



**THRIVE
BY FIVE**

DADS' ACTION PLAN FOR THE EARLY YEARS

Fathers demand action in the early years to ensure all kids have the best start in life.

The early years are critical to children's healthy development. During the first five years of life, the human brain develops to 90 percent of its full size. And the quality of care during these early years, both at home and in the early learning system, significantly influences the health, learning and wellbeing of children throughout their lives.

What fathers do for their children during this crucial time is important.



Intergenerational shifts in parenting roles and responsibilities have seen fathers taking a more active role in caring for young children. And the quality and quantity of these interactions have important and enduring influence on children.

However, fathers remain poorly supported by governments and employers, and are subject to stereotyping and old-fashioned attitudes that undermine progress toward a more equitable division of care and workforce participation between men and women that best support our children.

An alliance of organisations from across Australia have come together to form the Dad's Action Group, to make it clear that fathers demand action on the early years, including more tailored and equitable support for men to be engaged and present carers in their children's lives.

If we give fathers the tools and support they need to be the best parents they can be, everyone benefits.

- More engaged and present fathers supporting the health, learning and wellbeing of their children.
- Families will be more cohesive and relationships will be stronger.
- Fathers and their partners will enjoy improved mental and physical wellbeing.
- Families and the economy will enjoy the financial benefits of increased workforce diversity and participation.
- All of the above support children's healthy development and ensure our children have best start in life.

The Dad's Action Group has a five-point plan to supercharge fathers' contributions to the early years and help ensure all children can reach their full potential.

1

A national strategy to support fathers to take an equal share of parenting, including a major education campaign for businesses and families.

When men take greater responsibility for parenting and spend significant time playing with, caring for, and talking to their kids, it significantly increases the wellbeing of children.

Unfortunately, there are still many structural and cultural barriers that make this hard for some fathers and families, like workplace flexibility, financial pressures, and gender stereotypes. These pervasive challenges limit the opportunity for fathers to nurture and can discourage parents from sharing roles and responsibilities in ways that work best for families and support the health, learning and wellbeing of children.

Policy and practice must encourage and support long-term cultural change in the workplace and at home that enables fathers to get more involved in the delivery of quality parenting. This change requires a coordinated national strategy and consistent effort in public education.

2

Increased investment into tailored perinatal education and parenting support for fathers during the period from pregnancy to 5 years.

Fathers have the best chance of helping raise healthy children when they have access to quality parenting education and support. Fathers who are well-supported in the first five years of their children's lives are also more likely to continue to be positively involved in their children's lives through later childhood and beyond.

An accessible program of education and support for fathers during the period of pregnancy, birth and early childhood is an important first step. This program needs to be developed to meet the needs of fathers, evaluated on paternal data and delivered in ways that work for families across the nation.

3

Twelve weeks of federally-funded paid parental leave for fathers and non-birthing parents that does not detract from mother's parental leave entitlements and is economically viable, so that families choose to 'use it' rather than 'lose it'.

Families need decent paid parental leave for fathers and non-birthing parents so fathers can meaningfully contribute and participate in the care of their children.

The time that fathers spend caring for and getting to know their babies and young children changes fathers including improving empathy, nurturing, and attachment. Children need their fathers to have this opportunity.

Quality time at home in the early years sets the foundation for a family. Where caring responsibilities are equitably distributed between parents, fathers can develop knowledge, skills and relationships that enable close, sensitive, warm and enduring family connections which ultimately support children's health and development.

4

A commitment at National Cabinet to develop, implement and fund universal access to a high-quality and affordable early learning system for all children regardless of location or circumstances.

Fathers and non-birthing parents understand the value of early childhood education and want leadership from both State and Federal governments to design the system that can meet the future needs of families and the economy. Fathers also know that truly accessible early childhood education and care reduces economic pressures on families. Fathers around the country are joining with Thrive by Five to demand the collaboration and action at the national level to develop, implement and fund universal access to a high-quality and affordable early learning system.

5

A national early childhood workforce strategy that encourages male participation.

Children benefit from the opportunity to engage with caring and sensitive men during the early years and male early educators can play a huge role in modelling healthy relationships.

Cultural change that promotes and supports male participation in early childhood education and care will be accelerated by workforce strategies that value all dedicated early childhood educators with equal pay, equal qualifications and respect.

The new workforce strategy must fix the problems in the qualification system and employment awards to encourage recruitment and retention of male early childhood educators, which will ultimately support the health, learning and wellbeing of our children.



ENDORISING ORGANISATIONS



Dads Group



Australian Association for Men in Early Childhood



Welcoming Australia



Playgroup Victoria



The Parenthood



University of South Australia



University of South Australia - MENTor program



Australian Fatherhood Research Consortium



The Fathering Project



The Wiggles



KPMG



Support for Fathers



Minderoo Foundation



The University of Newcastle



LifeEd NSW



Playgroup NSW



SSI



Turbans 4 Australia

