

Supporting Children and Families in the Early Years

A Compact between DET, DHHS and Local Government (represented by MAV)

2017-2027

Victorian and Local Government working together in new ways with families, services and communities to give all children the best start in life

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Signed by:



Gill Callister
Secretary
on behalf of the Department of Education and Training



Kym Peake
Secretary
on behalf of the Department of Health and Human Services



Rob Spence
Chief Executive Officer of the Municipal Association of Victoria
on behalf of local government in Victoria

on the 28th day of April 2017

PREAMBLE

1. The Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET), the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and local government, represented by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), enter into this Compact to strengthen the collaborative relationship between these departments and local government in the planning, development and provision of early years services. This Compact demonstrates a shared focus on improving and sustaining outcomes for children and families across all Victorian communities.
2. A well-connected, accessible and effective service system supports families to raise happy and healthy children who can achieve their potential. A collaborative and effective relationship between state and local government provides a foundation for strengthening services for children and families.
3. Consultations with families and those who work in early years services have shown that we need more consistent, measurable and accountable service delivery. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities, joint planning and consistent goals and coordination across the early years services system will support more effective service delivery that maximises benefits for children and families.
4. This Compact aims to lay further foundations for a system that is robust, child-centred and straightforward to navigate, and allows for transition between services when families need them. It recognises the shared accountability of governments and outlines shared objectives and outcomes.
5. State and Local Government would welcome the Commonwealth agreeing to the principles and priorities as outlined in this Compact, recognising the important role the Commonwealth has in providing support to children and families through funding and broad policy settings.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER AGREEMENTS

6. This Compact is not intended to supersede or alter existing contractual arrangements or other agreements between the DET, DHHS and councils or MAV.
7. The Victorian State-Local Government Agreement (VSLGA) 2014 provides an overarching framework to strengthen state-local government relations by committing to improved and sustained levels of communication, consultation and cooperation. It outlines a commitment by both parties to progress social, economic and environmental outcomes for Victorian communities.
8. Sitting beneath the VSLGA, DET and DHHS have bilateral agreements with the MAV: the MAV/DEECD (now DET) Partnership Agreement 2013-17 and the Partnership Protocol between the Department of Human Services, Department of Health (now DHHS) and the MAV 2010. Both of these agreements commit to a formal partnership that is based on a spirit of cooperation and a shared commitment to achieve better learning, health and well-being outcomes for the Victorian community.
9. This Compact sits beneath these agreements and focusses on improving outcomes for children from the antenatal period up to school entry and their families.
10. The parties will continue to work with the Commonwealth Government to promote policy reforms that are of a national significance, or that need coordinated action by all Australian governments.
11. This Compact is not a legally binding agreement, but is negotiated and entered into in good faith by the parties and shall be respected accordingly.
12. The parties agree that in the event of a party stating that one or more undertakings in the

Compact is not being fulfilled, the parties will use best endeavors to ensure that the undertaking is satisfied or that an alternative solution is agreed.

PURPOSE OF THE COMPACT

13. The Compact is between state and local government who together provide collective stewardship of the early years system.
14. The purpose of the Compact is to:
 - clarify state and local government **roles and responsibilities** in the planning, funding and delivery of early years services for children from the antenatal period up to school entry;
 - strengthen a shared focus on **improving outcomes** for all children across Victoria supported by sharing of evidence, results and best practice;
 - establish a **strategic foundation** for the effective planning and delivery of agreed system reforms, including the creation of a more connected service system that has sufficient flexibility to support local innovation and responses;
 - support timely identification of **vulnerable children**, effective inclusion and sustained engagement of families in universal services and supported referral to other services;
 - build community understanding of the **importance of the early years** and how families can support their children’s learning, health and development; and
 - provide **consistency** in the availability, accessibility, quality and connectedness of services for young children and their families, across locations in Victoria.

