

RESTACKING THE ODDS

13th August 2025

Ms Pam White PSM and The Honourable Jay Weatherill AO
c/o Alana Culwick, Senior Executive Assistant to Chairperson Pam White
Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority
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RE: Response to Victoria's Rapid Child Safety Review

Dear Ms White and Mr Wetherill

Restacking the Odds (RSTO) welcomes the opportunity to respond to Victoria's rapid review into child safety in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings.

We support the exploration of immediate measures that are sensible, feasible and effective for child safety alongside long-term efforts that support and improve overall ECEC quality across all communities. ECEC services which foster quality improvement report better staff satisfaction and, in turn, lower staff turnover. That results in higher quality services and less risk to children.¹

The Victorian Government's investment, including the Best Start, Best Life reforms, expanding 3 and 4-year-old kindergarten and the school readiness fund, support children's participation in ECEC. It is critical that simultaneous effort is applied to ensuring high quality across the system. Children gain the greatest benefit from ECEC when they participate in high quality services.² Safe, quality early childhood education and care is of the utmost importance for children's outcomes. However, ACECQA data shows that high quality services are not evenly distributed, and children who face disadvantage are less likely than advantaged peers to access high-quality ECEC.

We provide the following insights from our research, data and tools developed in partnership with ECEC service providers to drive more equitable, high-quality ECEC. Please consider the following in your review:

¹ Restacking the Odds (2025). Restacking the Odds Impact Report: Phase Two. Centre for Community Child Health at The Royal Children's Hospital and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Melbourne, Australia.

<https://www.socialventures.org.au/about/publications/restacking-the-odds-2-0-impact-report/>

² Rankin, P., Staton, S., Jones, A., Potia, A. H., Houen, S., Healey, B., & Thorpe, K. (2024). Linking quality and child development in early childhood education and care: Technical report. Australian Education Research Organisation, <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/research/technical-reports/linking-quality-and-child-development-early-childhood-education-and-care> (accessed 12 August 2025)

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Adequate funding is needed to monitor and support ECEC quality effectively, with extra effort in communities with higher needs

This includes:

- Ensuring Victoria's Quality, Assessment and Regulation Division (QARD) has sufficient capacity to respond to services demonstrating poor quality while ensuring ongoing support for continuous quality improvement across the system and particularly for communities, services and children facing disadvantage.
- Ensuring forward planning for the ECEC and QARD workforce skills and capabilities, to ensure quality and safety activities keep pace with population and ECEC sector growth
- Providing capacity support for the ECEC workforce to increase the number of and skills of those working in the sector, including incentives to attract high-quality staff to communities with higher needs.

Services need more support for quality improvement

Restacking the Odds works with a small number of ECEC service providers to monitor and improve service quality. Through this work we have observed limitations of the National Quality Framework tools and assessments in enabling quality improvement, including:

- infrequent assessments
- complexity of the ACECQA's self-assessment tool
- insufficient granularity of assessments in supporting early identification of issues
- lack of guidance of potential effective action and
- gaps in the tools to demonstrate practices which are part of business as usual or informed by critical reflection.

Services require data and tools to help quickly identify service gaps and responses, clarity on strategies that improve quality, and support to document rationale, reflection and community engagement.

Opportunities to increase support provided to services for quality improvement include:

- More frequent assessments
- Peer-based assessors offering guidance, not just judgments
- Less emphasis on structural indicators; more on relationships and practice quality.
- Ready access to data and tools to help services quickly identify service quality gaps and respond efficiently and effectively.
- Guidance on strategies that improve quality, not just a list of standards or outcomes.
- Increased support for documentation such as tools to document rationale, reflection, and community engagement, especially for demonstrating "exceeding" quality

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Strengthen cooperation and governance between tiers and departments of Government

Early childhood development systems in Victoria and Australia are fragmented. Safety and quality improvement efforts are slowed and limited by a lack of overarching governance, accountability and inconsistent systems and reporting mechanisms.

Victoria can play a role in strengthening system accountability by engaging in productive efforts toward national agreements that put children's needs at the centre of decision-making, including:

- Supporting improved system governance, such as a National Early Childhood Commission, or a national agreement that clarifies accountability and leadership for ECEC between different levels of government. These arrangements need to embed enhanced reporting on system performance and over time be extended to improve oversight and coordination of all early childhood development services. This includes early learning, health, development, community support and safety and protection,
- Better coordination of early childhood data and evidence across the ECEC ecosystem, including across all forms of ECEC, to improve accountability, visibility and enable more rapid action
- Investment in initiatives that foster coordination between early childhood service systems, such as early childhood hubs, with a focus on building trusted relationships between families and services, enhancing the practice and skills of early childhood workforce through multidisciplinary learning making it easier for families to access the supports they need in their community.

Yours sincerely,



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About Restacking the Odds

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

Restacking the Odds aims to drive more equitable outcomes in the early years by ensuring that children and families can and do access a combination of high-quality, evidence-informed services where and when they need them. Restacking the Odds focuses on how to work differently within the existing service infrastructure to improve outcomes for children, families and communities. It uses a framework of evidence-informed lead indicators to support communities, service providers and policymakers to improve service quality, quantity and participation.

Over the last three years RSTO has been working with 4 ECEC service provider organisations across 10 sites in rural, regional and urban areas, to co-develop a series of prototypes to support them to collect and use data for ongoing improvements in participation, quantity and quality.