


Royal Commission into
**Early Childhood
Education & Care**

Community guide

Message from the Commissioner



I am honoured to have been appointed as the Royal Commissioner into Early Childhood Education and Care.

Education is a life-long passion of mine, and we all know that the most critical time for a child's learning is in their early years.

This Royal Commission is an opportunity to shape a once in a generation investment in South Australia's youngest citizens, in particular through the State Government's commitment to universal 3-year-old preschool.

Drawing on the insights of community and experts, the Royal Commission's findings will provide a pathway toward improved developmental outcomes for all South Australian children, including redressing the persistent patterns of underlying disadvantage that still plague our community.

I encourage you to share your thoughts and experiences to make this exciting future a reality.

Hon Julia Gillard AC

**Royal Commissioner into
Early Childhood Education and Care**

Early childhood education and care in South Australia

The early years system

The early years system in South Australia provides both universal (for everyone) and targeted education, care and support to families for all children from birth to the age of 5 years. Some services are delivered by government, some by the non-government sector, and some through private providers.

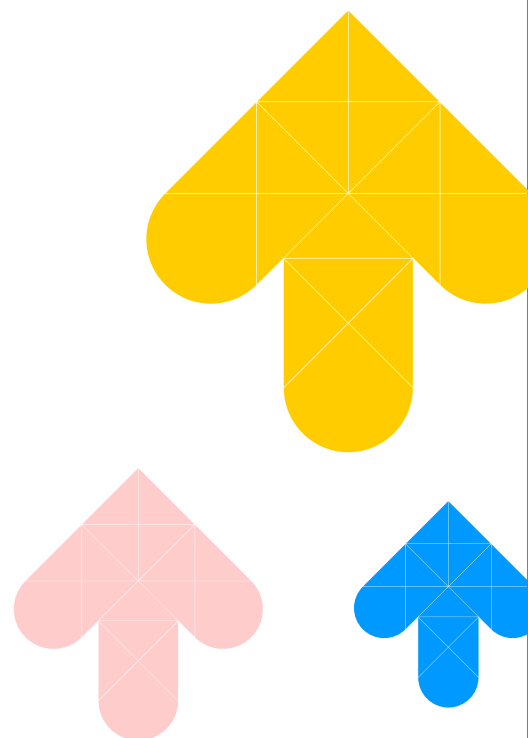
All of them are aimed at supporting parents, carers and children in those critical early years of life.

Early childhood education and care includes services such as:

- long day care (child care)
- early learning centres
- children's centres
- preschools (kindy or kindergarten)
- family day care.

Other services to support children and families in the early years include child health information and support (such as the 'blue book'), parent support, community services and child protection.

These are offered through Child and Family Health Services (CaFHS), government and non-government education and care services, supported and community playgroups, community libraries, local health networks and targeted parenting programs and initiatives.



Why are the early years important?

Research tells us how crucial the early years are for the rest of a child's life. Rapid brain development before the age of 5 means that quality early childhood education establishes the foundations of cognitive, creative, emotional, literacy and language skills that children need for future success in education, work and life.¹

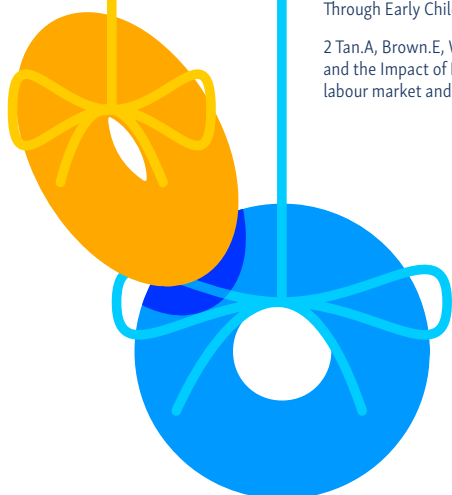
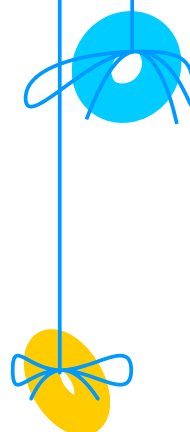
We also know that access to quality early childhood education and care is a key factor in workforce participation for parents, especially women. Improving opportunities for parents to work, including full-time, can only be done alongside access to affordable and quality education and care. The benefits of this are wide reaching, not only for families, but for also for our economy in general.²

While the early childhood education and care sector plays a critical role in our community, it has not always been valued as such. However, we have moved away from the historical view of two siloed sectors (caring and education) to understanding that they work together as an early childhood education and care system.

