Lin, C Harrop, N Perini, and S Goldfeld, Potential of 'stacking' early childhood interventions to reduce inequities in learning outcomes, J Epidemiol Community Health, 2019, 73(12), pp 1078-1086

Goldfields and Hands Up Mallee.

We focus on three key issues for the Commission to consider to strengthen its recommendations:
1. **Support to embed key indicators of quality, quantity and participation data at all levels**
2. **Foster a culture of continuous improvement across the ECEC sector**
3. **Improve access to ECEC for children experiencing disadvantage**

1. Support to embed key indicators of quality, quantity and participation data at all levels

Recent inquiries on the state of early childhood systems are welcome, but highlight an underlying issue – educators, service providers and other decision makers working across the system can't access the information they need to improve it. This obscures system oversight and improvement; limits the capacity of relevant system actors to understand which children are missing out; and limits understanding about where action to redress inequities is required.

The draft report proposes an ECEC Commission to advise and monitor governments' progress towards universal ECEC. It notes that the ECEC Commission will require access to good quality data and must share this with state and territory governments to deliver this role. RSTO is strongly supportive of tasking an entity to monitor the system, using good data. We encourage the Productivity Commission to provide further detail on:
- what data should be available to the ECEC Commission to support stewardship of the system,
- the data required to support decision making at other levels of the ECEC system, and
- the enabling structure required (data platforms, protocols and learning systems) for data capability and utilisation, including investment in individual and organisational capability.

In the remainder of this section we outline our recommendations on what detail should be included in each area.

a. Outline opportunities for data-driven decision making at each level of the ECEC system

Data should be readily available to support decisions at all levels of the system – whether that is system-level policy and market stewardship to achieve a universal system, community-level planning to address gaps in ECEC supply, or service-level action to better meet the needs of individual children.

As outlined in our previous submission, RSTO proposes that those involved in the delivery of early years services from the system through to the local level must be equipped to act on **lead indicator** data to answer three simple questions at a local level:
- (1) Are services available in sufficient quantity?
- (2) Are they being delivered at a standard that the evidence says is required (quality)?
- (3) Are the children and families who would benefit most receiving services (participation)?

Lead indicators are predictive measures that tell us what 'leads' to the development outcomes we care about, compared to lag indicators which show the eventual long-term impact from a program or intervention. Lead indicators reveal what families and children are experiencing, and allow service providers, government (local, state, federal) and communities to learn and adjust regularly, rather than waiting for years to see outcomes. RSTO has developed a framework of lead indicators to enable a view of what is happening in the system in real-time.

Monitoring lead indicators of system performance across the dimensions of quantity, quality and participation is an important role for the ECEC Commission for effective system stewardship. This enables the

Commission to identify the effects of policy mechanisms against the report's goals of affordability, availability, inclusivity and flexibility. The value of lead indicators has also been identified by NSW IPART in its draft methodology for monitoring the ECEC market.

There is also need for a flow of data from the system stewards and/or the ECEC Commission to the local level to support community-based actions. These might include enabling coordination and integration of early years services (to achieve the 'stack' of evidence-based supports that are crucial for children and families) and identifying local solutions required to address under-supply of places and/or barriers to attendance at local ECEC services.

At the service level, timely lead indicator data enables ECEC service providers to make and monitor changes that can have an immediate impact on factors we know are important to improve children's outcomes, such as regular attendance.

Table 1 summarises some examples of the potential opportunities for timely, coordinated data to support system improvements at different levels. The specific indicators and how those can be used are described further in the next section.

Table 1: Potential benefit of data use in the ECEC system

	Data need examples	Purpose or benefit
Families	- ECEC options in local area - Place availability - Cost - Quality - Supports available relevant to needs	Choice of ECEC that best meets their needs
Service providers	- Attendance - Priority population - Quality of service offering and areas for improvement - Quantity – how they contribute to overall quantity in community - Allied support services	- Identify under-attendance - Identify action to improve quality and participation - Identify child, family support needs - Identify professional learning focus
Place-based initiatives, system navigators, local government, integrated service coordinators	- Attendance - Priority population - Service needs - Waitlist - Workforce availability - Quality across centres	- Bridge information between system and service level - Service engagement connectivity and shared planning - Support families with system navigation - Identify cohorts missing out and barriers - Monitor local ECEC quality and design improvement support - Communicate/advocate to government about community needs
Federal, state and territory governments, ECEC commission	- Aggregate attendance - Priority population - Community needs - Quality ratings - Quality, quantity and participation in non-ECEC early years services	- Identify action to improve quantity - Understand progress toward universal, equitable ECEC - Identify under-served (and over-served) areas and unmet needs - Targeted distribution of resources to meet needs - Policy and funding reform

b. Outline the data that should be collected

RSTO has developed a framework of lead indicators to enable a view of what is happening in the system in real-time. Lead indicators revealing what families and children are experiencing, allow service providers, government (local, state, federal) and communities to learn and adjust regularly, rather than waiting for years

to see outcomes. The indicators are further described in our previous submission.

Data is already being captured across the ECEC system, but this is not coordinated or shared effectively for continuous improvement and decision making. RSTO, in collaboration with ECEC service providers and place-based partners have identified opportunities to improve data collection and coordination to support system visibility and action.

Participation indicators provide an understanding of who is attending the services and how much service they are receiving. Children need to attend the right amount ('dose') to get the maximum benefit from ECEC. RSTO evidence[2] highlights that the optimum dose varies depending on the age, and circumstances of the child and benefits differ across cognitive, academic and social and emotional domains (see tables 2 and 3 in Appendix 1). Evidence supports provision of high-quality ECEC for 15 hours or more per week for all children for 2 years before starting formal schooling. Children from priority cohorts would benefit from starting ECEC at a younger age. To understand participation, changes are required in how attendance and priority population data are captured.

