

Vision

Grow Australia is a movement of people that have come together to promote a better future for all Australians. Our vision is a future where all families and communities can raise children who are healthy, have a good education and strong sense of identity and belonging. However, despite Australia's global economic success story, there are still too many communities where not every child can flourish and families feel isolated and disempowered and face entrenched adversity. This has significant societal and financial implications for all Australians.

Across Australia, many communities are now taking charge. They have started long term community-led initiatives to generate greater well-being, connection, and life opportunities for children and adults alike. They know from local and international experience that tailored, community-led and integrated efforts that focus on the early years of life forward get results.

It is a smart investment. A focus on experiences during the early years (i.e., antenatal to 5 years old) provides a strong foundation for success in life. Studies show that every dollar invested on early childhood generates a return of \$7 over time.¹ Investing in our communities to support future generations is good for our society and our economy.

It is time for this grass-roots community-level action to be supported by government, philanthropy, and business in addition to related national, population-level child development and community advancement policies. As a country we are already making significant investments and there are many outstanding examples of innovation and progress. But too often the system is not working to support local people and their communities to make this change. We need to fix it. There is not enough focus on prevention and early intervention, we need more integrated approaches to funding, services and infrastructure, more tailoring to local contexts, as well as more long-term investment in building community capacity. The opportunity is huge. We estimate this approach could unlock \$15B by 2050 to be reinvested to achieve even better health, education and employment outcomes.²

We need to challenge the status quo and reimagine the journey of our children in our communities. Each year, there are 65,000 developmentally vulnerable children counting on us to create a better future.³ The choice is ours.

Principles

The core principles of the Grow Australia movement are:

- **Shifting the balance of power to communities.** Communities should be empowered and supported to lead, make decisions, and own solutions and outcomes, improving accountability overall.
- **Shared goals and solutions are tailored to local needs.** Investments have greater impact when they are aligned to the needs and goals of each unique place and when the community, government, philanthropy and other partners work collectively to common outcomes.
- **Improved lives over time, through strong foundations in the early years of life.** Focus on a child's wellbeing, knowing the earlier we invest in the family and community around that child, the better the social and economic outcomes for individuals, families, communities, and country.
- **Integrated efforts and investment.** The rules, processes, incentives and behaviours across the whole system need to change to remove barriers and integrate silos of governance, funding and effort to deliver resources to communities.

In addition, we believe our success will be underpinned by a long term commitment to work together, learning and improving through iteration and informed by evidence, evaluation and data.

- **Begin now, with a long-term commitment to change.** Build necessary foundations now while acknowledging that entrenched and complex social issues cannot be solved overnight but need 10+ year commitment and resourcing to deliver positive change.

¹ Garcia, Heckman, Leaf, Prados, 'The Life-cycle benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program, 2016.

² Conservative estimate, 2035-2050 based on BCG analysis.

³ Australian Early Childhood Development Census 2016.

- **Collaborate and hold each other accountable.** Resource and organise for collaboration and accountability. Design and deliver more effective solutions through partnering, supported by coordinating organisations (e.g., ‘backbones’⁴).
- **Iterate, evaluate and learn.** Support innovation and implementation of what works by encouraging testing, sharing best practices, and measuring impact and capability development.
- **Enable with data, community voice and evidence.** Better target effort as a result of increased data sharing, establishing means to listen to and act on community voice, and use of evidence and scientific research.

Call to Action

We are calling on all governments, community organisations, philanthropists, businesses, and others to make a long term investment in Australia by empowering communities to provide a better future for their children.

1. **Community-led, early years efforts in priority communities**
 - Invest \$2M per community per year over 10+ years to enable this approach, including actions below
 - Start now by providing backing for 20 “learning communities” where action is already building (agreed by communities, Commonwealth, relevant States/Territories, and key philanthropics)
 - Develop an evidence-informed plan to scale this approach to up to 100 communities across the country over the coming decade
2. **Investing in support for community action and leadership**
 - Support community leadership, organisation and governance so local communities can make decisions and guide investment
 - Build priority capabilities and capacity (e.g., data analysis, evaluation, community mobilisation, service design and commissioning, etc.) through specialist organisations (or ‘intermediaries’)
 - Resource intermediary organisations (e.g., ‘backbones’) to support coordination and collaboration with local, state and national teams and share learning
3. **System change at all levels of government**
 - Establish a temporary reform unit (including Commonwealth, State, and key non-government stakeholders) to design and implement change across all levels of government
 - Within two years, progress institutional changes across all levels of government to ensure this platform is scalable and becomes a norm
 - Tackle systemic barriers identified by community-led action (i.e., governance, decision-making, funding, policy, and data sharing) so the system is accountable to and delivers resourcing to communities
 - Ensure all levels of government have the skills, know-how and authority to work in this new community-led way (e.g., through a government capability building program)
4. **Structures and processes to enable the approach and accountability across all stakeholders**
 - Work across all levels of government to support the effectiveness of community governance, provide authority to access and shape resourcing and ensure accountability to communities (e.g., community access to a combined team of relevant State regional directors and Commonwealth representatives)
 - Establish senior political leadership and accountability for change at the community and system level (e.g., lead State and Commonwealth minister)
 - Invest in data, planning and evaluation capability and infrastructure that is community-focused (e.g., data labs and information platforms)
5. **Independent evidence program to inform future investment and approach**
 - Resource an independent evidence and evaluation partner to look across the system and approach (e.g., research institutes)
 - Capture and share evidence and best practice across all actors and communities

⁴ A ‘backbone’ team is an organisation dedicated to coordinating the various dimensions and collaborators involved in the initiative and supporting activities of community actors; may not be appropriate for all communities

Grow Australia Partnership is comprised of community leaders, community organisations, philanthropics, business leaders, and academics driving change on the ground

Please join us - provide your logo or signature of support to
growaustralia2018@gmail.com

Grow Australia is a movement to advance communities that are tackling adversity and inequality:

- *By giving children the best start in life*
- *Through evidence-based efforts that are integrated and tailored to local needs*
- *With the people in the community leading and driving the change*
- *Working together with government, philanthropists, non-governmental organisations, scientific research, and business*

DRAFT