

Wellington Shire Community Early Years Plan 2017 – 2021



Introduction

The Wellington Shire Council shares the community's vision for a healthy, vibrant and inclusive community that is well serviced and governed. These values are encapsulated in Wellington 2030 and the Wellington Shire Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

The Wellington Shire Community Early Years Plan 2017-2021 (herein after referred to as 'The Plan') is a vision that those working in the early year's sector have for local children and families now and into the future. The plan is tailored to suit local circumstances for development and coordination of early education, care, health services, activities and other local developments that impact on children 0 – 8 years in Wellington Shire.

The Plan provides a platform for service providers working together to provide direction and support in ensuring the health, learning and developmental needs of children are met and essential support is provided to ensure all children grow and develop.

The strategies in the plan have been developed to align with resource allocations and funding opportunities and including any new and emerging issues that are identified with partner organisations.

The Plan seeks to promote access to services, increase the responsiveness of services and better use of resources by enhancing service integration and collaboration.

The Plan requires services supporting children under eight years of age to work in partnership with the community to improve outcomes for young children and their families, particularly vulnerable families.

The Plan has been developed as a multi service approach to early years planning across the Wellington Shire and outlines the roles early years services are taking to achieve;

- A seamless early years system with services that are easy to access, friendly to use and strengthen the capacity of families to care for children.
- Child and family friendly community planning in partnership with agencies, groups and community members across the Wellington Shire.
- Local early years champions strength local networks and provide additional resources to ensure families and children access relevant services suited to their individual needs.
- Ongoing review of processes to ensure continual improvement across the early years sector.

Influences at state and national levels

At the time of developing this plan there are several state-wide documents being finalised that provide context for the roles of all levels of government in early years:

1. Early Years Compact 2017-2027 – a formalised partnership between state and local government that together provide collective stewardship of the early years system.
2. Maternal and Child Health Service Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Education and Training and Municipal Association of Victoria in relation to the Maternal and Child Health Service 2017-2020.

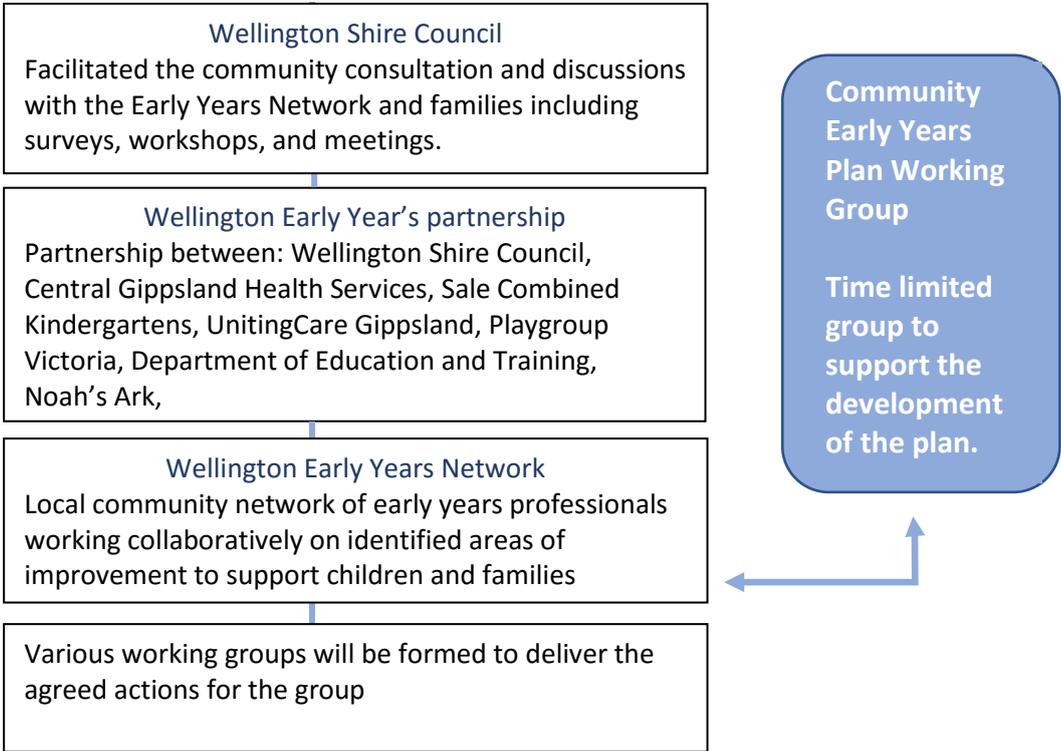
At a federal government level, the current National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education ends on 31 December 2017. This agreement enables the provision of universal access to 15 hours kindergarten for all four year old children. If this agreement does not continue or is modified, there will be flow on effects to early years services across Wellington Shire.

