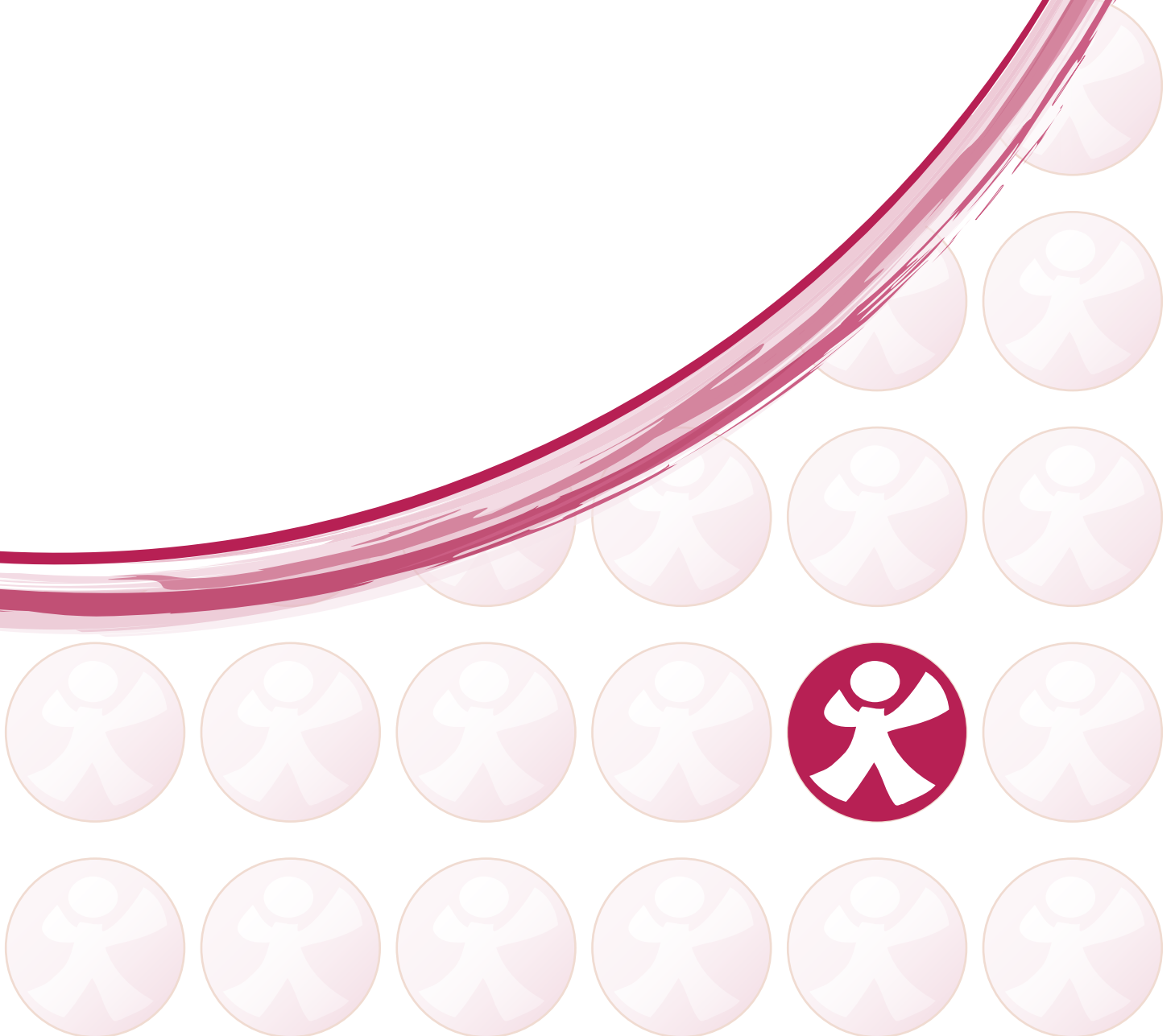




Kindergarten Parents Victoria

Budget Submission

to the Victorian Government
for 2010/2011



Message from the president

Early childhood is currently the focus of significant policy focus at all levels of government. The strategic importance of early childhood education in promoting the best outcomes for children has been recognised, as has the social and economic benefits of supporting parents in their role as the first and most enduring educators of children.



The coming years will be a time of significant change as policy initiatives that have been years in development are implemented in communities around the state. In Victoria early childhood services are implementing new regulations and, for the first time, completing Transition and Learning Statements for children commencing prep as part of the forthcoming Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. At the national level, among other initiatives, we have welcomed the Quality Reform Agenda and the commitment to universal access to 15 hours of kindergarten for all children in the year prior to formal schooling.

