

Welcome to the AEDC NSW Research Symposium 2025

Wednesday 18 June 2025

Dear colleagues,

AEDC NSW has created an opportunity through this research symposium for diverse stakeholders to come together and integrate the evidence. It is also an opportunity to reflect on the value of the AEDC dataset to improve outcomes for children in your community.

We hope that this symposium will create an opportunity to work in partnership with educators, practitioners, policy makers and researchers to respond to the developmental needs of children in our communities.

Symposium session times are displayed in AEDT. View the full symposium agenda on the AEDC Research symposium webpage.

Resources and feedback

[Submit a question for the day](#)

[Post participation evaluation – face-to-face participants](#)

[Post participation evaluation – online participants](#)

[AEDC NSW webpage](#)

[AEDC National webpage](#)

[AEDC Family awareness videos](#)

[AEDC NSW Research symposium webpage](#)

Symposium feedback is welcomed via this email address:

aedc@det.nsw.edu.au

Our speakers

Wednesday 18 June 2025



Mark Barraket

As Deputy Secretary for Early Childhood Outcomes (ECO), a division that supports more than 6,000 early childhood education and care services, Mark leads a team committed to delivering early childhood education and care initiatives, focusing on comprehensive investments in the critical first 5 years of every child's life. Mark has a background as both a primary school teacher and principal for the NSW Department of Education. In over 30 years with the department, Mark has held multiple senior leadership roles aimed at driving reforms to enhance outcomes for students, families, and communities. From pursuit of universal preschool access, to advancing 100 new public preschools, Mark plays a crucial role in the development and implementation of sector changing funds and ongoing programs that facilitate early intervention and improve preschool participation for children in NSW. Mark is passionate about addressing current challenges to ensure children and families have what they need for long-term success, fostering environments where every child can thrive, from preschool into the school years and beyond.



Elizabeth Hickey

Liz Hickey is the Assistant Secretary of the Early Childhood Data and Preschool Branch at the Australian Department of Education. Liz leads the Commonwealth's work on preschool policy, national early childhood data development, and the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC).

Liz has deep experience in budget policy, intergovernmental reform, and program implementation, having held senior executive roles in the Departments of Education and Finance, and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. She brings a strong focus on using evidence to shape national strategies and improve outcomes for children, families, and the services that support them.



Professor Tony Dreise

Tony is a proud member of the Guumilaroi and Euahlayi First Nations of north-west New South Wales and south-west Queensland. He brings an international reputation in education, public policy, research and First Nations affairs. Tony has held 2 Inaugural Professorships as Pro Vice-Chancellor of First Nations at the University of Southern Queensland, and Professor of Indigenous Policy and Director of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University. Tony's professional background includes experience in national education leadership roles including Chair of the Indigenous Literacy Foundation, Principal Research Fellow at the Australian Council for Educational Research, National Equity Manager for the Australian National Training Authority, and Board Member of Adult Learning Australia.



Dr Tess Gregory

Tess Gregory is an Associate Professor at The Kids Research Institute Australia and holds adjunct positions at the University of Adelaide and University of Western Australia. Tess' academic background is in psychology and statistics, and her research focuses on children's development, wellbeing, and academic achievement. She works closely with policy makers across Australia and has a strong commitment to conducting pragmatic research and translating findings into action to improve the lives of Australian children and families.



Associate Professor Yasmin Harman-Smith

Associate Professor Yasmin Harman-Smith leads the Early Years Systems Evidence team (EYSE). For over a decade she has worked closely with policy makers and service providers to evaluate how children and families are best supported in the early years of life and through school. Yasmin has a PhD in Psychology and a Masters of Primary Teaching, with an applied focus on how children are supported to thrive in modern societies.



Christine Jackson

Christine's professional career started as a secondary English teacher in central west New South Wales before teaching internationally and in Sydney. She has worked at the Australian Catholic University's Institute for Learning Sciences and Teacher Education, where she was involved in several government consultancy projects that specifically looked at the teaching of writing and on the purpose, impact, and use of NAPLAN in the context of policy, schools, and the community.



Professor Melissa Green

Melissa Green is Professor of Psychiatry and Mental Health at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), Sydney, and Director of Research in the School of Clinical Medicine at UNSW. She is the Scientific Director of the NSW Child Development Study, which uses linked intergenerational data from multiple government agencies to improve the mental health of young people.



Professor Kristin Laurens

Kristin Laurens is Professor of Psychology at Queensland University of Technology, and Adjunct Professor of Psychiatry and Mental Health at University of New South Wales, Sydney. Her research focusses on how students' social-emotional wellbeing relates with their educational and health outcomes. She works with health and educational professionals to identify new opportunities for mental health promotion, prevention, and early intervention, including the implementation of multi-tiered approaches in schools to foster the development of social-emotional skills for every student.