> **Attendance:** Attendance data describes the program hours a child attended. These are required to understand what dose of ECEC children receive.
>
> Current attendance data collections are too infrequent (e.g. annual National ECEC collection) or not used at the right level (e.g. attendance data used solely for claiming Child Care Subsidy) to provide meaningful understanding about the 'dose' of ECEC children are actually receiving. RSTO has found when participation data is interrogated, just 56% of children attended the recommended 15 hours per week for 90% of weeks over a 9-month period[3].
>
> **Priority cohorts:** Priority cohort data are required to understand who is attending a service, and whether their attendance is at the optimal level based on their needs. The RSTO indicator framework identifies priority populations including; children with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children of Health Care Card holders, children in out-of-home care, and refugees, asylum seeker and culturally and linguistically diverse populations. Collecting this data would assist with several of the Commissions' findings regarding inclusion for example; ***Finding 2.2 Children who would most benefit from ECEC are least likely to attend, Information Request 2.2 Cultural safety in ECEC services and, Finding 2.5 Increased funding for ISP required to ensure children with additional needs are adequately supported and included.***
>
> To ensure data can be used effectively, consistent definitions are required for each priority cohort, including clarification on whether the family or the child should be the focus. For example, capturing a child's first language only, might obscure a family's need for support in languages other than English. Priority cohort definitions should be applied through enrolment, claiming CCS, reporting attendance, referrals and school transition. Definitions of priority cohorts could also extend, where appropriate, to other early childhood services, such as child health services.

Quantity indicators help understand if sufficient services are available, and who they are available for. This is necessary to understand the supply of places as well as whether the available places offer sufficient hours of ECEC.

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[2] C Molloy, P Quinn, N Perini, C Harrop, S Goldfeld, 2018, *'Restacking the Odds – Technical Report: Early childhood education and care: An evidence basesd review of indicators to assess quality, quantity and participation.' https://www.rsto.org.au/media/2qsouizm/restacking_the_odds_ecec-_technical-report_early_childhood.pdf*
[3] C Molloy, S Goldfeld, C Harrop, N Perini, 2022, 'Early childhood education: a study of the barriers, facilitators and strategies to improve participation', https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/images/RSTO-CommBrief-ECEC-Barriers-Faciliators-Strategies-Jan2022(2).pdf

RSTO's ECEC service provider and place-based partners suggest that waitlist data and workforce data may be useful to describe quantity.

Waitlists: The Commissioners rightly recognise that current data on waitlists and vacancies are limited and pose issues with interpretation (p 339), however note their potential role in signaling availability of places.

Services in jurisdictions with centralised preschool enrolment through local government and providers operating multiple centres in a community may collate some waitlist data, however neither are sufficient to accurately describe demand across all forms of ECEC. A lack of data sharing protocols limits how these data can be used most effectively.

The NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (NSW IPART) recommends waitlist data be visible to families through a proposed digital service and data strategy (IPART recommendation 3). Waitlist data may be most appropriately collated and managed at the community level, for example local governments. The level of detail captured would ideally allow identification of the issues contributing to the shortage of places e.g. workforce or infrastructure shortages, or insufficient places for children of particular ages.

We also refer the Commission to consider the submission from Goodstart which proposes a 'database of demand and supply', which might be an additional mechanism to inform community and service planning, for example by providing insight on need for additional places.

Workforce: Workforce data can assist in identifying workforce shortages or surpluses and professional and skill development needs and inform workforce strategies – locally and at a system level.

Quality indicators provide an understanding of whether ECEC is a sufficient standard, in the most impactful areas to improve children's learning and development outcomes. RSTO evidence[4] finds that quality is most strongly related to the NQS quality areas 1: Educational program and practice, 4: Staffing arrangements and 5: Relationships with children. When developed, the preschool outcomes measure will also provide an opportunity for course correction at the child and service level.

Quality data is required:
- by service providers and community practitioners to identify areas for practice improvement to benefit children's outcomes
- by an ECEC commission, government system stewards and the regulator ACECQA to identify opportunities to plan and implement continuous improvement support (discussed further in section 2d of this submission)

c. Outline what's required to enable and embed data collection and use

RSTO has explored barriers and enablers to data use by ECEC service providers, front line staff [5] and place-based initiatives.[6] Obstacles to data use are common across these groups, and include lack of knowledge, skills or time allocated to interpret data, issues with data management systems and processes, data quality issues and limited resources. This results in poor coordination and oversight of data; data with limited utility

[4] C Molloy, P Quinn, C Harrop, N Perini, S Goldfeld,. 2018, 'Restacking the Odds Technical Report: Early childhood education: An evidence based review of indicators to assess quality, quantity and participation'. https://www.rsto.org.au/media/2qsouizm/restacking_the_odds_ecec-_technical-report_early_childhood.pdf

[5] S Sherker, K Villanueva, R Beatson, C MacMillan, YW Lee, O Hilton, C Molloy, S Goldfeld, S (under review), 'Barriers and Facilitators to data-based decision making in Australian early childhood education and care: A qualitative study'.

[6] K Villaneuva, R Beatson, O Hilton, WY Lee, C Macmillian, C Molloy, S Sherker, S Goldfeld, (submitted for publication) 'Barriers and enablers to data-based decision making in Australian place-based community initiatives: A qualitative study informed by the TDF and COM-B model'

for decision making; and insufficient tools, capacity and frameworks.