KPV congratulates the Victorian Government on its leading role in national early childhood reforms and recognises that significant investment in early years' services has been made in recent times. More work remains to be done. The needs of children and families are of paramount importance and so, in this submission, KPV has reaffirmed its ongoing commitment to advocating for two years of fully-funded, universal early childhood education. From this platform targeted measures to meet the needs of vulnerable children and families and those with additional needs can have the most impact.

Supporting early childhood services to implement reforms and to build on their track record of serving community needs is also of critical importance and is addressed in this submission through a range of strategies.

The recommendations are based on consultation with the sector including through our member surveys, cluster manager consultations and consultation with other peak bodies. I commend this submission to the Victorian Government.

Sue Roberts
President
Kindergarten Parents Victoria



Table of Recommendations

VISION	RECOMMENDATION
Education for Life	1. Government fully funds four year old kindergarten for all Victorian children.
	2. The Victorian Government commits to the universal provision of fully funded kindergarten programs for three year old children.
Universally Inclusive	3. Provide additional support for early childhood services, teachers and families to further develop inclusive practice in all kindergarten settings for all children.
Cohesive Service System	4. Implement strategies for improving the sustainability of early childhood services.
	5. Extend the <i>Children's Capital Program</i> beyond 2011 to fund renovations to existing facilities and build new children's centres.
	6. The Victorian Government advocates for Commonwealth recognition of parents with children at kindergarten as eligible for the <i>Child Care Rebate</i> and the <i>Approved Child Care Benefit</i> .
Involved Community	7. A range of integrated resources is available to support early childhood services to engage with families and communities in planning relevant, responsive early childhood education at the local level.
	8. Support is available for families who need interpreter/translation support to understand and complete <i>Transition and Learning Statements</i> , as well as for early childhood professionals working with them.
Excellence and Innovation	9. Early childhood management consultants provide enhanced support to strengthen governance and service planning in independent kindergartens across all local government areas.
	10. Workforce strategies are extended beyond 2011 to support recruitment and retention, and to encourage existing workers to build on their skills and qualifications.
	11. Professional learning and leadership strategies are developed to support teachers and early childhood professionals in enhancing skills development and leading early childhood reform at the local level.
Responsive and Flexible	12. Project funding is available to the community sector to assist services to co-locate with other services where possible or to network with local services to enhance service integration.



Education for Life

Quality early childhood education promotes children's overall learning and development¹. All children experience improved outcomes when they receive a quality early childhood education however, the benefits are especially dramatic for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Early childhood education is a powerful tool against ongoing disadvantage and social exclusion with research demonstrating improved outcomes for children both from the time of attendance and later in life. Improvements in educational, employment and other outcomes for children across the lifespan deliver profound economic and social benefits for the wider community². All this makes early childhood education a high-performing investment³.

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Two years of kindergarten prior to formal schooling must be made universally available to all Victorian children. Currently, government only partially funds four year old programs for Victorian children, with very limited inclusion support for vulnerable children in three year old programs. The *National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education* – which will deliver 15 hours of affordable kindergarten per week to children in the year prior to formal schooling by 2013 – is an important initiative, however participation can be further promoted by fully funding three and four year old kindergarten programs for all children.

Currently families and communities significantly underwrite the provision of early childhood education in Victoria through parent fees, fundraising efforts and volunteering⁴. Costs to parents are likely to rise further due to sector reform, with suggestions that at least some cost increases associated with quality reforms are likely to be passed on to parents⁵. Despite the per capita grant and fee subsidies for eligible families, many families already struggle to pay for fees for four year old programs.



¹ Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. & Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Final Report*, p.ii

² Schweinhart, L. (2005) *The High/Scope Perry preschool study through age 40: Summary, conclusions and frequently asked questions*, pp.1-4

³ Henry, K. (2009) *Prevention: How do we build tomorrow's capabilities today? Speech to Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) Conference*; Kilburn, M.R. & Karoly, L.A. (2008) *The economics of early childhood policy: What the dismal science has to say about investing in children*, *Rand Labor and Population (Occasional paper)* p.11

⁴ Kindergarten Parents Victoria (2009) *KPV Response to the Productivity Commission commissioned study Contribution of the Not for Profit Sector*

⁵ Council of Australian Governments Early Childhood Development Steering Committee (2009) *Regulation impact statement for early childhood education and care quality reforms*, p.36



Education for Life

The reform agenda in early childhood includes important and necessary improvements in staff qualifications, staff/child ratios and participation and access targets. However, within existing funding and infrastructure constraints, some services will have to make difficult decisions about programming in order to implement the policy agenda. Unfunded three year old kindergarten programs must not be an unwitting casualty of quality reforms. A second year of high quality early childhood education supports good outcomes for children, in particular for disadvantaged children⁶. There is strong parent demand for these services with approximately one third of Victorian families shouldering the full costs of accessing three year old kindergarten programs for their children.