Professor Sharon Goldfeld

Professor Sharon Goldfeld is the Director of the Centre for Community Child Health at The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne. She has built a career as a policy-focused public health and paediatric practitioner and researcher. Her research interests are made up of complementary, synergistic and cross-disciplinary streams of work focused on investigating, testing and translating sustainable policy relevant solutions that eliminate inequities for Australia's children. She is an authority on child health equity and policy and has led national research that has revolutionised data and metrics in Australia, (e.g. Australian Early Development Census), directly influencing national and state policy in early childhood, health, education and social care. In 2024, Professor Goldfeld was appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia for her service to paediatric medicine and public health research. Her contributions have been recognised with numerous awards, including the inaugural 2020 University of Melbourne Marles Medal in STEM for outstanding achievement in research impact.

Acknowledgement of Country



Lauren Braley

As a proud Dharug woman and mother of two, I am dedicated to both my family and my professional journey. In my role as an Aboriginal Education Officer, I advocate for First Nations perspectives in education and support students in their learning. Currently, I am pursuing my Bachelor of Education, which equips me with the skills to make a meaningful impact in the classroom. Additionally, I am learning to teach Dharug Dhalang through the Centre of Excellence program, enabling me to share my language and culture with students from preschool to year 6. This opportunity enriches my knowledge and fosters a deeper appreciation for our rich heritage and history among future generations.

AEDC NSW Project Team – Symposium hosts



Toni Kember

Toni Kember is the Director of the Early Learners unit within the Public ECEC Directorate in Early Childhood Outcomes, leading the work on public preschools, transition to school, Schools as Community Centres (SaCCs) and the NSW Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). Toni brings to the position strong academic and educational leadership and more than 30 years' experience in a wide variety of educational settings. This includes roles as a lecturer at UWS, a primary classroom teacher, a P-6 school principal where she led the largest public preschool in NSW, and as a Director Educational Leadership in Western Sydney. Toni holds a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education and postgraduate qualifications in play-based learning and educational leadership. Committed to expanding access and improving educational outcomes in the early childhood space, Toni wants to make sure every child is set up for a life of learning.



Shellee Whiffin

Shellee Whiffin has 25 plus years' experience in teaching and leading. She has led literacy and numeracy evidence informed practice strategies across department schools. As a Principal Education Officer (PEO) Shellee manages the team that is responsible for high quality curriculum resources in public preschools, Schools as Community Centres within public schools and Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). As a substantive principal within the department, Shellee can explore effective leadership curriculum implementation methods for practice in P-6 settings.



Mary Taiwo

Mary is a Senior Population Data Officer with NSW Department of Education where she performs the role of NSW AEDC State Coordinator. Mary managed the 2021 and 2024 AEDC collection cycles in NSW. Mary is passionate about using evidence to inform effective learning practices for all children. Mary is looking forward to engaging with the 2024 AEDC outcomes and supporting various stakeholders across NSW as they use the AEDC data to inform policy and practice over the next few years. She completed her Master of Philosophy (MPhil, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2011) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom, 2015) in inclusive and special needs education. Prior to joining NSW Department of Education, Mary worked as a researcher with Macquarie University. Mary has worked with Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) and Early Childhood Directorate as an evaluator and policy officer, respectively.

Agenda

Conference Theme – Shaping Futures – The Impact of the AEDC on Early Years Education

Event Facilitator – Toni Kember

Event key contact – Mary Taiwo, AEDC NSW State Coordinator

Session 1		
Time	Item	Speaker/s
8:00 am	Arrival and sign in	Planning team led by Mary Taiwo AEDC NSW State Coordinator, Senior Population and Data officer
8:30 am	Welcome/House keeping	Toni Kember, AEDC NSW National committee Member Director Early Learners, Early Childhood Education Outcomes, NSW Department of Education
8:35 am	Acknowledgement of Country	Lauren Braley Kingswood Park Public School, School Learning Support Officer (SLSO)/Aboriginal Education Officer
8:40 am	Keynote address 1 NSW Responds to the AEDC 2024 data outcomes	Mark Barraket Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood Outcomes (ECO), NSW Department of Education
9:05 am	Keynote address 2 AEDC 2024 National outcomes and its implications	Elizabeth Hickey Assistant Secretary, Early Childhood, Data and Preschool Branch, Australian Government Department of Education
9:30 am	Keynote address 3 Improving engagement with the AEDC data - learnings from a First Nations research project	Professor Tony Dreise Pro Vice-Chancellor First Nations Engagement, Charles Sturt University
10:10 am	Questions and Answers	
10:25 am	Morning tea	