Data sharing is also an issue. In integrated services and place-based initiatives, practitioners aim to use data to collaborate to identify and address barriers within their local early childhood system. However, data sharing protocols and practices are unclear, even within services under the same organisation, holding back practitioners from identifying local issues and forming timely responses. Substantial data is collected but there is limited understanding of what questions it should be used to answer, which data is relevant and who it should be shared with. We recommend development of data-sharing protocols to guide Governments and service providers. Protocols and practices should recognise and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data sovereignty and self-determination.

One way to create an enabling environment for data use at the service provider level, at the same time as lifting continuous improvement practice overall would be through stronger guidance on data collection and data-informed decision making through the NQF, as a way of demonstrating quality service provision.

Efforts to improve data-based decision making in ECEC would require evaluation to ensure effectiveness and modification if required. This could form part of a research agenda (***finding 1.2***)

RSTO research also highlights that data capacity and capability limitations exist for other early childhood development services and initiatives, including place-based initiatives, antenatal care and maternal and child health providers.[7] Enabling a more coherent and joined-up data system and investing in service provider capability to collect, use and act on data is important for understanding a child's journey across these fundamental services.

There is increasing recognition of the importance of a functional, connected data system to support early childhood service provision, as articulated in the suite of strategies and reviews listed below. As a key component of the early childhood development system, an ECEC data strategy must be designed to connect with these efforts to further reduce system fragmentation.

- National Early Years Strategy draft
- National Vision for Early Childhood Education and Care draft
- National Life Course Data Asset
- NDIS review final report
- Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census
- National Partnership Agreement outcomes and attendance data collection
- NSW Early Childhood Education and Care Independent Market Monitoring review draft methodology
- NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal into ECEC interim report
- SA Royal Commission into ECEC final report

A summary of how these documents refer to data capture, coordination and utilisation is provided in Appendix 2.

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[7] R Beatson, C Macmillan, S Sherker, O Hilton, S Goldfeld, & C Molloy, manuscript submitted for publication. 'Improving data-based decision-making in early childhood services: A systematic review informed by the Capability Opportunity and Motivation model of Behaviour.

2. Enable ECEC service providers to establish a continuous improvement culture

To improve how services are delivered, RSTO is embedding a data-driven continuous improvement approach and complementary data capability uplift. These are critical investments for a universal ECEC system.

RSTO has been co-designing a continuous improvement process with service providers, using service and state level data for quality (Quality Areas 1, 4 and 5), participation and quantity indicators. Data is captured and reflected back to service providers in a learning system, enabling them to easily identify how they are performing on lead indicators of quality, quantity and participation. The learning system enables services to reflect regularly (e.g. each month) on what's happening in their service and determine what actions they can trial immediately, as well as see the effects of actions already in place.

RSTO's end-to-end process of data collection, use and continuous improvement action is described in the case study: 'Using a continuous improvement approach to improve participation in early childhood education and care', developed with Gowrie Victoria (provided in appendix 3.)[8]

Through our co-design process, we have identified factors which undermine cultures of continuous improvement, as well as opportunities to strengthen and support this practice. This could be considered through the Commission's findings and recommendations on workforce supports, including professional development and regulating for quality.

a. **Continuous quality improvement requires a high quality ECEC workforce who are supported and enabled to thrive in their professions**

RSTO supports the Commission's focus on the fundamental need to address ECEC workforce shortages through adequate pay and conditions and through improved professional development and support.

RSTO service provider partners report that workforce challenges are undermining efforts to improve service quality. For example, centre directors and managers report they are often required to perform educator roles and centres report being unable to source casual educators to cover the release of regular staff for professional development. This limits opportunities for services to take up government programs like the Professional Development Subsidy or Kindy Uplift.

Services also noted some professional development subsidies cannot be used for travel (for example, Victoria's school readiness funding). This limits the variety and frequency of professional development those from regional, rural and remote services could access due to the need to do so on their own time and funds.

Issues around attracting and retaining qualified ECEC staff are likely to remain without a strong and concerted effort that includes fair and attractive wages and a focus on communities with low ECEC workforce compared to demand. Professional development subsidies must enable equal access to opportunities and be sufficiently flexible so that services and children are not unfairly disadvantaged.

b. **Dedicated time is needed to support a culture of continuous improvement**
Service providers report that paid, dedicated time where they are not caring for children is required in greater quantity to:
- undertake continuous improvement practices, reflection or mentoring
- engage with families to establish relationships and support their participation

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[8] Restacking the Odds, 2023, 'RSTO case study: Using a continuous improvement approach to improve participation in early childhood education and care', https://www.rsto.org.au/media/wgppxldp/rsto_cs_gowrie_da6.pdf

- engage with other services (for example, allied health services) in the early childhood development system or local community
- complete funding, planning and reporting requirements
- mitigate burnout caused by providers having to dedicate time outside of standard work hours to complete mandatory requirements

In addition to formal learning, these activities are important for the service as well as for expanding professional practice skills alongside time spent with children.

RSTO proposes that *recommendation 3.6 'contribute to professional development for the ECEC workforce'* is expanded to enable flexible approaches to professional learning, particularly where backfill release is impractical, and to allow for activities that benefit the service in other ways. Some examples include:
- Provision of funding to provide coaches, as demonstrated by [Gowrie Victoria](#) (and discussed in *recommendation 3.3*)
- Staff with teaching registrations in some jurisdictions may have enterprise entitlements allowing for paid training where services don't charge families - this approach could be expanded to include other educators.
- Allowing ECEC services to hold a set number of child-free planning days where they can claim the Child Care Subsidy

c. Support for services to improve quality should focus on services with a high proportion of disadvantaged children

Improving service quality is one aspect of RSTO's continuous improvement approach. We note the Commissions' *information request 8.3 on support for services to meet the NQS* focuses on services who are not currently meeting NQS, however we believe a continuous improvement approach is beneficial for all services, staff and children attending them. RSTO partners report that limited support is available for centres that are meeting the NQS and wishing to improve their practice.