Goals

The four key goals in The Plan were identified during strategic workshops hosted by Wellington Shire Council in partnership with the Wellington Early Years Network. The four goals are:

1. Collaborative Partnerships
2. Friendly Environments
3. Strong Connected Communities
4. Ongoing monitor and reviewing

Figure 1: Structure for the development and implementation of the Wellington Municipal Community Early Years Plan



Highlights of the 2013 - 2015 Wellington Municipal Early Years Plan

The previous Plan made a significant contribution to ensuring children in Wellington Shire have equitable access to universal services and improved their learning and development. Wellbeing was an ongoing focus during the three years of implementation.

A strong partnership of professionals working with children under the age of eight years form the Wellington Early Years Network. Having a wide variety of backgrounds, they work together to improve service delivery for better outcomes for families and children (members of the network are listed at the end of this document).

Some of the initiatives from the previous Early Years Plan were:

- Established a central location where families could get information about upcoming local events and information relevant to early years with the development of the Wellington Maternal & Child Health Facebook page.
- Successfully attracted government funding for capital works at two kindergartens (Glassford St, Maffra and Stratford Kindergartens) to meet the introduction of fifteen hours funded kindergarten programs for four-year olds (Universal Access).
- Delivered of a program within school and kindergarten settings designed to teach children about waste reduction, energy and water saving techniques and compost recycling.
- Improved access to speech therapy with changes to the initial assessment process for children identified as being under developed in their language skills.
- Improved collaboration between the two local kindergarten cluster managers enabled the development of a streamlined approach to service delivery and enrolment process.
- Improved partnerships between early years service providers through regular Early Years Network meetings with a focus on improving outcomes for children and families.
- Partnerships developed between Wellington Shire Council and the Yarram and District community in the development and delivery of Yarram Early Learning Centre.
- Successful annual events such as Children's Week, The Big Draw and Parks Week which promote community connectedness for families and children.

Developing the Current Community Early Years Plan

The Wellington Shire Community Early Years Plan was developed with involvement from a range of stakeholders and members of the community. Extensive engagement, consultation and active feedback was undertaken through each stage of the development process.

Information that formed the focus of the plan includes:

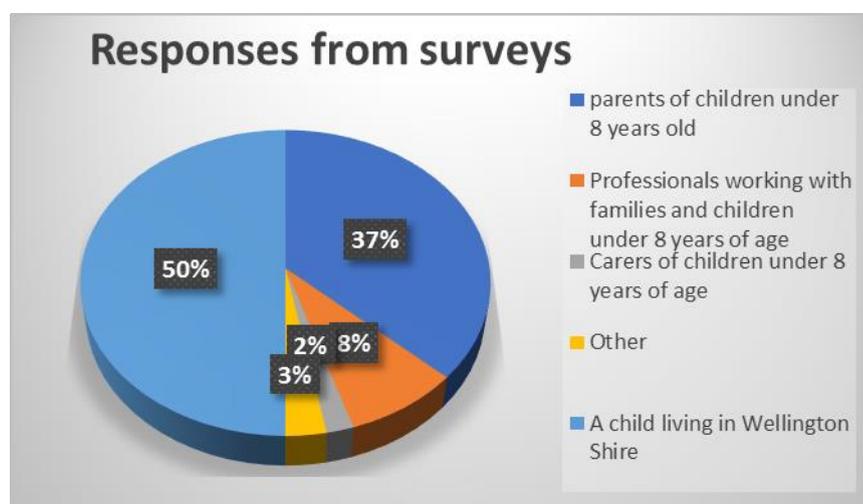
- Demographic data relating to Wellington Shire.
- Input from members of the Wellington Early Years Network on current trends across sectors.
- Consultation with internal and external stakeholders and approximately two hundred and seventy members of the wider community.