Session 2		
Time	Item	Speaker/s
10:55 am	Keynote address 4 Spotlight on the 2024 AEDC results in NSW – what we know about children starting school	Dr Tess Gregory and Associate Professor Yasmin Harman-Smith The Kids Research Institute Australia
11:35 am	Keynote address 5 What skills are important for future learning?	Christine Jackson Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)
12:15 am	Keynote address 6 Student mental health and wellbeing: findings from the NSW Child Development Study	Professor Kristin Laurens and Professor Melissa Green University of New South Wales
12:55 pm	Questions and answers	Speakers and DoE Director EL, ED Public ECEC and Dep Sec responding
1:10 pm	Lunch	
Session 3		
Time	Item	Speaker/s
1:50 pm	Keynote address 7 Beyond the silver bullet – closing the equity gap for children within a generation	Professor Sharon Goldfeld Centre for Community Child Health
2:30 pm	Table activities and discussions	Toni Kember, Director Early Learners Unit
3:10 pm	Questions and answers	Speakers and DoE Director EL, ED Public ECEC and Dep Sec responding
3:25 pm	Close conference – summary of key takeaways	AEDC NSW National committee member – Toni Kember
3:30 pm	Event ends	AEDC NSW National Committee member – Toni Kember

Session 1



NSW Responds to the AEDC 2024 data outcomes

Mark Barraket

**Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood Outcomes (ECO),
NSW Department of Education**

In this session Mark will highlight what the AEDC data means for the NSW Department of Education and how the evidence will help the department support outcomes for children and families across NSW through the implementation of Our Plan for NSW Public Education.



AEDC 2024 National outcomes and its implications

Elizabeth Hickey

**Assistant Secretary, Early Childhood
Data and Preschool Branch, Australian Government Department of Education**

In this session Liz will highlight some of the key outcomes of the AEDC 2024 national outcomes. He will also explore some of the immediate implications and value of the AEDC data.



Improving engagement with the AEDC data – learnings from a First Nations research project

Professor Tony Dreise

Pro Vice-Chancellor First Nations Engagement, Charles Sturt University

The AEDC data is a valuable data set, notwithstanding aspects of the data collection and release, that need further improvement. The AEDC still has unmet potential as it gives a good indication of early childhood development across Australia. If development in the early years is actualised as expected, then all other lifelong goals have the potential to be fully attained.

This session will highlight the need to develop a long-sighted view and cross government collaboration to ensure improvement in early childhood outcomes in the coming years. This session will also share some of the findings from an AEDC First Nations project where there was a varied level of awareness and understanding of the AEDC across different stakeholders' group.

Session 2



Spotlight on the 2024 AEDC results in NSW – what we know about children starting school

Dr Tess Gregory and



Associate Professor Yasmin Harman-Smith

The Kids Research Institute Australia

This presentation will provide an overview of the 2024 AEDC results in NSW as well as state-level trends in child development over the past 15 years (2009 to 2024). We will explore trends over time in the percentage of children who are vulnerable, at risk and on track in each of the 5 developmental domains of the AEDC, as well as trends in the AEDC summary indicators. AEDC results will be compared for key equity groups, such as students living in more and less socio-economically disadvantaged communities in the state, as well as children growing up in metropolitan, regional and remote areas.

We will explore the demographic characteristics and ECEC experiences of the children in the 2024 AEDC cohort in NSW, and contrast this with earlier cohorts of children (2009 to 2021) to help explain the trends over time in child development outcomes. We will consider what these trends tell us about how children are faring and what supports they may need as they transition to school.



What skills are important for future learning?

Christine Jackson

Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)

The workshop focuses on the utility of the Australian Early Development Census data for understanding indicators of key skills, whilst also creating feed forward opportunities for teachers to support children to reach their potential.

Session 2



Student mental health and wellbeing – findings from the NSW Child Development Study



Professor Kristin Laurens and Professor Melissa Green

Director of Research, School of Clinical Medicine, UNSW Medicine and Health

This presentation will describe findings from the NSW Child Development Study, a research project that has followed the development of a population cohort of ~96,000 children up to the age of ~19 years – these were children for whom teachers completed the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) in 2009 during their first year of full-time school, and who self-reported on their mental health and wellbeing during their final year of primary school (Year 6) in 2015 via the Middle Childhood Survey (MCS). This presentation will describe the identification of 3 different ‘risk profiles’ of developmental vulnerability at age ~5 years (using AEDC data) which increase risk for later childhood mental health disorders (between ages 6–12 years) relative to children without these risk profiles. The presentation will also describe social-emotional skills that contribute to students’ progress in reading and numeracy attainment between Kindergarten to Year 7, demonstrating the role of students’ self-awareness and self-management at age ~11 years (using MCS data) in supporting achievement. Findings emphasise the important dual role of educators in supporting students’ mental health alongside their academic attainment.

Session 3



Beyond the silver bullet – closing the equity gap for children within a generation

Professor Professor Sharon Goldfeld

Centre for Community Child Health

In the past decade, there has been great global effort to support children’s health, development and wellbeing. Evidence shows that strategic investments in early childhood are imperative for averting the onset of health challenges and mitigating their societal impacts. Regardless of the evidence and investments, there are still inequities that have persisted in early childhood outcomes due to preventable social, economic or geographic factors. This session will explore of these systemic inequities and the impact it has on budgets, productivity of society at large and in delivering on greater human capital. Australian children have had disadvantaged trajectory over early childhood outcomes. Nevertheless, with the right political will and resource commitments, Australia could close the child equity gap within a generation.