In this context, governments and providers recognise the essential skills and expertise needed within the workforce and value the contribution that educators are making to our early learners and future leaders. The National Quality Framework (NQF) requires people working in early childhood settings to be qualified and to deliver and document individualised learning for every child. Services are assessed against the NQF and outcomes are published online.

1 Pascoe.S & Brennan.D (2017) Lifting our Game: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools Through Early Childhood Interventions, LiftingOurGame.PDF (education.vic.gov.au)

2 Tan.A, Brown.E, Wood.N & Sathanapally.A (2022) Women's Economic Opportunities in the NSW Labour Market and the Impact of Early childhood Education and Care TRP22-19 Women's economic opportunities in the NSW labour market and the impact of early childhood education and care | NSW Treasury



What do we know about young children and early childhood education and care in South Australia?

In 2021, almost 98,000 children were between 0 and 4 years old and approximately 20,000 of those were 4 years old (Figure 1).¹

Most live in metropolitan Adelaide, 21.6% in rural South Australia and 3.4% in remote areas (Figure 2).

The vast majority of 4-year-olds in South Australia go to a government run kindy. 43.2% are only enrolled in a government preschool program, while 46.4% are enrolled in both a government and non-government preschool program (for example, kindy programs in long day care).

Preschool programs provide 15 hours a week of low cost, high quality kindy in the year before school. However, often those hours are split across shorter days and do not provide the flexibility for working parents to balance working and family commitments.

98,000

Number of children aged 1-4

20,000

Number of 4-year-olds

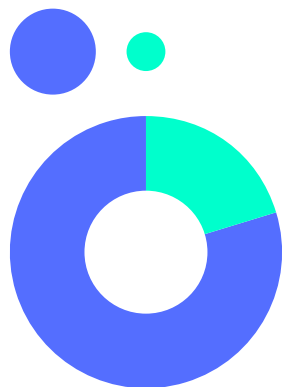


Figure 1 / Number of children aged 1-4 in SA in 2021 and the 4-year-old subgroup

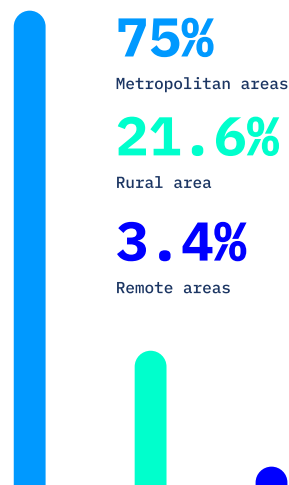


Figure 2 / General geographical distribution of 4-year-olds in South Australia—2021

¹ Quarterly Population Estimates (ERP), by State/Territory, Sex and Age— December 2021 .Stat Data Explorer (BETA)
• Quarterly Population Estimates (ERP), by State/Territory, Sex and Age (abs.gov.au)

SA's performance in the AEDC

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a national survey held every 3 years for children in their first year of school against a number of developmental areas (known as domains).

According to the 2021 AEDC,¹ almost one quarter (23.8%) of South Australian children are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain.

This is higher than the national average (22%) and shows a decline in developmental readiness in South Australian children since the census began in 2009. Other states, notably Western Australia and Queensland have seen an improvement in child developmental measures over a number of years.²

This means that despite efforts across the system, some children are not meeting developmental milestones, suggesting there is more work to do to support those children and their families.

Across South Australia's existing early childhood education and care system we also know:

- In 2021, 63.4% of all South Australian 3 year old children were enrolled in early childhood education and care³ (Figure 1).
- 29% of primary school aged children (47,280) are enrolled in Out of School Hours Care (OSHC),⁴ with 24,003 approved OSHC places available each day⁵ (Figure 2).
- 86% of early childhood education and care services in South Australia in June 2022 were assessed as meeting or exceeding the National Quality Framework, compared to 88% of all providers nationally.⁶
- Of the SA early childhoods education and care workforce (government and non-government sectors), 88.8% identify as female.⁷

Figure 1 / In 2021, 63.4% of all South Australian 3 year old children were enrolled in early childhood education and care



63.4%

3 year olds enrolled in early childhood education and care programs in SA-2021

Figure 2 / South Australian children are enrolled in OSHC, and approved OSHC places available each day

47,280

children enrolled in OSHC

24,003

available OSHC places



1 Australian Early Development Census National Report 2021 - [2021 AEDC National Report](#)

2 Child Development Council (2020) Evidence Matters – Every Young South Australian Counts, Policy Brief - [Policy Brief 1: South Australia's surprising downward trend in AEDC results \(childrensa.sa.gov.au\)](#)

3 [Report on Government Services \(2021\)](#)

4 Australian Government, [Department for Education \(2021\)](#)

5 [Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority online register \(accessed October 2022\)](#)

6 Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2022) NQF Snapshot Q2 2022 - [NQF Snapshot Q2 2022 FINAL.pdf \(acecqa.gov.au\)](#)

7 Social Research Centre (2022) 2021 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census report [2021 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census report - Department of Education, Australian Government](#)

*note that this data excludes the SA Government preschool workforce

What work is already happening in the early years system in South Australia?