As high quality ECEC is particularly important to children experiencing disadvantage, priority support to improve quality could be directed to centres who support a greater proportion of disadvantaged children. Support to centres should address the Quality Areas which are most important to improve outcomes for these children in particular, i.e. QA1: Educational program and practice, QA4: Staffing arrangements and QA5: Relationships with children.[9]
This call for support for all centres is also reflected in the submission to the draft Report by The Hive Mount Druitt.

Examples of support that is valuable to ECEC providers to improve quality includes:
- Providing tools such as a continuous improvement framework for services to respond to their quality ratings and identify their own actions to improve quality and lift participation
- Ensuring software enables simple collection of data outlined above for NQF reporting
- Support for local ECEC networks and/or Communities of Practice, for example through funding local coordination roles, to allow sharing of local experiences and actions to lift quality

To further enhance quality in ECEC, we support the Commission's recommendations:
- To ensure regulatory authorities are adequately resourced, to improve the timeliness of assessments
- To incentivise quality provision in new ECEC services.

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[9] C Molloy, P Quinn, C Harrop, N Perini, S Goldfeld,. 2018, 'Restacking the Odds Technical Report: Early childhood education: An evidence based review of indicators to assess quality, quantity and participation'. https://www.rsto.org.au/media/2qsouizm/restacking_the_odds_ecec-_technical-report_early_childhood.pdf

As acknowledged by the Commission, the [preschool outcome measure](#) (under development) can also play a role in a broader quality improvement approach.

3. Improve access to ECEC for children experiencing disadvantage

Removal of the activity test and adjustments to the childcare subsidy are critical steps in improving access to ECEC, however additional measures which centre children's needs are required to increase participation by children experiencing disadvantage.

RSTO's place-based initiative and ECEC service provider partners in communities with higher levels of disadvantage are working to reduce barriers including through:
- support to families by navigator/connector/community engagement staff
- coordinating other family and children support services to create a 'stack' of supports.

a. 'System navigators' could support families with funding and appropriate remit, but shouldn't replace other efforts to improve barriers to access and improved service quality

RSTO supports the proposal of 'system navigator' (or similar) roles discussed in *information request 7.2,* however we encourage the Commission to consider that:
- increasing participation in poor-quality services will not change outcomes for families and should not be seen as a silver bullet response to system transformation
- efforts to progress system simplification, particularly for children experiencing disadvantage, remain a priority
- system navigator roles must be adequately funded
- the remit of these roles requires flexibility to respond to local needs.

System navigator roles and other similar role types are emergent – more work is required to codify the scalable elements, professional development needs, and the skills required.

System navigators may complement other efforts to improve access, participation and inclusion but should not be seen as a panacea or draw funds away from the important core aspects of ECEC delivery. Some RSTO partners indicated concern with the framing of the title 'system navigators' for its implication of a narrow scope. Investment in system navigators shouldn't overshadow efforts to streamline the ECEC and making it simpler to navigate. Work to reduce ECEC system complexity would also increase time available to people in connector and navigator roles to focus on the most meaningful way to support families.

RSTO place-based initiative partners also describe local navigator or connector roles which include a family support remit as core to fostering system integration and require investment as part of integrated service models rather than standalone. Both funding and reporting frameworks around these roles must allow for flexibility to respond to local need. This may include additional centre-based funding or funding to place-based initiatives in communities with higher needs.

We also refer to the submission to this draft Report from the National Child and Family Hubs network which outlines the critical role that System Navigators play as part of Integrated Child and Family Hubs. These roles are a core component of the integration function (known as the 'glue')[10], working to build trust with families and offer a warm entry to access appropriate services.

These roles may focus on community and early childhood supports, help to identify and remove system barriers, and support communities to understand and advocate their local needs. We note that local

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[10] Centre for Community Child Health, 2023, The glue: Enabling connected and quality early years services',
https://blogs.rch.org.au/ccch/2023/11/15/the-glue-enabling-connected-and-quality-early-years-services/

navigators also feature in the NDIS final report[11] and system navigators in the ECEC sector must be enabled to collaborate with others in parallel roles in other sectors.

A holistic focus on the needs of the child is required, for example through connecting to other parts of the early childhood development system, including:

- community outreach and relationship building
- analysing community need for example, causes of barriers to participation or attendance
- facilitating relationships with and between local services (for example, in support of *recommendation 7.2: 'Support connections between ECEC and child and family services'*)
- responding to critical issues including child exclusion
- working with the ECEC Commission to provide feedback on the system.

Staff with lived expertise of the communities they are employed in would be well-placed to lead outreach to families unaware or unlikely to engage with ECEC (p 419). For example, Logan Together's Community Connector roles act as key system enabler, establishing a critical base for trust between services and families and a substantial working knowledge of the local early years services. They also collect local intelligence on the barriers that exist for whom and why - evidence is then used to inform system and practice improvement.

Some RSTO partners have highlighted challenging family circumstances as a barrier which prevents children's participation, even when affordability and availability barriers are removed. These families require support to develop the routines and functionality needed to prepare for ECEC participation. Navigators would facilitate connection of families to relevant supports.

More work is needed to define and test how system navigator roles can most effectively support ECEC participation for children and further how they may meaningfully enhance the system for families overall.

b. Place-based initiatives, Integrated Child and Family Hubs and an ECEC Commission have a significant role to play in supporting integrated and coordinated services and improving access to ECEC

Evidence tells us that children's developmental outcomes are improved when families have access to a 'stack' of evidence-based health, education and social supports.[12] RSTO welcomes the discussion of and acknowledgement of the role ECEC plays or could potentially play in ensuring children and families have access to the combination of services they need to thrive.