The Victorian Government has recognised the importance of a second year of early childhood education for vulnerable children, with the introduction of fee support for indigenous children, children known to child protection and other vulnerable children to participate in three year old kindergarten programs. A commitment to progress towards universal provision of fully-funded three year old early childhood education is the next step for Victoria's children.

Recommendation 1: Government fully funds four year old kindergarten for all Victorian children.

Strategies for implementation

- Progressively increase the per capita grant to reflect full cost of 10 hour per week programs in 2010; 10.75 hours in 2011; and 15 hours in 2013.
- Commit to fully fund the additional 5 hours of kindergarten in 2013
- **Cost: \$47.3m per year for 10 hours per week.**

Recommendation 2: The Victorian Government commits to the universal provision of fully funded kindergarten programs for three year old children.

Strategies for implementation

- The Victorian Government commits to fully funding three year old kindergarten programs beginning with all concession card holders and progressively fully funding three year old programs for all Victorian children.
- **Cost: \$42.5m per year for 3yo children whose families hold a concession card. \$157.5m per year for all 3yo children.**

⁶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2006) *Starting Strong II: Early childhood education and care*, p.192

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Universally Inclusive

Increased investment in early childhood education must benefit all children, including children with additional needs. The intent of the *National Partnership Agreement* – to ensure all children receive a quality early childhood education in the year prior to school – requires special attention to particular groups of children and families.

KPV acknowledges and commends recent investments in fee subsidies for kindergarten programs and inclusion support for families with diverse cultural needs. Additional support for mainstream services is an essential step to building on existing good practice and further developing inclusive and responsive services. All early childhood services should have the opportunity to implement relevant lessons from the outcomes of the *Universal Access Project and Communities for Children* in maximising vulnerable children's participation in early childhood education.

Inclusion for children with additional needs continues to require investment. Currently both packages of support and consultant support through the *Preschool Field Officer Program* are insufficient to meet community demand. Eligibility criteria for children to access kindergarten inclusion support packages are extremely narrow, restricting access to children with very high support needs. In addition, greater consistency in the continuum of inclusion support between kindergarten programs, child care settings and formal schooling would assist families and professionals to access supports and transition between settings.

Early childhood educators can play a key role in the development of inclusive services. Investment in professional development for early childhood educators can maximise the potential of teachers as key influencers in inclusive service development. Committees of management also require enhanced support to lead the promotion of inclusivity in services.

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Universally Inclusive

Recommendation 3: Provide additional support for early childhood services, teachers and families to further develop inclusive practice in all kindergarten settings for all children.

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Strategies for implementation

- The number of funded Preschool Field Officers (PSFOs) is increased by 50%. Preschool Field Officers are supported to provide training and development in each region for the early childhood education sector, encompassing early childhood teachers, assistants and committee members.
- A program of indigenous inclusion training for early childhood education services, including cultural sensitivity training and inclusion strategies, is delivered to committees and early childhood professionals
- Additional packages of early childhood intervention support are available for children with additional needs.
- The Universal Access Project and Communities for Children have developed strategies to promote participation in early childhood education. Grants are made available for early childhood services to incorporate these strategies and develop local responses to maximise participation.
- **Cost: \$1.5m per year for 16 new preschool field officers. \$750,000 for grants to implement strategies from the *Universal Access Project*.**



Cohesive Service System

Organisational sustainability remains a key concern for many early childhood services. Early childhood services remain heavily dependent on parent fees, fundraising and volunteer work in order to operate. Particular pressures in relation to sustainability are felt by small rural services and cluster managers. Many cluster managers cross subsidise early childhood services through in-kind support generated by other programs and services provided. Cluster managers receive an annual payment of \$7200 for each kindergarten under their management. For most cluster managers this is insufficient to carry out the range of functions underpinning the management of high quality early childhood services consistent with their missions and ethos. A price review for cluster management is necessary in order to examine the true costs of providing this service and to contribute to the development of sustainable cluster management funding arrangements.

