





PART TWO:

# Essential services for young children

Part two presents a series of nine essays that motivate for a package of essential services and support for young children and their caregivers, in order to step up national development.

The essays motivate for:

- an essential package of services for young children
- an effective ECD system
- improved delivery of nutritional support services
- an expanded role for health care services
- greater support for caregivers
- effective parenting programmes
- increased access to early learning programmes
- quality schooling in the foundation phase
- important next steps to enhance service delivery

# Overview

Part 2 motivates for early investment in the lives of young children and presents a package of *essential services and support for young children* in order to enhance their developmental outcomes and improve their life chances, thereby significantly contributing to national development in the long run.

## **1. Getting the basics right: An essential package of services and support for ECD**

(pages 26 – 33)

Early childhood development services play a critical role in mitigating the effects of poverty and giving South Africa's children the best start in life. This essay outlines an essential package of services for young children that can be delivered through a variety of different channels in order to support children and caregivers throughout the early childhood period – from conception to the foundation phase of schooling.

## **2. Strengthening ECD service delivery: Addressing systemic challenges**

(pages 34 – 43)

South Africa needs to address a range of systemic challenges in order to improve quality and ensure more equitable access to ECD services. This essay outlines the key ingredients for an effective ECD system which include: enabling policies, population-based planning, good governance, adequate resourcing and effective service delivery at local level.

## **3. Promoting healthy growth: Strengthening nutritional support for mothers, infants and children**

(pages 44 – 49)

Good nutrition in the first 1,000 days of life is associated with improved health and education outcomes so the high levels of malnutrition amongst young children in South Africa is a serious concern. This essay outlines a series of six key interventions that are known to address malnutrition and identifies a number of different strategies to ensure these interventions are extended to all young children, especially those most in need.

## **4. Beyond survival: The role of health care in promoting ECD**

(pages 50 – 55)

This essay outlines a range of interventions that can be integrated within a broader package of maternal and child health services to promote children's development, and stresses the need to address systemic barriers and to shift thinking towards supporting the well-child. It also motivates for the improvement of early intervention and referral systems to support children at risk.

## **5. Caring for the caregiver: A framework for support**

(pages 56 – 61)

The health and wellbeing of caregivers is the single most important contributor to children's survival and development. Yet poverty, illness, violence and social isolation can affect caregivers' ability to cope and care for children. This essay motivates for caregivers' access to good health care, nutrition, child care, psycho-social and material support so that they are better able to respond to their children's needs.

## **6. Rising to the challenge: Towards effective parenting programmes**

(pages 62 – 65)

Parenting programmes can help caregivers understand how to support children at different stages of development, manage their children's behaviour and build their self-esteem. There are very few parenting programmes in South Africa – particularly in poor and rural settings, and those that exist struggle to provide services effectively. This essay offers possibilities for strengthening and extending the delivery of parenting programmes in South Africa.

## **7. Learning begins at birth: Improving access to early learning**

(pages 66 – 71)

Children from birth to five years are learning at a rapid rate. While younger children learn best within the home environment, this essay argues that older children (3 – 5 years) benefit from group programmes where a focus on emerging literacy and numeracy skills provides a strong foundation for school readiness. The essay motivates for a multi-pronged approach to the delivery of quality early learning programmes.

## **8. Building strong foundations: Improving the quality of early education**

(pages 72 – 77)

While South Africa has made significant progress in increasing access to grade R and schooling in the foundation phase, learner performance is poor. This essay argues that the quality of children's early schooling needs to be addressed before considering introducing an additional year of preschool education, and that teacher education is key to improving outcomes.

## **9. ECD services in South Africa: What are the next steps?**

(pages 78 – 81)

This essay highlights key conceptual shifts that need to underpin future policy and programme development, and identifies critical next steps to address service gaps, improve service delivery and reach priority groups.



It is vital that affordable and well-resourced early childhood development programmes reach children in rural areas.

### Box: Key terms

**Early childhood development:** The processes by which children from conception to at least nine years grow and thrive – physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially.<sup>1</sup>

**Primary caregiver:** The person primarily responsible for the daily care and well-being of a child.

**ECD service:** An ECD *service* promotes the development of young children, and is usually provided by someone who is not the child's caregiver.

**ECD programme:** An ECD *programme* consists of planned activities, offered within an ECD service, such as a maternal and child health service, to provide interventions to support a child's development.

**Centre-based services:** ECD services that are provided at a facility, such as an ECD centre.

**Non-centre-based services:** ECD services that are provided in communities or family homes. They are also referred to as home- and community-based services or out-of-centre

services. They include home-visiting services, playgroups and toy and book libraries.

**Integrated:** An integrated approach to service delivery involves thinking about the whole child and what is needed to meet the child's physical, psychological and social needs. Integrated services often involve partnerships between different role-players. Formal integrated services are usually jointly funded, managed, implemented and evaluated and operate seamlessly at a local level.<sup>2</sup>

**Inter-sectoral:** Two or more sectors such as health, education and social development working closely together to ensure that the full range of children's needs is met.

**Multisectoral:** More than one sector involved in the delivery of services to young children.

**Delivery channels/platforms:** The vehicle or mechanism through which an ECD service is delivered. These may include home visits, ECD centres, health facilities and playgroups.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from: Department of Education (2001) *Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education: Meeting the challenges of early childhood development in South Africa*. Pretoria: DoE.

<sup>2</sup> Vargas-Barón E (2009) *Going to Scale: Early Childhood Development in Latin America. Designing Successful and Sustainable ECD Programs with National-level Coverage*. Washington, DC: Institute for Reconstruction and International Security through Education.