



2016/17 State Budget Analysis: The critical early years

TasCOSS provided advice to State Government to assist it to work towards the following outcome:

All Tasmanian children grow up in a safe, supportive and loving environment

Analysis

While TasCOSS acknowledges a number of positive developments in this Budget in this area the Government has yet to articulate a cohesive vision and sufficient funding of support and assistance to Tasmanian children during the vital 'early years'. Without this overarching vision, focus and commitment, the educational, employment and participation outlook for children in our State will not improve.

TasCOSS and the community services sector look forward to working with the Government to develop policy and programs that offer genuine support and assistance to children and families in the critical first years of life.

TasCOSS welcomes those initiatives in this Budget that do support children in their early years, and their families, including:

- child protection system reforms that appear to acknowledge the importance of the early years with an increased focus on intervening early, even before birth, with support and assistance.
- funding allocated for the implementation of the new *Education Act*, including providing for the extension of school attendance age. However, we believe the allocations from 2019/20 will need careful monitoring to ensure sufficient funds are provided for teachers and classrooms, as well as to support both younger and older students.
- funding for the Learning for Life program and for School Community Hubs is also welcome as both focus not only on supporting engagement in education from the early years, but also on involving communities as well as students, families and educators.

The loss of the independent Tasmanian Early Years Foundation (TEYF) means the loss of sector development, research, professional development and training work in this vital area. TEYF's grants program funded many practical, cross-sectorial, place-based initiatives that supported communities, families and children specifically in the early years. This is a significant loss that provides meagre savings for the Government.

Initiatives

Education Act review

Costs associated with implementation of the new *Education Act* (not yet in force) were allocated in this Budget, including \$4.5Million for both 2016/17 and the following year, for an implementation team to oversee the transition from the old Act. Also allocated is \$6.3Million per annum from 2019/20 to meet

additional teaching and other costs associated with the extension of school age at both ends of schooling (commencing in the 2020 school year).

Learning for Life & School Community Hubs

Funding of \$1.6Million over four years has been provided as a co-investment between the Government and the Smith Family for programs that focus on encouraging engagement in education from the early years to tertiary level. The School Community Hubs concept is based on the understanding that improving educational outcomes cannot be achieved by a single organisation and must take account of cultural factors, attitudes and relationships. This year's allocation is \$400k.

Child Protection system redesign—*Strong Families, Safe Kids*

While not specifically and fully an early years initiative, the Child Protection system redesign involves an increased focus on intervening early, even before birth, and providing support and assistance to families and children to prevent problems occurring at a later time.

\$20Million over four years has been allocated to support implementation of a range of strategies identified in the *Strong Families, Safe Kids Implementation Plan*. \$15Million will go to DHHS and \$5Million to the Department of Education for a Student Wellbeing Initiative to provide additional support to children in both government schools and Child & Family Centres.

Gaps

Tasmanian Early Years Foundation (TEYF)

The TEYF was among a number of government-funded boards and foundations identified for abolition by the Government in its first Budget in 2014/15. Despite an announcement ahead of last year's Budget that the TEYF would be assisted to transition to an independent non-government organisation by 2016, no funding has been allocated to enable this.

In addition, the \$500k grants program once administered by the TEYF has also disappeared. This significant divestment of funds to the early years has not been compensated for by any other initiatives in any Government Department.

[More detail can be found in TasCOSS's 2016/17 Budget Priorities Submission](#)