A working group made up of early years professionals with a focus on the health and wellbeing of children under the age of eight years was established. The group collated the responses and data to determine what is important for improving opportunities and environments for young children.

The main objectives of the group were to:

- Assist in the development and promotion of the Early Years Plan.
- Advocate in relation to areas of identified need on behalf of children and their families.
- Monitor the progress of agreed goals and strategies within the Plan.

Responses from Families and Professionals



Families living in Wellington Shire believe the most important part of early years education is to have environments which foster children's development and active lifestyles. Meeting these needs are the numerous parks available throughout the shire and early years services where families build invaluable relationships with the highly qualified educators who provide a caring and welcoming environment for children to grow in their development and social skills.

Families in Wellington Shire reported a long waiting period for secondary services such as paediatricians and ear, nose and throat specialists. Early years professionals have also recognised the emerging issues with lack of support for those children with complex needs. Support that is required is either not available locally or has long waiting periods.

Examples of responses from families and professionals

*“Not enough Professional providers in the area that work with children with varying challenges/disabilities that services can refer to i.e. OT, Speech. Families cannot get into services; they are booked out or not offered in the area and need to travel.”
(Early Years Professional)*

*“There is a lack of parenting services/groups that can support parents with strategies around parenting and coping with challenges that arise. There is no or limited behaviour modifications supports/groups on offer and many families can't get to see a paediatrician for months, there is a lack of soft entry points for families in the community.”
(Early Years Professional)*

“There's a need to improve early intervention programs and physio programs for 6yr olds.” (Parent)

“Playgrounds don't cater for children with disabilities, even though there is the Liberty Swing it makes it difficult to access on those 'ad hoc' visits to the park and then becomes less enjoyable when having to run around for a key.” (Parent)

*“It's very hard to find information about local services if you are not linked in with Maternal & Child Health or GP.”
(Parent)*

*“Child friendly businesses would be an area to develop and publicise. Some businesses don't let you take prams in which makes it a challenge.”
(Parent)*

“Parks and playgrounds are fantastic, maternal health centres are fantastic here in Sale, child friendly businesses give families flexibility to frequent the town and what it has to offer.” (Parent)

Responses from Children

Eighty percent of children who participated in the consultation process indicated that they were actively engaged in physical activities with frequent visits to parks, pools/beach and school environments.

When we asked children where was a place in their town that was not good for children to go, there were many responses which indicated that children in Wellington Shire have a good sense of water safety and the dangers of playing near the roads and train tracks. Children also were conscious of negative impacts on their health such as fast food and the impact of cigarette smoking.

*“If I had a magic wand I would have an adventure park with a tree house and a small bridge and a slide sort of big, make out of wood also a place in the adventure park where you can look at lizards.”
(Charlotte aged 8)*

“I would like to put a playground near the clock tower so mum can have a coffee and I can play.” (Jac aged 6)

*"I like it when we go to the pool with dad and when we go to the Flying Fox Park."
(Timothy aged 4)*

*"I like playing at the beach with my mum and dad".
(Bella aged 4)*

*"A place that is dangerous is where there is water, and the top bunk."
(Cameron aged 5)*

*"We play at the park, it is fun I like the round-about, I spin really fast I would scream
Aaagh." (Alyrah aged 6)*

Australian Early Development Result for Wellington Shire

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a national measure of child development. It provides a local overview of how children have developed by the time they start school. The AEDC measures five key areas of child development.

