



Information Sheet

Using evidence to guide the work of the Early Years Network

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Understanding and appreciating what makes your community—especially in relation to children and families—is a vital early activity. By building understanding of how young children are developing, Early Years Networks (Networks), in collaboration with local communities, can identify ways to positively influence child development.

Discovering, compiling and analysing data provides an invaluable foundation to inform the work of an Early Years Network.

In addition to using the results of questionnaires and inquiry tools, key sources of general research and information include:

- [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#) – for statistics relating to local government populations and children.
- [Australian Early Development Census \(AEDC\)](#) – provides place-based information about children’s development in local communities.
- [Child Development Atlas](#) – maps data on area-level indicators of development for children and young people in Western Australia. Children's wellbeing and development can be influenced by the communities in which they live.
- Local government websites and publications – including commitments to children and families in their Strategic Community Plans.

About the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)

The AEDC:

- Is an Australia-wide census of young children’s development, providing a snapshot at national, State/Territory, and community levels.
- Has been carried out every three years since 2009.
- Includes information from schools throughout Australia, collected via teachers completing the Australian version of the Early Development Instrument shortly after children start pre-primary.

The AEDC measures the number and proportion of pre-primary children who are developmentally on track, at risk, or vulnerable across the following five key domains:

- physical health and wellbeing
- social competence
- emotional maturity
- language and cognitive skills
- communication skills and general knowledge.

These domains are considered strong predictors of adult health, education, and social outcomes. The AEDC focuses on the importance of the whole child—including health, wellbeing, learning, physical health, and social development. As a population measure, it reports information at the group level rather than at the individual level. It is not a test or measure of school performance.

Results provide insight into how communities have supported their children (up to five years of age) and help identify how children are doing developmentally compared to other communities in Western Australia and nationally.

AEDC data is reported at the suburb or town level where the child lives. Results are available through [AEDC online](#) community profiles and maps, which can be filtered by the local government area or suburb/town. Data can also be refined across the five domains of child development, with access to maps, summary tables and interpretation guides. You can access community data via the [Community Data Explorer webpage](#).

The AEDC provides communities with important information about children's development. It focusses on all children in the community and can be used to understand what is working well in the community and what needs to be improved or developed to create safe and nurturing learning environments where children can thrive. Collecting and analysing community data alongside grassroots information supports the Network's understanding of local community needs and goals.

Ways to use AEDC data

There are several ways your network can use the AEDC to improve local early childhood development. These include:

1. Understanding children's development across the community and the five domains of development. For example, to:
 - a) understand how local children are doing developmentally compared to children nationally and in other communities
 - b) use with other socio-demographic and community indicators to provide a comprehensive picture of early childhood development
 - c) pinpoint strengths in the community as well as what can be improved.

2. Supporting community and Network efforts and actions. For example, to:
 - a) provide evidence to support strategic planning
 - b) provide a basis for identifying priorities for action
 - c) strengthen collaborations between community agencies and stakeholders
 - d) strengthen transition programs and continuity of learning in partnership with schools and early years services
 - e) mobilise community actions around early childhood.
3. Monitoring and evaluating Network efforts over time. For example, to track how the community is progressing in improving early childhood development

How can we achieve this?

Step 1: Download the community profile and maps from the [AEDC website](#). Share and discuss the results at an Early Years Network meeting titled 'Understanding Child Development in Our Community'. Key questions to help guide discussion might include:

In which domain/s are children more likely to be vulnerable? Are there domains where children are less likely to be vulnerable?

How do the results compare to the national and State AEDC results or other communities with similar characteristics to your local community?

How do the results compare to previous years? Are there emerging trends?

What might be some possible explanations for the results?

Step 2: Gather community data that will provide a local context to better understand the AEDC results. This project could be titled 'Building the Community Picture'. Context information could include:

What challenges might local families be facing that could contribute to child development vulnerability?

What early childhood services and supports are available in the local community for families and young children?

Are the services located in the right place and accessible to all families?

Are vulnerable families accessing services (are services accessible to all families)?

Are there long waitlists for services?

What risk and protective factors exist in the community for children and families?

What other indicators (health, education) help assess community support for early childhood development?

What other information is needed?

Step 3: Use the information gathered and analysed in Steps 1 and 2 to prioritise Network actions.

Step 4: Develop an Action Plan.

More information

To find out more about Early Years Networks, please visit our website or contact:

- **Web:** www.communities.wa.gov.au
- **Email:** EY@communities.wa.gov.au