South Australia has a broad and effective early childhood system, but there is room to improve.

In 2021, the South Australian Government launched an Early Learning Strategy¹ with a focus on:

- ➔ strengthening universal child development services for children 0 to 5 years old, including a commitment to:
 - ➔ expand universal child development screening checks
 - ➔ support responsive local programs and services
 - ➔ improve support for families as their children's first teachers, including through community and supported playgroups
 - ➔ reduce barriers to participation in early childhood education and care for children, with a focus on rural and remote parts of South Australia
- ➔ supporting excellence in teaching and learning in all government preschools, with an emphasis on teaching and learning, leadership and system supports.

¹ South Australian Government (2021), All Young Children Thriving and Learning: South Australia's Early Learning Strategy [Early Learning Strategy 2021 to 2031: All young children thriving and learning](https://www.education.sa.gov.au/early-learning-strategy) (education.sa.gov.au)

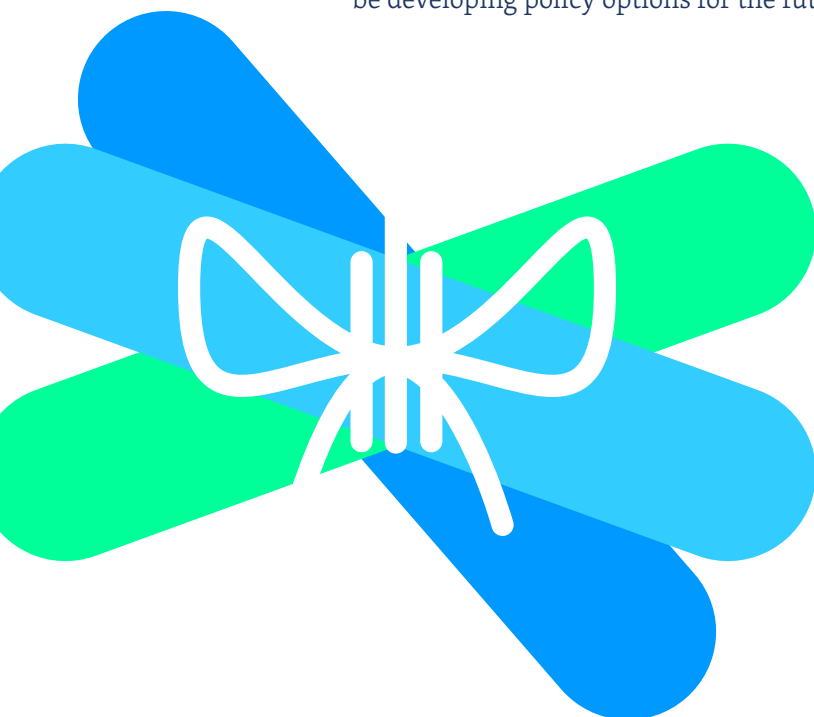
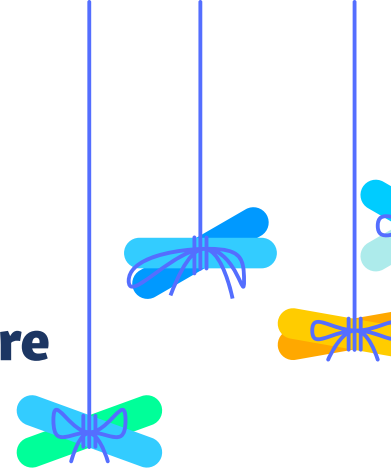
The Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care

The Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care is investigating what can be done to better support families in South Australia so that our children can thrive, including offering 3-year-old preschool to everybody.

Led by the Hon Julia Gillard AC,
the Royal Commission will examine:

- a. how families are supported in those first few years of a child's life and how early childhood education and care can help lead to better outcomes for South Australian children
- b. how universal (for everyone) preschool for 3- and 4-year-old children could be delivered in South Australia, making it accessible, affordable and of a high quality
- c. how Out of School Hours Care might be available for children of preschool and primary school ages

Unlike many others, this Royal Commission is not looking back at the problems of the past but will be developing policy options for the future.