- Physical health and wellbeing;
- Social competence;
- Emotional maturity;
- Language and cognitive skills;
- Communication skills and general knowledge.

The 2015 AEDC results for Wellington Shire indicate that many children are developmentally on track in all the five key areas, however areas of greater vulnerability are evident across the municipality and these require urgent action.

Is the change from 2012 to 2015 data significant?

Over the three-year period early years professionals were provided with several development opportunities that had a focus on language development. With a partnership between kindergartens and speech therapist the initial assessment process was changed improving access to early intervention with speech development. The result of these two strategies saw a significant increase in the number of children developmentally on track with communication skills and general knowledge.

The information from the AEDC was considered when setting the goals and objectives for the 2016/21 Wellington Shire Community Early Years Plan to improve outcomes for children.

Figure 2 Domain results for developmentally on track children in Wellington Shire, including critical differences, 2012-15 comparison.

AEDC domain	2012 Developmentally on track		2015 Developmentally on track		2012-2015 change in percent on track	Critical difference	Significant change
	(Number of children)	(Percentage of children - %)	(Number of children)	(Percentage of children - %)			
Physical health and wellbeing	452	80.0	419	84.6	4.6	3.1	Significant increase
Social competence	446	78.5	395	79.8	1.3	2.4	No significant change
Emotional maturity	448	78.6	378	76.8	-1.8	2.5	No significant change
Language and cognitive skills (school-based)	459	80.1	396	80.0	-0.1	2.5	No significant change
Communication skills and general knowledge	416	73.2	428	86.5	13.2	2.7	Significant increase

Note: Percentage values have been rounded.

The Wellington Shire Community Early Years Action Plan

The services that will support and work towards meeting the outcomes listed in the plan are broken into three categories:

Universal – *available for all children and families*

For example: Maternal and Child Health Services, kindergarten, child care, occasional care, playgroups, immunisation, libraries, toy library, schools, playgrounds, recreational activities.

Secondary – *supporting children and families that need a greater level of support in addition to universal services.*

For example: Family Support, Child FIRST, Counselling, Supported Playgroups, Inclusion Support Services.

Tertiary – *Those services where the issues, problems and concerns require intensive and ongoing intervention.*

For Example: Child Protection, Early Childhood Intervention Service, Mental Health Services, Family Violence Services.

BEST START

Best Start is a prevention and early intervention program with a strong emphasis on using local data and local early years services to support families, caregivers, and communities to provide the best possible environment, experiences, and care for young children in the important years from pregnancy to school.

The emphasis of Best Start is on prevention and early intervention. It has a focus on ensuring that vulnerable young children and their families who are not currently engaged with universal services, or prematurely disengaged, can participate in and benefit from the universal service platform.

Fundamental to the development of the Early Years Plan has been the incorporation of the Best Start program and action planning. The strategic directions for Best Start have been combined into the Early Years Plan by linking goals and strategies.

How to read the action plan

Goal and Objectives –

The goals and objectives highlight the areas of identified improvement which will be the focus over the next five years.

Strategy –

The Strategy identifies what actions the network will take to meet the relevant strategy.

Outcomes –

The outcomes are the desired results that the plan aims to achieve.

Lead and Partners –

This identifies who will be involved in the delivery of strategies either in a lead or partnership role.

Goal 1 - Strong partnerships between early years services.

Building a strong network of early year's services enhanced through a community-wide, integrated approach to raising children, enables the best possible outcomes for the health, wellbeing, learning and development. Early years' service providers must be clear about what outcomes they are trying to achieve and how an integrated approach will promote these outcomes to be responsive, accessible and meeting the needs of families and children is the best possible approach to improve outcomes for families and children.

There are already many strong relationships between local services and the community contributing to improving outcomes for children. This plan will strengthen and promote these qualities and work on developing new community identified initiatives which will define Wellington as a child and family focused community.

How are we going to maintain collaborative partnerships?

Objective 1.1 Maintaining ongoing participation and support for the Wellington Early Years Network.

Early years professionals have identified that working together as a network produces better results than working on their own.