Some early childhood education services in rural Victoria operate with very few enrolments due to small and dispersed populations. The per capita grant, even at the small rural level, delivers an insufficient financial base for services to deliver a full program. Some programs are reduced in length as a consequence, creating inequitable outcomes for children in these services. Such low funding levels also constrains the ability of services to plan effectively for meeting present and future community needs.

Given the benefits of early childhood education, and policy commitments of universal access, all children, including those in remote locations must be able to access a full kindergarten program.

In Victoria, early childhood services are often housed in ageing facilities or facilities with limited flexibility to expand the numbers of programs offered and hours of service. Through the municipal planning process, many services are considering how they will be able to continue the programs they currently offer while extending the hours provided to children in funded programs to a greater number of children in the community. The challenge for services is to do so while continuing to offer three year old programs – vitally important for improving outcomes for vulnerable children and meeting community demand for these programs. There is a strong continuing role for the Victorian Government in supporting the development of quality, purpose built facilities as well as renewing existing infrastructure.

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Cohesive Service System

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Recommendation 4: Implement strategies for improving the sustainability of early childhood services.

Strategies for implementation

- Conduct a price review to cost the delivery of professional and sustainable cluster management; establishment costs for new cluster managers; and, clusters taking on new locations. Increase the cluster management subsidy in line with recommendations of price review.
- Kindergarten programs serving small rural communities and with limited enrolments are provided with a minimum level of funding. KPV recommends kindergartens serving small rural and remote communities are supported with funding for a minimum of 10 places plus an operational grant for services with 15 or less children.
- **Cost: \$80,000 for cluster management price review. \$3.3m per year for minimum funding allocation plus operating grant for small rural kindergartens.**

Recommendation 5: Extend the Children's Capital Program beyond 2011 to fund renovations to existing facilities and build new children's centres.

Strategies for implementation

- Extend the *Children's Capital Program* beyond 2011 to assist the early childhood sector to maintain existing services and achieve sector reform objectives. The program should explore innovative infrastructure solutions such as quality, environmentally sustainable relocatable kindergartens and retrofitting kits to enable existing community facilities to be used as high quality early childhood premises.

Recommendation 6: The Victorian Government advocates for Commonwealth recognition of parents with children at kindergarten as eligible for the Approved Child Care Rebate and the Child Care Benefit.

Strategies for implementation

- Advocate for the recognition of kindergarten programs as eligible for *Child Care Rebate* and *Approved Child Care Benefit* through COAG processes in the context of the *National Reform Agenda in Early Childhood*.



Involved Community

The important role of family and community involvement in all aspects of early childhood service provision is increasingly recognised in early childhood policy development. For example, the national *Early Years Learning Framework* and the draft *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework* recognise the critical importance of services working in partnership with families and communities. At the individual level, outcomes for children can be maximised when early childhood educators and parents share information and learning and development strategies. At a whole of community level, services which partner and consult effectively with local families and the wider community are in the best position to deliver services that are relevant to local communities and responsive to community needs.

Recommendation 7: A range of integrated resources is available to support early childhood services to engage with families and communities in planning relevant, responsive early childhood services at the local level.

Strategies for implementation

Fund KPV to:

- Develop a range of resources that support services to develop positive partnerships with parents to promote good outcomes for children. Resources to include consultancy advice, high quality written and multimedia resources and information/training sessions.
- Provide an outreach role for consultants to committees of management to raise awareness of the importance of strong relationships between parents and communities and links services up to the resources available, as well as actively supporting them to undertake planning and reform activities.
- **Cost: \$80,000 for the development of resources. \$1m for two consultants in each metropolitan region and one in each rural region.**

Recommendation 8: Support is available for families who need interpreter/translation support to understand and complete Transition and Learning Statements, as well as for early childhood professionals working with them.

Strategies for implementation

- Individualised support is provided to support culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families to benefit from *Transition Learning and Development Statements*. Bilingual workers are engaged to support families, early childhood teachers and services and prep teachers in completing and working with transition statements.
- In addition to service delivery, the program of support has a funded research component to evaluate the success of support strategies and to inform further policy development.
- **Cost: \$0.4m**

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Excellence and Innovation

The national reform agenda in early childhood promises to increase participation in early childhood education; enhance service quality and encourage service provision that is child and family centred. The benefits of reforms can be maximised by further supporting professionals and services to lead reforms in their local communities, and by supporting skills development and the development of leadership capacity within the workforce.

