

## Research summary

# Evidence use and evidence-based practices in early childhood education and care

July 2023

## Background

These national research snapshots by the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) aim to understand how evidence is used by educators, teachers and service leaders in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services in Australia.

The Australian ECEC sector has a strong foundation in evidence-based practices through learning frameworks like:

- National Quality Standard (NQS)
- Belonging, Being, Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia
- My Time, Our Place: Framework for School-Aged Care.

This research collects information from educators, teachers and leaders working in ECEC services in Australia about the place research and evidence has in their professional practice and identifies areas where evidence is already having a positive impact, as well as opportunities for further improvement.

## Aim and focus

This research aims to explore ECEC educators', teachers' and service leaders':

- experience with evidence use
- access to research evidence
- confidence in evaluating sources of evidence
- application of evidence to practice and use of evidence-based practices.

It also explores enablers of and barriers to evidence use in ECEC services.

The findings will be used to support the use of evidence-based practices in ECEC. This will enhance the quality of ECEC services in a way that caters to specific contexts and cohorts and aligns with evidence-based theories of children's learning and development.

## Methods

These snapshots are based on findings from:

- AERO's evidence use survey
- a rapid review of existing literature on evidence use
- early findings from interviews with educators, teachers and leaders
- an analysis of NQS data.

## Key findings

### Evidence use in ECEC services

This research found that ECEC educators, teachers and leaders primarily rely on practitioner-generated evidence rather than research evidence to inform their practice. Academic research is often used to affirm existing practices, address gaps, and support conversations with parents and professionals.

### Evidence-based practices in ECEC services

Most ECEC services are rated as 'Meeting NQS' or above overall, but only one-third of services are ranked as 'Exceeding NQS' for each quality area. Key findings at quality-area level include:

- many services could support quality improvement by drawing on evidence-based practices related to the 3 NQS 'Exceeding' themes
- educators, teachers and leaders in some service types are more confident with pedagogy than assessment
- relationships with children are at the forefront of most ECEC services
- most ECEC services are strong in building partnerships with families.

### Barriers and enablers to evidence use in ECEC services

Barriers to evidence use in ECEC at the system and service levels include:

- the absence of enablers
- workload pressures
- lack of time and access to professional learning
- differences in terminology between sectors
- differences in approaches to assessment and reporting between sectors (such as ECEC, outside school hours care and schools).

Barriers to evidence use for individual educators, teachers and leaders in ECEC services include:

- time constraints
- differing perceptions of roles and responsibilities
- lack of knowledge and skills.

Key factors that enable effective evidence use in ECEC services include:

- a culture of evidence use
- leadership support
- professional learning
- staff confidence to use evidence.

## Recommendations

This research provides valuable insights for improving evidence use and evidence-based practices by educators, teachers and leaders in ECEC services. Recommendations from this research include:

- promoting the purpose of evidence use
- improving the capacity of service leadership to support evidence use within the service
- targeting effective professional learning to support the use of evidence in practice
- clarifying terminology in relation to evidence use
- addressing barriers at different levels.

By implementing these recommendations, ECEC services can strengthen quality practices, improving outcomes for children.