OUTCOMES

15. Through this Compact, the parties seek the following **outcomes** for Victoria’s children and their families:



ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PARTIES

16. This Compact recognises the complementary roles and responsibilities of each party in the collective stewardship of the early years system. It also acknowledges the role of the Commonwealth Government and non-government service providers as key players in achieving outcomes.

The Department of Education and Training supports the learning, development, health and wellbeing of Victorian children through the development of state-wide policy and the provision of funding, planning and regulation for early years services and the transition of children from early years services to schools.

The Department of Health and Human Services supports the health and wellbeing of Victorian children through the development of state-wide policy and the funding, planning and delivery of health, human services and sport and recreation programs and services that support children and their families. This includes through services that protect children, build family capability and address trauma.

Local Government has a statutory and social responsibility for planning for its local community. It supports the learning, health and wellbeing of Victorian children and families through determining policy at a local level. There are 79 local councils in Victoria. Each one of these takes a place-based approach to planning, funding and infrastructure investment, as well as the coordination and delivery of services for children and families.

The Municipal Association of Victoria has the statutory responsibility to promote the interests of local government and represents all councils.

PRINCIPLES

17. The parties to this Compact commit to working together in new ways to improve outcomes for children and families by:
- Identifying and implementing what is working well and changing what is not
 - Using a systems- and placed-based approach to deliver well-connected, inclusive and high quality services tailored to local communities, with a particular focus on vulnerable children and families
 - Systemic sharing and analysis of information, data and evidence
 - Engaging families and children in decision making about the services and supports they need
 - Working in a transparent and mutually accountable way to design, plan and deliver on agreed priorities, respecting each party's roles and responsibilities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

18. The following strategic priorities will be the focus of collaborative efforts between the parties of this Compact:
- **Driving better outcomes** - better use of evidence and evaluation to continuously improve the planning, delivery and practice of services to drive stronger outcomes
 - **A more coherent and empowering system** - build a more consistent, capable and connected early years system that responds to families' health and wellbeing needs and

preferences

- **Stronger place-based governance and planning** - responding to the needs of local communities and Victoria's changing population
- **Promoting early childhood** - raising family and community awareness of the importance of early childhood health, learning and development
- **Supporting service quality** - build a quality system that supports all Victorian children and their families
- **More inclusive services** - improve early identification and support for all children, including children at risk; vulnerable children and families; and children with health, disability and developmental needs.

IMPLEMENTATION

19. Implementation of the strategic priorities will be achieved through Implementation Agreements and other joint activities aligned with agreed local/state government priorities. These Agreements will acknowledge the obligations and responsibilities of the parties under existing agreements and as such will not seek to increase or extend those without appropriate consultation.
20. Strategic priorities will be developed in collaboration between the parties and agreed to annually by the Compact Board. These priorities may include the areas of:
 - Child and family health and development
 - Early childhood education and care
 - Connected care
 - Place based planning.
21. Implementation Agreements will be developed as required and will be specific, detailed and establish joint accountability measures for monitoring and reporting on outcomes.
22. All Implementation Agreements will:
 - outline implementation roles and responsibilities of each government partner
 - directly relate to the Compact's vision, principles, outcomes, and strategic priorities
 - build on existing practice frameworks and new initiatives while allowing flexibility to respond to local needs and to innovate
 - seek to achieve a stronger, more consistent early years system, while recognising the need for flexibility for Local Government in making decisions about the best ways to deliver services according to local need, council policy and capacity.

GOVERNANCE

23. A high-level Compact Board with representatives of DET, DHHS MAV and Local Government will be established to monitor and review the implementation of the Compact and related Implementation Agreements. This will include reviewing how the partnership is achieving the Compact Purpose and Principles including the partnership's performance against outcome measures. This group will meet twice yearly.
24. A Compact Steering Group with representatives of DHHS, DET, Local Government and MAV will be established to provide advice to the Compact Board on the design of the Implementation Agreements and processes to support the monitoring and review of the Compact. This group will meet quarterly.