An enhanced *Early Childhood Management Consultant* (ECMC) role will strengthen governance, build understanding and where appropriate, support the move to cluster management for independent committees. The enhanced ECMC service will assist in the development and provision of additional models of support for independent kindergartens in local government areas where cluster management is currently not able to be accessed. The enhanced role will provide proactive support to committees and cluster managers in all local government areas through individual contact and establishing support networks.

This strategy builds on work that is being undertaken in 2009 through the *KPV Solutions Pilot Project*. Initial evaluation has shown that independent committees experienced improved understanding of their roles, government policy, planning processes and their knowledge of cluster management options when they accessed an enhanced ECMC service.

An enhanced focus on staff recruitment and retention can help ensure that early childhood services are able to meet proposed new structural indicators of quality on staff qualifications and staff/child ratios.

Professional learning for early childhood educators would benefit from being primarily coordinated through a professional body such as an *Early Childhood Educator Registration Board*. The purpose of doing so should be to ensure standards of teaching and providing early childhood teachers with professional development opportunities and resources consistent with primary and secondary teachers. A particular focus of an *Early Childhood Educator Registration Board* must be to support educators to remain current in their practice. Assistants and other early childhood staff should be progressively required to join the professional body as associate members. This membership status will allow assistants and other workers to access some of the benefits provided by the body.



Excellence and Innovation

Enhanced regional support for professional development and leadership will enhance the statewide initiatives and ensure local services and networks are well connected to evolving pedagogies and policy reforms, and are supported to implement necessary changes in partnership with families and communities.

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Recommendation 9: Early childhood management consultants provide enhanced support to strengthen governance and service planning in independent kindergartens across all local government areas.

Strategies for implementation

- Fund early childhood management consultants (ECMC) to provide an enhanced role in working closely with independent committees and cluster managers across all local government areas.
- **Cost: \$2m per year**

Recommendation 10: Workforce strategies are extended beyond 2011 to support recruitment and retention, and to encourage existing workers to build on their skills and qualifications.

Strategies for implementation

- Bursaries are offered to students commencing early childhood teaching degree study providing they are employed in early childhood services for a minimum period.
- Incentives are available for teachers qualified to teach in both primary and early childhood services to choose to teach in early childhood education.
- Incentives are offered to teachers with three year degrees and diplomas to upgrade their qualifications to four year degrees.
- All untrained children's services staff can access Certificate III training at no cost.
- Develop a centralised database of early childhood employees to assist services in managing the current long service and sick leave entitlements of employees.
- Develop a portable long service scheme for the community sector that meets the needs of early childhood education staff.
- **Cost: \$2.7m for assistants to access Certificate III. \$2.4m for 115 Early Childhood Education Degree bursaries. \$0.1m for a centralised database.**



Excellence and Innovation

Recommendation 11: Professional learning and leadership strategies are developed to support teachers and early childhood professionals in enhancing skills development and leading early childhood reform at the local level.

Strategies for implementation

- Establish an *Early Childhood Educator Registration Board*.
- A formal comprehensive program of accessible professional learning is developed and delivered statewide. Early childhood educators can access professional support to further develop pedagogical leadership, community development and administrative skills.
- Build capacity in early childhood services to lead the implementation of change at a regional level. A dedicated worker is employed in each region to assist services to build this capacity.
- **Cost: \$0.7m for a Capacity Building Senior Project Officer in each DEECD region.**

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Responsive and Flexible

Early childhood services are diverse in their nature and scope and are delivered in a range of settings across the state. Services may deliver one or more of the following services: kindergarten programs, long day care, occasional care, playgroups, early childhood intervention services as well as a range of family services. Integrating the range of early childhood services has the potential to deliver significant benefits to the Victorian community. A holistic approach to supporting children and families requires maternal and child health and family services to be considered in this context as well.

Service integration is a strong focus of *Victoria's Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development*. Reforms to licensing under the *Children's Services Regulations 2009* and proposed changes under the *National Quality Agenda* are complementary to service integration, creating streamlined systems of licensing and accreditation for early childhood services. Service integration can deliver significant benefits. Where services are integrated, children and families experience greater coherence in accessing services⁷. Quality integrated services have an enhanced capacity to place children at the centre of service provision, coordinating (if not directly providing) the range of services and supports to benefit children and families. Service integration promotes a flexible and multidisciplinary workforce.

Services can be integrated in a number of ways. They may be fully integrated centres (children's hubs) or physically co-located services. Service integration can also refer to networks of relevant service types coordinated at the local level working to ensure that families and children know about and can receive the range of services and supports available. This style of service integration promotes collaboration among professionals and 'seamless' services for parents even where infrastructure constraints precludes physical co-location.