How the Royal Commission will work

The Commission will hear the voices of parents and caregivers from diverse backgrounds, as well as from experts in early childhood development, service providers for children in the first 1000 days, leaders of early childhood education and care services, relevant unions, and providers of Out of School Hours Care.

The Royal Commission will hear from these groups through:

- ➔ public hearings held to define the key issues and published online
- ➔ online forums with parents and caregivers, including dedicated sessions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and families of children with a disability
- ➔ parent and community feedback via YourSAY
- ➔ roundtable sessions with experts to discuss the specific elements of the Royal Commission's Terms of Reference:
 - ⌚ Preschool / kindergarten
 - ⌚ A child's first 1000 days
 - ⌚ Out of School Hours Care (OSHC)
- ➔ formal submissions, which can be lodged at any time up until 19 May 2023 via www.RoyalCommissionECEC.sa.gov.au, but two formal calls for submissions will also be issued.

The Royal Commission will also be supported by an Expert Advisory Group, with expertise in child development, early childhood education and Australia's early childhood education and care system, as well as expertise in the economics of workforce participation.



A timeline of the Royal Commission’s activities

These are indicative timeframes only. The final timeline of activities will be shaped by the volume and complexity of submissions, and the need to be responsive to stakeholders and the community.

2022

16 October

The Governor formally establishes the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care

Online submissions and public consultation on YourSAy open

December

First Expert Advisory Group meeting

2023

Early January

Call for submissions for the Interim Report (3-year-old preschool)

Late January

Public hearings

February

Early childhood education and care stakeholder roundtable

1000 days stakeholder roundtable

Parents and caregivers forum

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and caregivers forum

Parents and caregivers of children with a disability forum

Second Expert Advisory Group meeting

28 February

Submissions for the Interim Report (3-year-old preschool) close

March

Call for submissions for the Final Report

Third Expert Advisory Group meeting

1000 days stakeholder roundtable

Out of School Hours Care roundtable

Early childhood education and care stakeholder roundtable

April

Interim report (3-year-old preschool) published

19 May

Submissions for the final report close

June

Public hearings

Out of School Hours Care roundtable

Parents and caregivers forum

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and caregivers forum

Parents and caregivers of children with a disability forum

Fourth Expert Advisory Group meeting

August

Final report delivered



Reports from the Royal Commission

The Royal Commission's inquiry and engagement is expected to run well into 2023 and release 2 reports.

Recognising the wide-ranging Terms of Reference, the Royal Commission will issue an Interim Report by 30 April 2023 which will focus on 3-year-old preschool delivery.

The final report of the Royal Commission will be delivered by the end of August 2023.

The Government will then consider the report and the recommendations, and look at how to implement them.

The role of formal legal public hearings

The Royal Commission's mandate is to develop policy options for the future, rather than deeply examine specific events or decisions from the past.

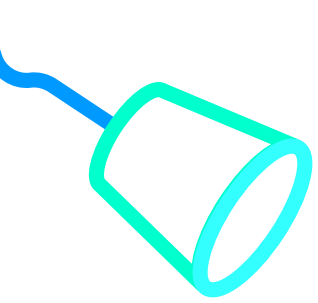
The Commission will hold public hearings early to help define key issues through evidence delivered by experts.

Taking its lead from more recent Royal Commissions with a forward-focused policy mandate (for example, into Victoria's Mental Health System), the Royal Commission will focus its evidence gathering via mechanisms designed to support open and constructive dialogue with people working in and on the system (for example, facilitated roundtables and forums).

The Royal Commission may use the powers of the *Royal Commissions Act 1917* to issue a document called a summons to collect relevant evidence to support the Commission's inquiries.

Protocols for engaging with the Royal Commission

Protocols will be published on our website to explain to participants in Royal Commission roundtables, public forums and face-to-face meetings the way in which the information they share will be published and used.



Hearing from parents, families and the community

The Commissioner wants to hear from families, parents, and carers to hear your experiences with early childhood education and care.

Your input will help the Royal Commission gain a deeper understanding of how the early years system can better support children in South Australia.

Our YourSAy survey asks:

- what is important to you when thinking about early childhood services for your child?
- what services or experiences do you want for you child?
- what factors are informing the choices you have made/will make?
- what do you think is important for children's learning and development?

The answers you provide will be kept anonymous and any data used will be de-identified.

The survey will be open until mid-February 2023.

Visit www.yoursay.sa.gov.au/RoyalCommissionECEC to complete the survey.