Strategy	Outcome	Measures	Lead and Partners
Provide opportunities through the network for services to explore current issues relevant to families and children of Wellington Shire that require attention/support.	Deliver successful jointly developed strategies and activities that are locally relevant and lead to improved outcomes for families & children.	10% improvement in the Australian Early Development Census	Wellington Early Years Network: Wellington Shire Council (Community Wellbeing). Department of Education and Training. UnitingCare Gippsland. Sale Combined Kindergartens Inc. Department Health & Human Services.
Establish a culture that continues to be informed and advocate for the availability of support services for families to be delivered in Wellington Shire.	Families are supported through the changes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme and an increase in parenting support sessions being offered.	Professionals actively advocating/supporting families with meeting their needs.	Wellington Early Years Network: Wellington Shire Council (Community Wellbeing). Department of Education and Training. UnitingCare Gippsland. Sale Combined Kindergartens Inc. Department Health & Human Services.

Strategy	Outcome	Measures	Lead and Partners
Collaborative approach to providing professional development opportunities to staff within the Wellington Early Years Network.	All services inviting network members to participate in local training sessions.	20% increase in Professional opportunities for members.	Wellington Early Years Network: Wellington Shire Council (Community Wellbeing). Department of Education and Training. UnitingCare Gippsland. Sale Combined Kindergartens Inc. Department Health & Human Services.
Creating a system that supports the administrative needs of the Network, including developing agenda, recording and distribution of meeting minutes, scheduling of future meetings / venues and maintaining the member's mailing list.	Ongoing success of the Wellington Early Years Network with regular quarterly meetings.	An ongoing facilitator role with the responsibility of setting the agenda and distributing the minutes four times per year.	Wellington Early Years Network: Wellington Shire Council (Community Wellbeing). Department of Education and Training. UnitingCare Gippsland. Sale Combined Kindergartens Inc. Department Health & Human Services.

Objective 1.2 Strengthen partnerships in the planning and delivery of services and programs for children.

Early years professional identified that there is a need to improve connections between some services.

Strategy	Outcome	Measure	Lead and Partners
Improved collaborative approach to delivering events which builds community connectedness; such as Baby's Day Out, Children's Week, Children's Expo and other events that focus on children.	Successful events planned and delivered by a variety of services which have enhanced community connectedness for families and children.	A 20% increase in services promoting activities during Children's Week.	Wellington Shire Council (various units); Maternal & Child Health. UnitingCare Gippsland. Best Start. Sale Combined Kindergartens Incorporated (SCKI).

Strategy	Outcome	Measure	Lead and Partners
Promote referral pathways between early years' services and Community Welfare Services for vulnerable children.	Working in partnership to meet the Best Start strategies. Children engage and participate in early childhood education. Children and families actively engage with M&CH services.	10 promotions completed.	Wellington Best Start. Maternal & Child Health. Wellington Shire Council (Community Wellbeing).
Build new relationships to better understand and adapt to ongoing policy and sector reforms.	Early years services will experience minimal impact to Policy change due to early planning e.g. NDIS.	Early years staff are well informed to support families.	Wellington Early Years Network: Wellington Shire Council (Community Wellbeing). Department of Education and Training. Unitingcare Gippsland. Sale Combined Kindergartens Inc. Department Health & Human Services.

Goal 2 Providing safe and welcoming places.

A healthy and safe environment is important for a child's development that enables children to grow in environments that are free from harm and allow the children to be confident learners. A strong and connected community provides a sense of belonging and promotes active participation. A providing opportunity for people to come together and build relationships, this requires safe and easy access environments to ensure families can connect with others and participate fully in all areas of community.

How are we going to provide friendly environments?

2.1 Create and advocate for family friendly environments that provide opportunities to socialise, play and learn.

Families reported that Wellington Shire lacked inclusive play spaces and environments where they could comfortably socialise with others.