Integrated Child and Family Hubs play an essential role for achieving 'stacking' by offering a soft entry point to ECEC and between ECEC and other supports such as playgroups, Child and Family Health, family support programs and wider community networks.[13] This model is especially beneficial to support families who experience disadvantage. enabling Hub staff to engage with families, using child or family-centered approaches to ensure supports are timely and relevant and through offering practical support to understand entitlements. The integration function of these hubs (referred to as the 'glue') is critical to enabling this connection with families and to support children's outcomes.

Analysis of the Australian Early Development Index found 18% of children commence school with additional health and developmental needs, primarily in the areas of language, behavior and challenges within the

[11] Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2023, 'Working together to deliver the NDIS – independent review into the National Disability Insurance Scheme: final report, https://www.ndisreview.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/working-together-ndis-review-final-report.pdf

[12] C Molloy, M O'Connor, S Guo, C Lin, C Harrop, N Perini, and S Goldfeld, Potential of 'stacking' early childhood interventions to reduce inequities in learning outcomes, Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, 2019, 73(12), pp 1078-1086

[13] Social Ventures Australia, 2023, 'Happy, healthy and thriving: enhancing the impact of our Integrated Child and Family Centres in Australia, https://www.socialventures.com.au/assets/Enhancing-the-impact-of-our-Integrated-Child-and-Family-Centres-in-Australia-full-report-1-May-edit.pdf

home[14]. The [NDIS review](#) also found that there is inconsistency in mainstream (i.e. non clinical) services for identifying and supporting disability and developmental concerns early, and supports tend to be delivered in clinical settings. The review calls for a shift to best practice, with support for children with additional needs to be primarily delivered in 'natural' settings where children are already participating. ECEC must be designed to connect children with services they need to ensure their developmental needs are met before beginning school.

RSTO supports **recommendation 7.1 'ensure integrated services are available where needed'** and encourages the Commission to expand this recommendation to also ensure adequate funding is available for Integrated Child and Family Hubs to perform this integration function.
Funding models are further explored in the Social Ventures Australia and National Child and Family Hubs Network submissions to this draft report.

We also support **finding 7.3 'Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are well placed to provide early years and family services – but face funding challenges'** and defer to the submission from SNAICC to this draft Report outlining funding requirements for these services.

Recommendation 7.2 identifies a role for the ECEC Commission to examines connection between ECEC and other child and family services and to identify the most suitable way to address any gaps, and **Information request 9.2** seeks views on the potential scope of an ECEC Commission.

Recommendation 7.2 could be strengthened by acknowledging the role that services at the community level such as place-based initiatives and Integrated Child and Family Hubs can play supporting the ECEC Commission in identifying and enabling local needs and solutions for integration. The recommendation should also articulate "health" services are part of the "other child and family" services which should be connected to ECEC.

Place-based initiatives have a remit to foster connections between local services to meet community need. For example, the Australian Government's [Stronger Places, Stronger People](#) initiative operates on the principle of shared accountability for planning, decision making and results. Integrated Child and Family Hubs are another model with a remit to work closely with the community to understand their needs.
Both models are well-placed to feed in to the ECEC Commission, sharing insights about the barriers families face in their community and the local solutions they are using to navigate these.

Additionally, place-based initiatives and Integrated Child and Family Hubs have a remit which extends beyond ECEC to other parts of the early childhood development system. They would have valuable advice for the ECEC Commission on how these different systems affecting children's development are, or are not, functioning well together and where system-level integration can facilitate a more seamless experience for children. Place-based initiatives and Integrated Child and Family Hubs, including Aboriginal and Torres-Strait Islander-led integrated services offer opportunity to innovate within place and communities. This would offer lessons to inform scaling integrated child and family service models, noting that scaling is essential if we are to address inequities across Australia, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Finally, RSTO proposes that the scope of the ECEC Commission **(information request 9.2)** accounts for the need for the Commission and system stewards to extend to other services in the early childhood development system. This would help to complete the picture for a fully joined up early childhood system that is well-placed to support children to reach their potential. The draft Report recommends a role for an ECEC Commission to engage with Australian, State and Territory government system stewards, to identifying

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[14] S Goldfeld, M O'Connor, M Sayers, T Moore, F Oberklaid, 2012, 'Prevalence and Correlates of Special Health Care Needs in a Population Cohort of Australian Children at School Entry', Journal of Developmental & Behavioural Paediatrics, 33(4) p319-327.

where ECEC services and integrated hubs are needed, and other action to improve accessibility and inclusivity for children.

A Commission with an early childhood development remit could play these same roles across other parts of the early childhood health, education and social system, and ensure these systems function together to support the best possible outcomes for children. A Commission for Early Childhood Development and the government system stewards should be given authority and accountability that reflect the importance of coordinating this reform. This may also include functions that enable the Commission for Early Childhood Development to connect with Cabinet to ensure appropriate authority and accountability for Australia's young children.

