

RESTACKING THE ODDS

IMPACT REPORT SUMMARY

Phase Two (2022-2025)
Co-Designing for Impact:
Supporting the Use of Data in
Early Years Systems

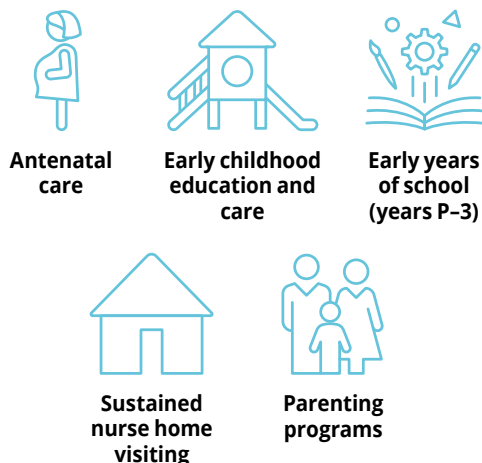


November 2025



A child's early years are the foundation for lifelong health, development and wellbeing. But in Australia today, many children miss out on the high-quality early childhood services they need to thrive.

Restacking the Odds (RSTO) is working with local early years partners to build a stronger stack of key early years services, including:



Key to this work is ensuring local early years partnerships² and service providers have the right data to help shape their decision making. That's why RSTO enables local partners to use actionable,

locally relevant data, known as lead indicators³, to answer three important questions:

- Are there enough services available? (quantity)
- Are they high quality? (quality)
- Are children and families accessing them enough to benefit? (participation)

The RSTO 2.0 Impact Report evaluated RSTO's second phase (2022-2025). RSTO 2.0 focused on building relationships with early years partners, understanding barriers to using data for continuous improvement, co-designing tools to support evidence-informed decision making, and advocating for the benefits of stacking.

Stacking is when children participate in a combination of services over time and access extra supports as needed. The benefits add up, helping every child get the best start in life.¹



- 1 Molloy et al., Potential of 'stacking' early childhood interventions to reduce inequities in learning outcomes, JECH 73(12), 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1136/jech-2019-212282>
- 2 Partnerships that bring together local community and service providers to improve outcomes for children and families.
- 3 Data that signal future outcomes, enabling local early years partnerships and services to make timely adjustments.

WHAT WE FOUND

Services experience barriers to using lead indicators

BARRIERS



- a lack of data capabilities and skills
- limited systems to support data integration
- inability to interpret and share data, and a lack of dedicated resources for using data effectively
- inconsistent indicators used by leaders across services
- data required by funders for reporting, but not for improvement or change efforts
- a limited culture of valuing and using data to drive outcomes, contributing to reduced motivation.

ENABLERS



- consistent, evidence-informed lead indicators across key early years services
- investment in data systems
- training to support ongoing data use for decision making
- communicating the benefits of using evidence-informed lead indicators for continuous improvement
- embedding use of data into funding deliverables through policy and funding changes.

RSTO tools respond to barriers and support enablers

RSTO has worked with 13 local partners to co-design and implement practical tools—lead indicators, a data dashboard and a continuous improvement (CI) program—across early childhood education and care (ECEC), antenatal care and parenting programs. This has led to immediate improvements in data use, enabling services to collect and analyse priority groups⁴ data for the first time.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) services are increasingly embedding RSTO tools into routine practice

Across our partners, 4 of 9 ECEC sites now use the RSTO tools consistently as part of their everyday planning, reflection and CI processes, and all sites remain engaged in evidence-informed learning and improvement.

RSTO is growing recognition of service stacking and lead indicators

RSTO's policy efforts—through coalition-building, strategic engagement and identifying key opportunities—have raised the profile of service stacking and using timely data for continuous improvement. This was confirmed by an [independent evaluation of RSTO 2.0](#) by Paul Ramsay Foundation and ARTD Consultants.



**15 OVERTON
CITATIONS⁵**



**21 REFERENCES IN
MAJOR SUBMISSIONS
TO GOVERNMENT**



**FORMAL INVITATIONS TO CONTRIBUTE TO POLICY
REFORM EFFORTS, INCLUDING:**

- > [THE EARLY YEARS STRATEGY](#)
- > [THE INVESTMENT DIALOGUE FOR AUSTRALIA'S CHILDREN](#)
- > [THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION REPORT INTO ECEC](#)
- > [PUTTING QUEENSLAND KIDS FIRST](#)

⁴ Families disproportionately impacted by inequity due to factors including education, employment status, income and ethnicity.

⁵ A mention of academic research in policy documents, as tracked by the Overton database.

RSTO tools are shaping service quality, quantity and participation, particularly in ECEC

One ECEC site, committed to increasing the attendance of enrolled children, saw a significant uplift in just three months—a testament to what’s possible when the right data and locally-led action come together (Figure 1).



Participation data showed 14-17 enrolled children were not attending each week

To improve participation, practitioners introduced solution-focused phone calls with parents to **understand and address barriers to attendance**

- ✓ After three months, the **number of non-attending children** fell to around 10 per week
- ✓ The proportion of children on track to meet the recommended 600 annual hours **increased by 8%**, with an even larger **19% rise among priority groups**

Figure 1. How an ECEC site increased participation using RSTO tools

WHAT WE LEARNED



Building capability, motivation and opportunity is critical for implementation

Successful, evidence-informed continuous improvement requires tools and processes that build workforce capability, support collaborative decision making within and across services, and foster motivation at all levels.



The right data and continuous improvement are catalysts for change

The progress with ECEC partners shows that when practitioners have timely, locally relevant data and use it within continuous improvement cycles, they can make rapid and meaningful improvements.



Success relies on balancing the core model with local needs

RSTO tools are designed for scalability. Success depends on balancing the core model with thoughtful adaptation to different service types and local contexts.



System change requires strategic focus, relationships and policy alignment

Early childhood systems are complex and fragmented, making coordinated action difficult. RSTO's policy influence is strongest where it offers a solution to an identified need and aligns with the direction of reform.



Improvement requires a proactive, evidence-informed approach

RSTO must continue building benefit for funders and policymakers by demonstrating how continuous improvement, informed by lead indicators, drives better outcomes for children.

'I've loved learning about the story stats can tell. Coming together to put a plan in place supports us to do the best we can for our community.'

ECEC leader

WHERE WE'RE HEADING

The third phase of RSTO, which has begun and will continue until 2028, is focused on scaling RSTO tools in local early years partnerships around Australia. With the support of Minderoo Foundation, we're enabling early years partnerships to build a stronger stack of services and drive more equitable outcomes in their communities. In RSTO 3.0, we are:



Continuing to build evidence to support implementation

Expanding lead indicator use across the early years service stack, enabling the use of actionable data in local early years partnerships, and refining our impact measurement approach.



Developing a sustainable, impactful scaling strategy and operating model

Deepening engagement with diverse implementation partners and tailoring RSTO's tools and supports, refining our training package to enable scalable implementation, and working to embed lead indicators into government reform frameworks.



Applying a continuous learning approach to support scaling

Taking an innovative mindset and continuous learning approach to scaling our impact, using targeted experiments to generate insights and refine strategy, and sharing learnings to support the early years sector.

Read the [RSTO 2.0 Impact Report in full here.](#)

For more information about RSTO

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Visit: www.rsto.org.au

LinkedIn: [CCCH](#)

RSTO is a collaboration between the Centre for Community Child Health at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Bain & Company, and Social Ventures Australia.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging.