



Exposure Draft: Thrive by Five Early Childhood Guarantee Bill 2024

Submission to Minderoo Foundation

May 2024

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL) supports the inclusion of an early childhood guarantee in legislation and commends Minderoo Foundation for taking tangible steps towards the realisation of this objective. At BSL, we know that enabling every child to thrive in early childhood is central to advancing an Australia free of poverty. Our current system is complex, difficult to navigate and is not achieving the outcomes we need. Every child has the right to the best start in life and, if passed, this Bill would help this to become a reality.

BSL supports the intent of the Thrive by Five Early Childhood Guarantee Bill 2024. Outlined below are some suggested areas where the Bill could be clarified, simplified and strengthened.

Suggested changes

The Dictionary and associated wording

To reduce repetition and assist with clarity, BSL suggests that the Early Childhood Services definition be incorporated into the definition of Early Childhood Development and this definition then be renamed 'Early Childhood Development System'.

BSL also recommends that references to Family Tax Benefit (FTB) payments throughout be removed. FTB payments are targeted rather than universal payments and as such do not support all families to meet their needs. Removing the definition of Family Benefits and removing references to FTB payments throughout could be facilitated by replacing the term 'family benefits' with the broader non-specific term 'parenting supports' or similar.

Consistent with this, the definition of early childhood development could read:

In this Act *Early Childhood Development System* means early childhood services and ~~family benefits~~ **parenting supports** provided specifically to young children and families **from pre-birth to five years of age**, including but not limited to early childhood education and care (including long day care, family day care, **occasional care**, out-of-school hours care, preschool), maternal and child health, paid parental leave and other services that may exist within communities, such as playgroups, ~~and~~ First Nations services, **and child and family focused community programs**.

Finally, we suggest replacing the word 'framework' with 'system' for consistency and clarity throughout.

Schedule 1 – Thrive by Five Principles

BSL recommends:

- the Schedule be renamed ‘Thrive by Five Guarantee’ and the first sentence amended to read ‘These entitlements constitute the Thrive by Five Guarantee’ or similar. We find the term ‘principles’ inaccurate in this context as the items listed are really the base level requirements for early childhood services and parenting supports to be guaranteed to all Australians. Consistent with this, we suggest references to ‘Thrive by Five Principles’ throughout the Bill be changed to ‘Thrive by Five Entitlements’ or similar.
- amending point 3.2 to replace the existing text with ‘low cost for all families’. BSL considers it more appropriate for the details of price schedules and frameworks to be specified in regulation or a similar instrument.