Grants can assist early childhood services to determine the best route to integration at the local level.

Recommendation 12: Project funding is available to the community sector to assist services to co-locate with other services where possible or to network with local services to enhance service integration.

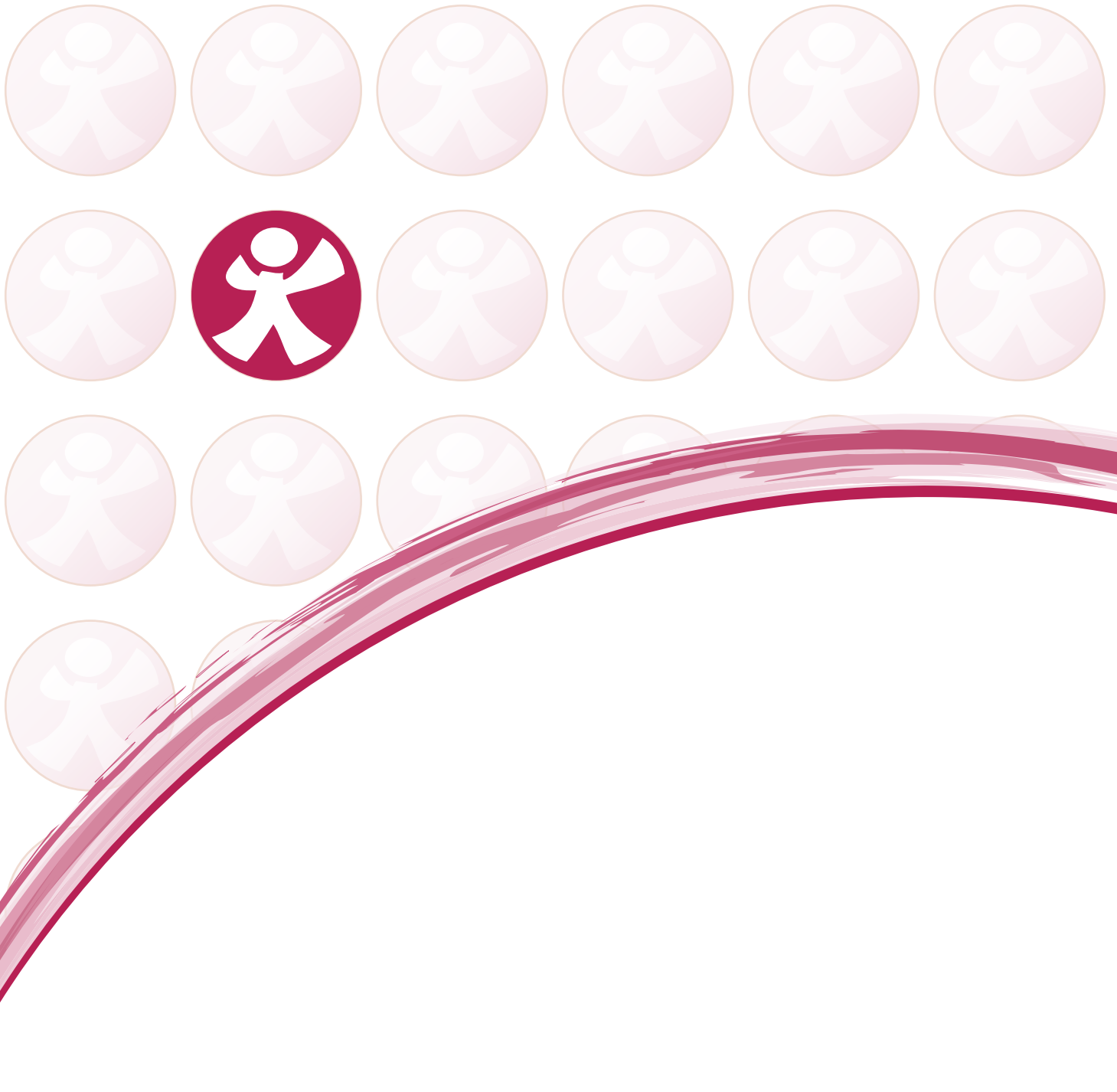
Strategies for implementation

- Services are supported to co-locate where possible and network with a range of local services to promote seamless delivery of services where co-location is not possible.
- **Cost: \$3.1m**

⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2006) *Starting Strong II: Early childhood education and care*, p.53

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