Appendix 1 - Summary of overall evidence base for ECEC by starting age, program duration and program dose

The following is an extract from the Restacking the Odds: Technical Report Early Childhood Education and Care: An evidence-based review of indicators to assess quality, quantity and participation, p15

Table 2: Summary of overall evidence base for ECEC by starting age, program duration and program dose for **universal provision**

STARTING AGE	COGNITIVE & LANGUAGE	ACADEMIC	SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL
0-2 years	• Supported	• Promising	• Mixed
2-3 years	• Supported	• Promising	• Mixed
3-4 years	• Promising	• Promising	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base
4-5 years	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base

PROGRAM DURATION	COGNITIVE & LANGUAGE	ACADEMIC	SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL
Less than 1 year	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base	• Supported	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base
1-2 years	• Promising	• Supported	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base
2-3 years	• Supported	• Supported	• Not supported
More than 3 years	• Supported	• Supported	• Not supported

PROGRAM DOSE	COGNITIVE & LANGUAGE	ACADEMIC	SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL
Part time	• Supported	• Supported	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base
Full time (> 15 hours)	• Mixed	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base	• Not supported

Table 3: Summary of the overall evidence base for ECEC by starting age, program duration and program dose for **targeted (priority population) provision**

STARTING AGE	COGNITIVE & LANGUAGE	ACADEMIC	SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL
0-2 years	• Supported	• Supported	• Supported
2-3 years	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base	• Supported	• Not supported
3-4 years	• Supported	• Supported	• Supported
4-5 years	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base

PROGRAM DURATION	COGNITIVE & LANGUAGE	ACADEMIC	SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL
Less than 1 year	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base
1-2 years	• Supported	• Supported	• Supported
2-3 years	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base	• Not adequately addressed in target evidence-base
More than 3 years	• Supported	• Supported	• Supported

PROGRAM DOSE	COGNITIVE & LANGUAGE	ACADEMIC	SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL
Part time	• Supported	• Supported	• Supported
Full time (> 15 hours)	• Supported	• Supported	• Supported

Appendix 2 – List of early childhood system reform activities relevant to data capability

National Early Years Strategy draft	**Priority Focus Area 4.2: Data, research and evaluation (**p57), particularly: We will look at opportunities to: • share community and service level data, and make it easy to understand and interpret, to give parents, kin, carers and communities the tools they need to make decisions about their priorities and to drive service improvement. • improve information and data sharing and analysis across governments, providers, communities and academia to improve our collective understanding of the early years and, how children are faring and what is supporting them to thrive, as a basis for ongoing collaboration and decision making and to help solve the complex problems for children and their families.
National Vision for Early Childhood Education and Care draft	**Enablers** (p2) Data and evidence: Policies models and interventions must be underpinned by comprehensive high quality data and evidence.
National Life Course Data Asset (in pilot stage)	The Life Course Data Asset initiative aims to improve understanding of how communities experience disadvantage, including through longitudinal data. Many Australians continue to face disadvantage and this disadvantage is often concentrated in specific communities. This work will connect administrative datasets into a linked longitudinal data asset to support evidence-based policy making at the community level.
Child Wellbeing Data Asset (under development)	Under development The Child Wellbeing Data Asset is an initiative under the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse that aims to improve outcomes for children and young people by enabling holistic analysis of pathways through government services through enduring, nationally integrated, child-centred data across sectors.
NDIS review final report	**Recommendation 23.4** All Australian Governments should agree to jointly invest in actions to improve disability data quality and sharing, and **Action 2.13: All Australian governments should agree as a matter of priority to expand universally available child development checks to ensure the early identification of children with developmental concerns and disability and enable early intervention (**p79), particularly: • There should be a national approach to minimum data requirements and **Figure 4 Overview of proposed navigation support (**p103), particularly, • Collecting data and reporting on demand for services and unmet need for all people with disability • Reporting gaps in local services system
NSW Early childhood education and care Independent Market Monitoring review draft methodology	**Table 2.1: Dimensions to review in table 2.1 (**p6) Priority populations are an included dimension but notes these are not consistently identifiable in the available data sources, including through Child Care Subsidy data.

NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal into ECEC interim report	**draft finding 2: Workforce availability and expertise are critical to the support and accessibility of quality early childhood education and care services and constitute a significant problem currently facing the sector (**p2), particularly: 'Providers and policy-makers need access to data to help with decisions about where to locate services and what programs are needed. Throughout the review to date, we have experienced significant issues with data as sources are varied, fragmented, hard to access and often inconsistent.' and **Draft finding 3: The lack of comprehensive, integrated, accessible, high quality digital services and data about early childhood education and care … impedes good decision-making for providers and policy makers – a digital transformation is needed' (**p2) and **Recommendation 3: The NSW Government should develop a digital service and data strategy for the early childhood education and care sector… so providers and governments can make better informed decisions** (p3)
SA Royal Commission into ECEC final report	The knowledge ecosystem and an early childhood development data system (p55), and **Recommendation 4 Legislation for a new universal child development data system** (p6), particularly: That in establishing the Office for the Early Years, the State Government includes the legislative basis for an integrated child development data system that enables: • services to engage in data sharing to support service targeting, planning, evaluation and research population wide, individual level de-identified data for planning, evaluation and research • communities to meaningfully plan and take action and engage with governments • all participants – policymakers, educators, service providers – to engage in a process of continuous improvement and reflection

RESTACKING THE ODDS

RSTO CASE STUDY

Using a continuous improvement approach to improve participation in early childhood education and care

Participation in high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) boosts children's health, development and wellbeing. While all children can benefit from ECEC, children experiencing disadvantage stand to benefit the most. Children and families need to attend at the right dosage for the benefits of ECEC to be realised. Research shows children and families experiencing disadvantage are more likely to miss out.

There is limited national ECEC participation data collected in Australia. The available data is enrolment data (e.g. the proportion of children enrolled in a preschool program) and doesn't provide sufficient information about the dosage of ECEC participation. Without this data, it is challenging for services and communities to identify issues with ECEC participation and, importantly, to identify how to make changes that improve participation and children's developmental outcomes.

Restacking the Odds (RSTO) is a program that aims to develop the knowledge and skills of early years service providers to collect, understand and use evidence-based lead indicators to enhance service quality, quantity and participation.

CASE STUDY

RSTO is partnering with Gowrie Victoria to help identify opportunities for improving early childhood education and care participation rates at Gowrie sites in Victoria.

