

FIRST NATIONAL SNAPSHOT OF AUSTRALIA'S YOUNG CHILDREN

10 December 2009

For the first time, the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) has been completed nationally, giving Australia a snapshot of young children's development.

The first national census of early child development has shown that a majority of Australian children are developmentally on track at the time they enter full-time school.

A Snapshot of Early Childhood Development in Australia—Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) National Report 2009 revealed that around two-thirds of children are doing well in five key developmental areas.

The report, launched today by Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard and the Minister for Early Childhood Education, Child Care and Youth, Kate Ellis, also showed that 23 per cent of children are developmentally vulnerable in one area, and more than 12 per cent are vulnerable in two or more developmental areas.

The initial AEDI results are also available as online maps, providing community-level data.

The AEDI is conducted by the Centre for Community Child Health at The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne and the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, in partnership with the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth.

Director of the Centre for Community Child Health, Professor Frank Oberklaid, said while most children are doing well, there are many children with developmental vulnerabilities in Australia.

"The AEDI is about helping communities to understand how well local children are developing in the critical early years before they start school, and where efforts would be best directed in addressing any vulnerabilities," Professor Oberklaid said.

"They help us look at how to best distribute resources to meet the needs of all children, and consider where targeting particular areas or resources might be more effective.

"We know that the brain develops rapidly between birth and five years of age and that the skills and experiences that children have in early childhood can set down a positive pathway for life."



An Australian Government Initiative



Professor Steve Zubrick from Perth's Telethon Institute for Child Health Research said the AEDI had repeatedly proven its value since initial studies in WA in 2002.

"We know from the AEDI pilot project that communities and governments that have embraced this data have managed to focus resources, advocacy and energies and make really significant improvements for children before they start school."

"This information is really powerful for communities. It provides them with a real blueprint for what they can do to ensure that young children get off to a solid start in life, well before they start school," Professor Zubrick said.

Shell Australia Chairman, Mr Russell Caplan, said the company was very proud to have supported the AEDI pilot project and the Indigenous Adaptation Study

"It has been fantastic to watch this project grow into a national program of such scale. This shows how corporate Australia can support creative ideas to the stage where they have significant community impact."

The Australian Government has committed \$21.9 million to implement the AEDI nationally. The 2009 AEDI results are based on data gathered by teachers on more than 260,000 children around Australia as they entered their first year of full-time school.

The AEDI measures five key areas of early childhood development: physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, communication skills and general knowledge .

Further information about the AEDI is available at www.aedi.org.au or by telephoning 1300 558 422.

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