Strategy	Outcome	Measures	Lead and Partners
Enhance opportunities for children to have access to inclusive play spaces which foster the growth and development of all children.	An increase in stimulating play spaces which are designed to meet the diversity of children's needs.	1 new play space and 2 modified play spaces catering for the diverse needs of children.	Wellington Shire Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural Environment and Parks Community Wellbeing Wellington Early Years Network.
Engage local businesses in providing inclusive and accessible environments where children and families feel welcome.	Families having an increased choice of family friendly businesses.	A 20% increase in businesses who promote themselves as being family friendly. A 10% increase in the availability of baby change areas within main shopping areas.	Wellington Shire Council, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic Development Business Unit.
For Wellington Shire Council to be recognised as a child safe organisation.	Wellington Shire Council to embed child safety within organisational practice.	Evidence of Wellington Shire Council implementing Child Safe Policies.	Wellington Shire Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People & Excellence.

Strategy	Outcome	Measures	Lead and Partners
Improve access for all children to participate in recreation and leisure Programs throughout the year.	A reduction in travel distance to enable families to support their child/children's ongoing participation in programs	Planning has commenced for a new indoor swimming facility for Yarram residents.	Wellington Shire Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built Environment, • Community Wellbeing • Community & Culture

Goal 3 - Increase awareness of services available for families and children.

Communities and professionals play an enormous role in planning to ensure that individuals and community needs are being supported to prevent a much greater social problem in the future. Families and children who live in a supportive community are provided with the best possible outcomes.

Early years services in Wellington Shire have built invaluable relationships with families, staffed with highly qualified educators who provide children with a caring and welcoming environment where children grow in their development and social skills.

How are we going to build strong connected communities?

OBJECTIVE 3.1 Provide widespread promotion of accessible information about local services available to families and children through a range of communication methods.

Families reported that they didn't know where to find community information and relied on family, friends, and Maternal & Child Health Nurse for direction.

Strategy	Outcome	Measures	Lead and Partners
Develop strategies to better promote early years' information to those families and children not currently connected to the early year's system.	Increase of families aware of the Wellington Parent Directory and how to access it.	Minimum of 3 promotions of the Wellington Parent Directory throughout the community.	Wellington Best Start.
Reviewing Council's website to promote current information about services and activities available in Wellington Shire that families need.	Residents and visitors provided with information about local services in once central location.	Redeveloped website has an average of 50 visits per month.	Wellington Shire Council; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Wellbeing. • Media and Public Relations
Improve opportunities to promote and engage with universal early years services such as Wellington Toy Library, playgroups, Library services kindergarten etc.	Improved connections and increased partnerships to enhance services.	A 10% increase in services and families regularly accessing Toy Library and Library services.	Wellington Early Years Network. WSC – Arts and Culture Business Unit.

OBJECTIVE 3.2 To strengthen the provision of a comprehensive, integrated, and continuous structure of service delivery.

Early years staff identified that there are no formal processes for supporting vulnerable families to access relevant services.

Strategy	Outcome	Measures	Lead and Partners
Improved promotion and engagement between secondary early years services such as Early Start Kinder, Supported Playgroup, M&CH Enhanced Home Visiting etc. to improve vulnerable families accessing services.	A collaborative approach by services to support vulnerable families and children.	Evidence of meetings outlining new practices.	Wellington Best Start. Unitingcare Gippsland. Maternal & Child Health. Sale Combined Kindergartens Inc.
Embedding referral pathways between early year's services and tertiary early year's services for vulnerable children and families.	Change in communication processes between services to support individual needs of families.	Improved communication and links between early years' services to support vulnerable families and children.	Best Start. Unitingcare Gippsland. Maternal & Child Health. Department Health & Human Services.

Goal 4 - Ongoing monitor and review of the Wellington Community Early Years Plan.

Strategies and actions included in the Wellington Community Early Years Plan will be implemented through partnerships with relevant organisations, services, and local government who represent the Wellington Early Years Network.

It is expected that a collaborative approach across the Network will identify the best possible methods to achieve the identified goals for the improved outcomes for children's development and support for families. Ongoing reviews of the plan and other influencing factors will identify successful outcomes in the early years and how they have improved the health and wellbeing of families and children zero to eight years.