Service focus:
Early Childhood Education and Care

RSTO indicator focus:
Quality, quantity and **participation**

murdoch children's research institute

SVA Social Ventures Australia

BAIN & COMPANY

Gowrie Victoria

For over 80 years, Gowrie Victoria has been at the forefront of high-quality early learning. As a purpose-driven, not-for-profit organisation they have a reputation for high-quality ECEC and focus on empowering children and connecting and supporting families. Gowrie Victoria deliver long day care services, sessional kindergarten and training and consultancy in early childhood education across six sites in Melbourne, serving over 1700 children and 1450 families.

The opportunity

Gowrie Victoria's vision is ensuring all children can participate in high-quality early childhood education and care to achieve the best outcomes. To deliver on their vision, Gowrie wanted to better understand if children enrolled in their services were participating in early education at the right dose for the benefits of ECEC to be realised. And if not, how they could improve participation.

The organisation collects data on participation, however, this information sits across different systems and requires a lot of manual effort to aggregate and analyse. The data was mostly being used for reports to the Gowrie leadership team and Board and wasn't being harnessed to drive action that could benefit children and families.

There was an opportunity for RSTO to help Gowrie use their data more effectively to ensure children were getting the most from ECEC.

The RSTO approach

Forming a partnership

RSTO first engaged with Susan Anderson, Gowrie CEO, in mid-2022 to discuss the opportunity to partner. The team at RSTO had always been impressed with Gowrie's focus on quality and continuous improvement and saw them as an ideal lead partner to inform and support the development and roll out of RSTO. A suite of early-stage prototypes were co-designed to help services consistently collect and make better use of data for decision-making, including a data dashboard and a continuous improvement training program. RSTO data dashboards make it easier to act on data by presenting data in a visual way and showing patterns and trends. The continuous improvement training program supports practitioners to understand what actions to take and how to monitor impact.

A number of meetings took place in mid-2022 with the Gowrie leadership team and RSTO. The primary focus of these conversations was to understand what the partners were aiming to achieve and how to work collaboratively.

'We were motivated to partner with RSTO to help us make better sense of where to focus our efforts to improve participation. Helping us to take action immediately and strengthen a culture of continuous improvement,'

Susan Anderson, CEO, Gowrie.

22

Collecting data

To inform the development of the prototypes, RTSO interviewed 10 staff across different Gowrie centres and roles to better understand the barriers and enablers to collecting and using data (see Table 1). This information was used to start developing a minimum viable prototype that could support Gowrie Victoria with data-informed decision-making.

Table 1: Barriers and enablers to collecting and using data at Gowrie Victoria

| BEHAVIOUR CHANGE FACTORS	BARRIERS	ENABLERS
Capability	• knowledge of what data to collect • capability to interpret and use data	• data literacy • quality improvement support • data systems
Opportunity	• low data quality • low data availability • data systems and processes • limited resources to support data collection and use	• increased resources to support data collection and use • increased funding • improved data systems and processes
Motivation	• pressure on staff resources	• reinforcement • professional role

Developing a data dashboard

From July 2022 through to November 2022, RSTO and its technology partners worked with key staff at Gowrie to develop the first component of a minimum viable prototype – a technology platform that would calculate indicators and then publish the results in an easy-to-use dashboard. The indicators needed to enable Gowrie staff to quickly and easily identify how many children were attending Gowrie sites, and how often, so that Gowrie could action strategies to enhance participation. See Figure 1 for an example mock-up of how summary data related to ECEC participation can be presented in a data dashboard.

This process involved understanding Gowrie's systems, how data was collected and where it was stored. It also involved understanding how and where to access population level data required to calculate certain RSTO indicators. For example, identifying whether there are enough ECEC sites available in sufficient quantity in the areas Gowrie is located.

Figure 1: Sample RSTO data dashboard

23
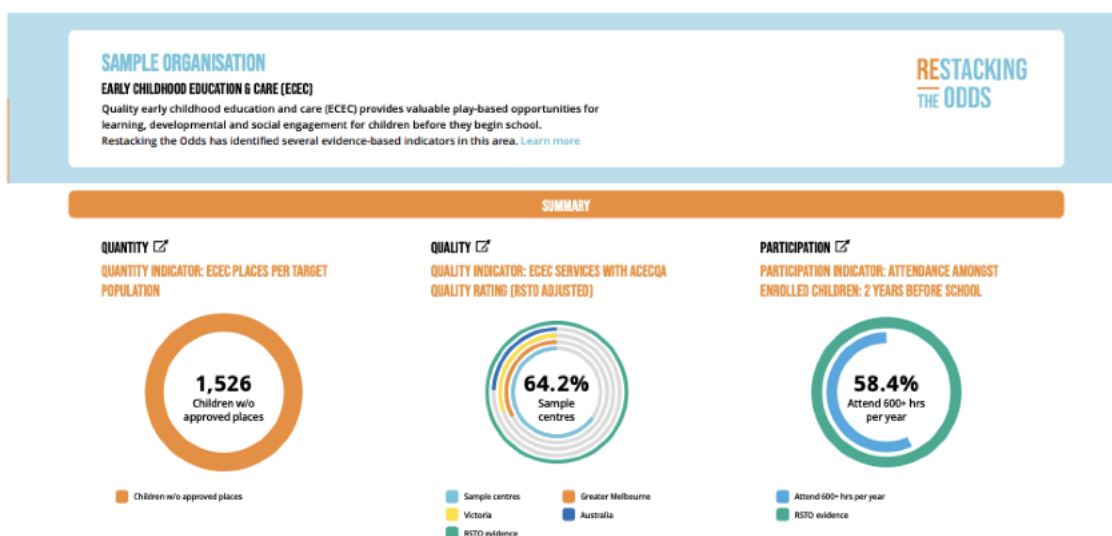
A critical goal of the prototype was to develop a process to extract data from relevant systems automatically and de-identify all family and child level data on entry to the platform. This was achieved by developing service reporting templates that could be easily uploaded to the platform.