In early 2023, we will also be holding a number of online public forums with parents and caregivers to hear directly from South Australian families.

More information about these forums will be shared next year.



Staying in touch with the Royal Commission



Keep up to date with the Royal Commission's activities, learn about upcoming events and hear about calls for submissions by [subscribing to our newsletter](#).



Visit the Royal Commission's [website](#) for the latest information.

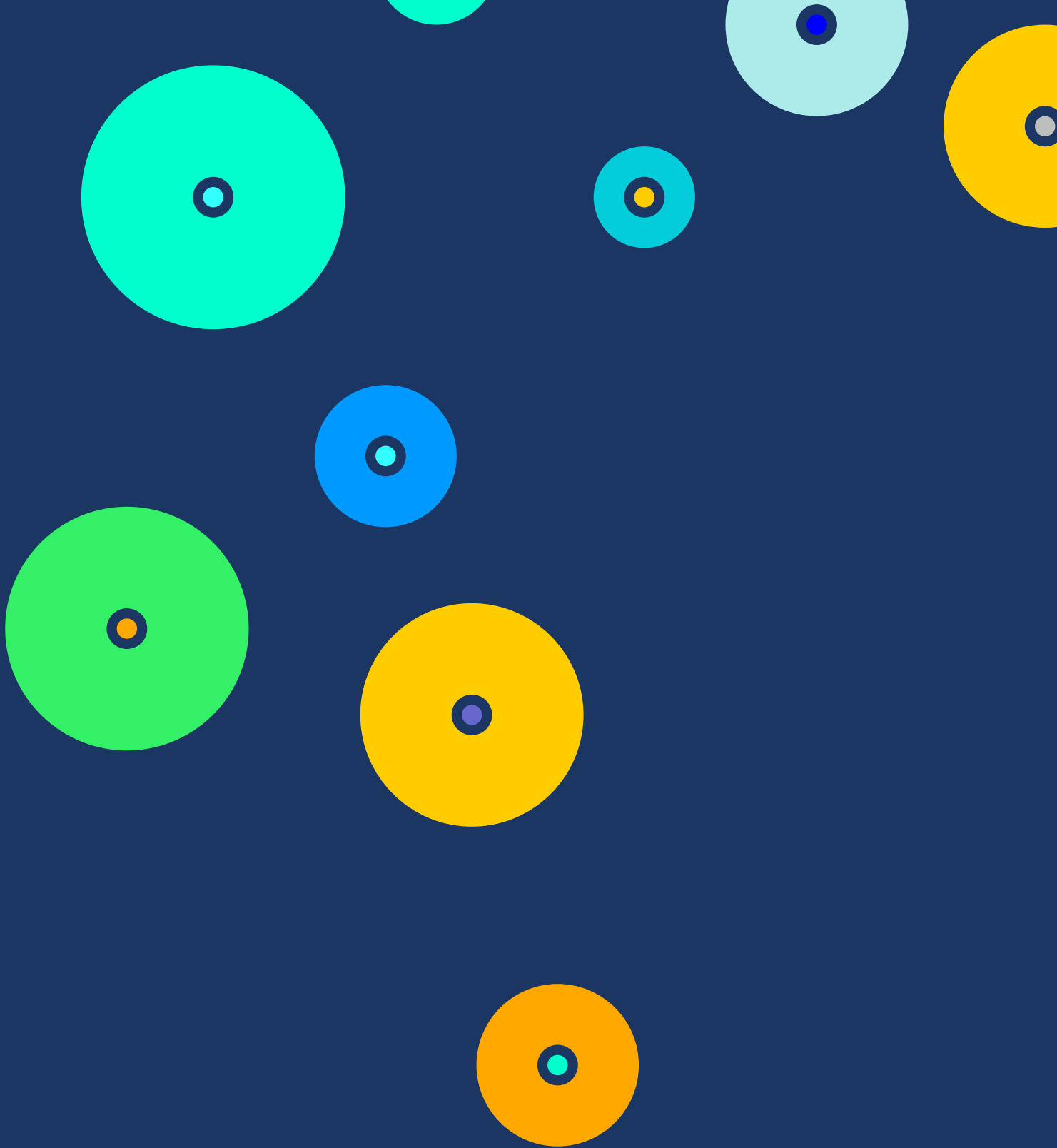


Contact the Royal Commission via [email](#), telephone or mail.

RoyalCommissionECEC@sa.gov.au

08 7322 7034

GPO Box 11025, Adelaide SA 5001



Royal Commission *into*
**Early Childhood
Education & Care**