

# An additional year of preschool - an achievable reform

## Two Years are Better Than One

In the past 5 years, Australia has achieved near universal enrolment in preschool for children in the year before school. We can do the same for our 3 year olds.

A shared, national commitment to an additional year of preschool is a key strategy for reducing children's developmental vulnerability in the first year of school, and for contributing to the social and economic prosperity of Australia into the future. It is also an affordable and achievable policy reform for Australia.

### Australia already has the foundations for a high quality preschool program for 3 year olds

- Two thirds of 3 year olds are already attending some form of early education and care - the challenge is to ensure they all receive the right dose and quality, and to remove barriers to access for children not attending
- Preschool programs can be embedded within the existing early education and care system
- Our National Quality Framework and Early Years Learning Framework provides the foundations for high quality

We also have the opportunity to learn from our experience delivering preschool for children in the year before school - particularly the importance of affordability, meeting the needs of families, sustainable funding, flexibility in implementation, and strengthening data and evaluation.

### A collaborative approach with shared goals and a long term plan are important for success

A staged approach to designing, implementing, embedding and sustaining an additional year of preschool is important.

### Designing

Agreement on the key quality features of a 3 year old preschool program is the first step - including the number of hours, educator qualifications, and educator to child ratios.

It is also critical to understand the best way to deliver a 3-year-old preschool program within the early education and care system in each state and territory, as there are many different delivery models. Mapping where there are already enough places for 3 year olds, and where services are already at capacity, is necessary to understand priorities and costs.

### Implementing

The first state of implementation involves developing implementation plans for each state and territory, understanding reasonable timeframes, and agreeing to achievable goals.

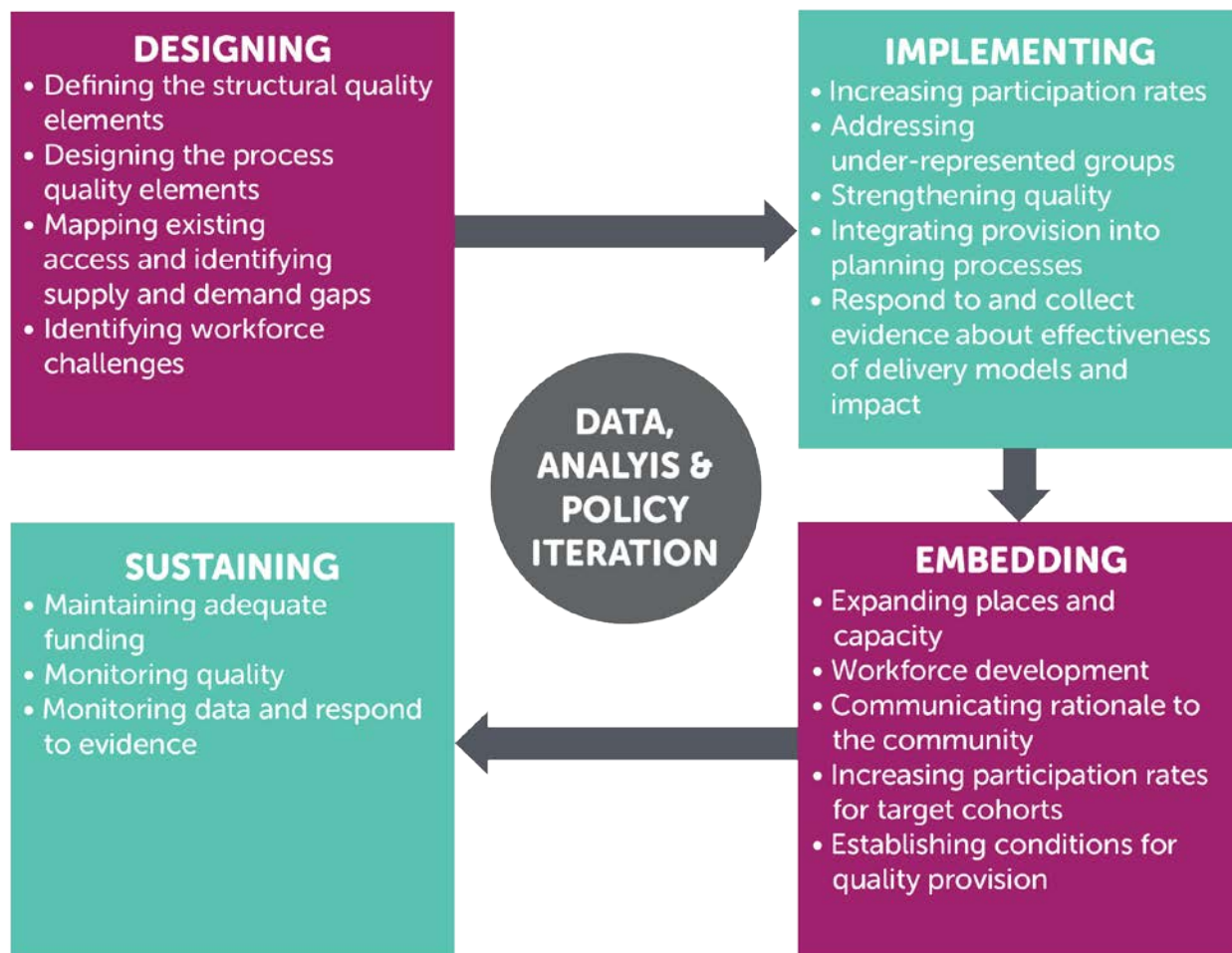
Delivering a preschool program for all 3 year olds will require a phased approach, so there is time to expand the number of places available, deliver a workforce strategy and start building attendance rates.

### Embedding

Once there are enough places and educators within the sector, the priority is maintaining a focus on quality, attendance for the right number of hours for all children, and ensuring priority cohorts have equitable access.

### Sustaining

To sustain an effective preschool program, it is necessary to maintain appropriate levels of quality and funding, and respond to emerging evidence about dose, duration and quality thresholds.



### Data, analysis and policy iteration

Underpinning these implementation strategies must be a renewed commitment to building a data and evaluation strategy that enables the impact of this policy initiative to be measured, and a commitment to developing preschool programs in response to new evidence.

### The first step

While an additional year of preschool is an eminently achievable policy goal, there are a number of practical implementation issues to work through

## Key recommendation

COAG should commission a scoping study into universal 3-year-old preschool programs for Australia. The study should be completed by the end of 2017 and should identify:

- Delivery gaps and opportunities
- Core process and structural quality elements
- Strategies to address barriers to access for priority cohorts
- Jurisdiction-specific implementation options
- Improvements in data collection needed to track impact