To ensure the data was easy to understand, the RSTO team worked with Gowrie through a series of short meetings, to co-design dashboards that could provide meaningful data. This involved understanding how to present the data at a summary and centre level; how to explain the data in terms that were most relevant to users and how to benchmark data to enable better tracking over time. See Figure 2 for an example of summary ECEC participation data presented in the data dashboard.

Supporting the use of the data dashboard

Once the dashboards were developed, RSTO worked to design a program to support staff to understand and use the data to improve service performance – a continuous improvement program. The need for this program came from research RSTO had conducted to identify the barriers to data-informed decision-making.

Before rolling this program out across all centres, Gowrie nominated two centres, Broadmeadows

and Docklands, to work closely with RSTO to test the data dashboard and program to support staff. Both Centres were performing well on quality but wanted to understand and improve participation.

Implementing coaching sessions

Drawing on the foundations of quality improvement and plan-do-study-act (PDSA) cycles, the RSTO team met with Gowrie to develop an informal approach to implementing a monthly coaching session with key room leaders and management.

These sessions were an opportunity for the teams to review the monthly data from the data dashboard and identify actions that they could implement with little effort and funding – to increase ECEC participation.

To support the team to identify potential solutions, the RSTO team provided Gowrie with several resources, including published literature on the main barriers to participation in ECEC and issue tree diagrams that help to solve an overall problem. This activity helped staff walk away with a clear actions to address the barriers to participation. Specifically, it helped them create a plan that outlined what they will do, when and who will be responsible.

Figure 2: Sample graph from RSTO data dashboard: Number of children attending ECEC two years before starting school

Attendance hours
- 15+ hours
- 7-<15 hours
- 4-<7 hours
- <4 hours
- Did not attend
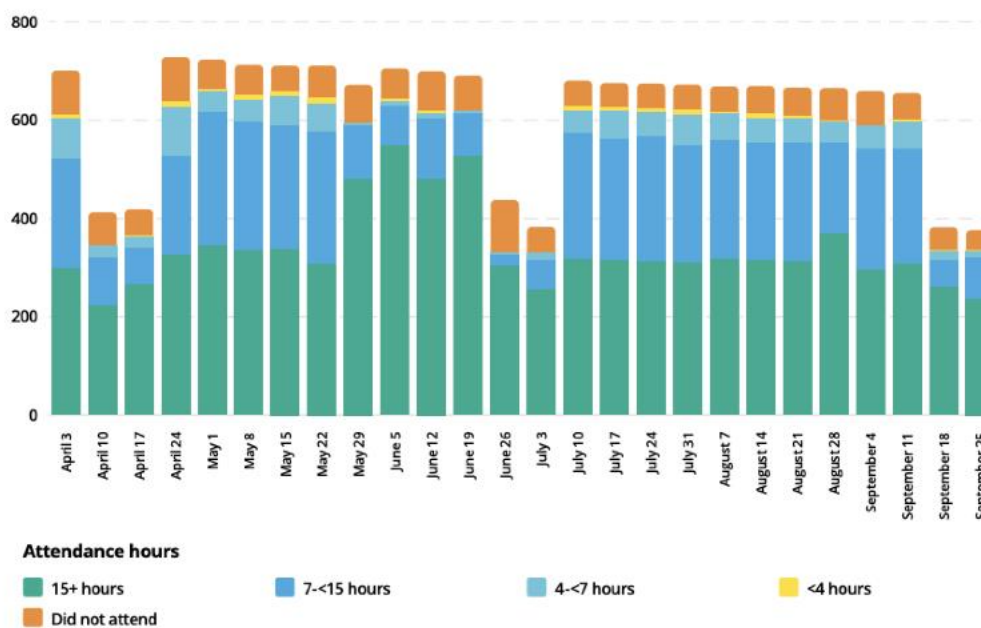
Learnings to date and implications

The Gowrie team have enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to improve their understanding of how they are tracking against the RSTO lead indicators, and importantly, experiment with activities to improve their services performance.

Some of the activities implemented to improve participation include:

1. raising families awareness of the importance of early learning and consistent ECEC attendance

2. developing a campaign to improve families knowledge of what play-based learning is and how it can help their child achieve positive outcomes through consistent attendance

3. changing where the Gowrie sign-in facility is to ensure families can easily see it and access it as they arrive

4. supporting transport for families who have difficulty attending due to transport issues.

The team can use the lead indicator data presented through their own dashboard as well as other data they may collect to monitor the impact of these activities.

'This is the first time we have been able to see our data at such a granular level and so clearly.'

Team Member, Gowrie Victoria.

"I am starting to like data now that I can see how it supports my work.'

Team Member, Gowrie Victoria.

While it is early days, the team are now able to see some key themes that are driving participation and how they share ideas with other Gowrie centres.

'The opportunity to come together as a group monthly and have someone guide us to reflect on what we're doing and how we might improve, has been invaluable.'

Team Member, Gowrie Victoria.

Looking ahead

With the early success of the trials in both Docklands and Broadmeadows, the RSTO team will start working with the Gowrie Service at the Carlton Learning Precinct in early 2024.

Over the course of the next year, the RSTO team's goals are to continue to refine the data dashboard and supporting resources (RSTO prototypes), support consistent use of the data and continue to support Gowrie to learn and improve. The ultimate goal will be a shift in participation data and improved outcomes for children and families.

Interested in partnering with RSTO?

Learn about opportunities to engage with the project at **www.rsto.org.au/partnering-with-rsto/**