OBJECTIVE 4.1 Continually reviewing and improving services for children and families

It has been acknowledged that the Early Years Plan must be a working document that achieves desired outcomes.

Strategy	Outcome	Measures	Lead and Partners
Undertake an annual review of which actions contained in the plan have been implemented and identify new or modified actions to progress.	Wellington Early Years Network meeting agenda items reference objectives in the Wellington Community Early Years Plan.	Early Years Network meeting minutes documenting progress on strategies that have been implemented and any new / modified strategies.	Wellington Early Years Network. Wellington Shire Council (Community Wellbeing). Department of Education and Training. Unitingcare Gippsland. Sale Combined Kindergartens Inc. Department Health & Human Services.
Undertake an annual review of which outcomes have led to improving practices and outcomes for families and children.	Progress reports presented during Early Years Network meetings.	Early Years Network Meeting minutes documenting change in practice / improved outcomes.	Wellington Early Years Network. Wellington Shire Council (Community Wellbeing). Department of Education and Training. Unitingcare Gippsland. Sale Combined Kindergartens Inc. Department Health & Human Services.

Strategy	Outcome	Measures	Lead and Partners
Mid-term review of the Early Years Plan to ensure the plan is a continual work in progress.	Representation from partnering agencies review progress at the two and half year mark.	Update of progress is reported and documented in the Early Years Network Minutes and reported at a Council workshop.	Wellington Shire Council (Community Wellbeing). Central Gippsland Health Services. Unitingcare Gippsland. Sale Combined Kindergartens. Department of Education and Training.

Delivery of this Plan

The Wellington Shire Community *Early Years Plan 2017-2021* includes strategies and actions that are delivered by Council or through partnerships with relevant organisations who make up the Wellington Early Years Network, community groups or layers of government.

Wellington Shire Council - programs targeted at the early years consist of:

- National Immunisation Program
- Children and Youth Library Services
- Art Gallery Children's Education Programs
- Service Planning and Development.

Central Gippsland Health Service

- Maternal and Child Health Services
- Enhanced Maternal and Child Health
- Speech Therapy
- Pediatric Occupational Therapist.
- Health Promotion Officer

UnitingCare Gippsland

- Supported Playgroups
- Kindergartens
 - Queen Street Maffra
 - Glassford Street Maffra
 - Heyfield
 - Stratford
 - Briagolong
 - Gormandale
 - St Columbas - Sale
 - East Sale
 - Longford
- Wellington Best Start Program
- Family Day Care
- Child First
- Integrated Family Services
- Supported Playgroup
- Early Childhood Development Coordinator
- Best Start

Sale Combined Kindergarten Incorporated

- Hyland Kindergarten
- Gwenfa Hampton Kindergarten
- Sale North Kindergarten

Department of Education and Training

- Specialist Children Services
- Wellington Network Early Childhood Performance and Planning Advisor
- Early Childhood Intervention Services
- Koorie Engagement Support Officer
- 24 State Government Primary Schools located throughout the Wellington Shire
- 7 Non-Government Primary Schools located throughout the Wellington Shire

Early Learning Child Care Centres

- Nurture one
 - McCole Street, Sale
 - Reeve Street, Sale
 - Duke Street, Maffra
- Yarram Early Learning Centre
- East Sale Childcare Centre.
- Kath Foley Children's Centre
- Gumnuts Early Learning Centre
- Gippsland Grammar Early Learning Centre.

Yarram District Health Services

- Health Promotion Officer

Specialist Children's Services

- Yooralla
- Noahs Ark

REFERENCES

Mapping and research from a variety of sources identified several key findings which contributed to the development of strategies to improve outcomes for children living in Wellington Shire, including:

Wellington Shire Council Municipal Early Years Plan 2012-2015.

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www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmanagement/beststart/default

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http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/FINAL%20The%20State%20of%20Victoria's%20Children_2012%20v2.pdf

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