

Preparing for primary

Maximising learning opportunities in the early years

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Mitchell Institute – focus on policy & impact

THE PROBLEM

22% not prepared for school



28% don't have foundational literacy & numeracy skills



26% don't attain Year 12 or equivalent by 19



26% 24 year olds not full time learning or earning



WHAT WE'RE DOING

Delivering policy solutions for quality early education



Developing great teachers and transforming schools



Designing a better and fairer vocational and higher education model



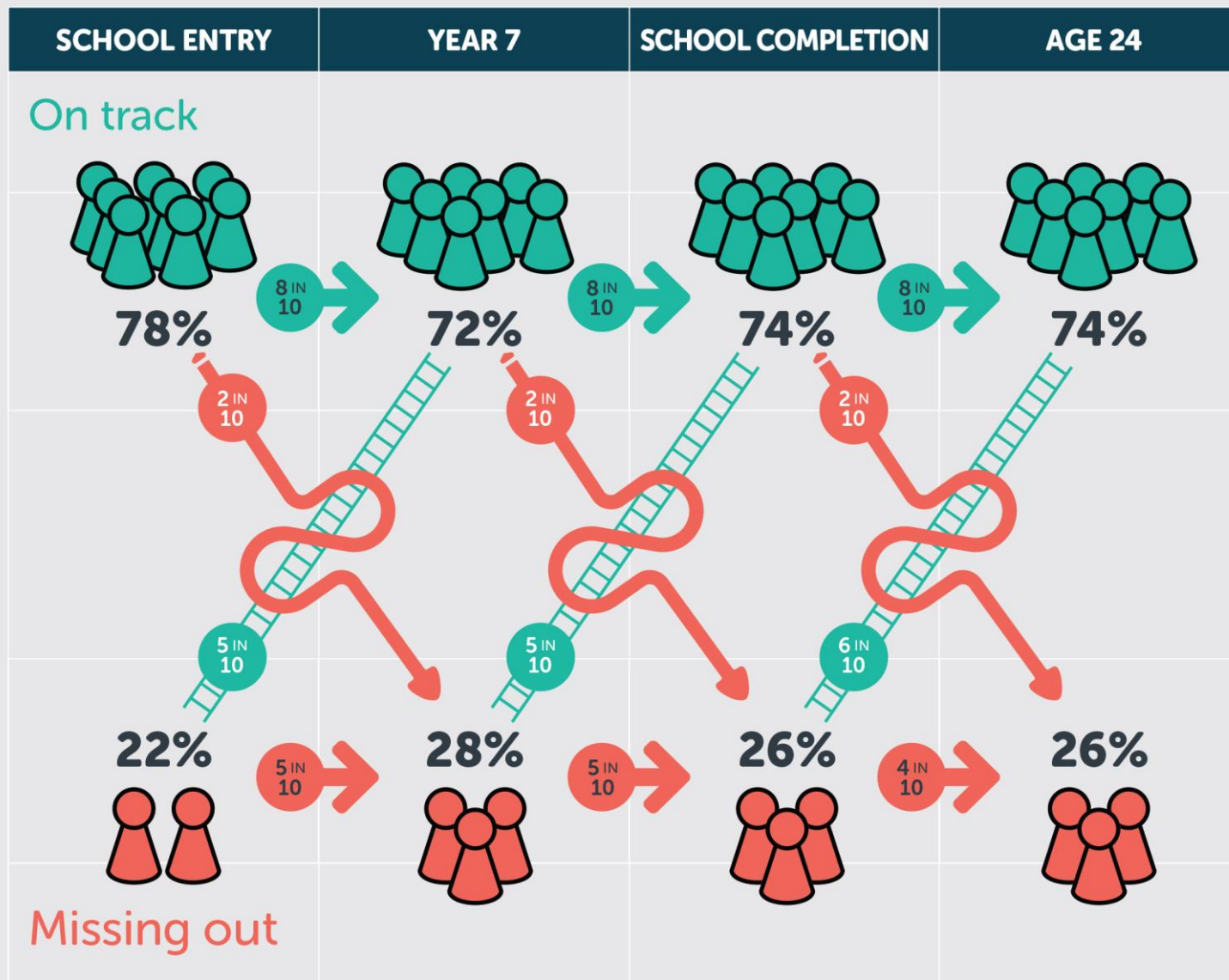
IMPACT

All kids ready for learning

Curious, creative & resilient learners

Entrepreneurial and skilled workers

Index of educational opportunity in Australia 2015



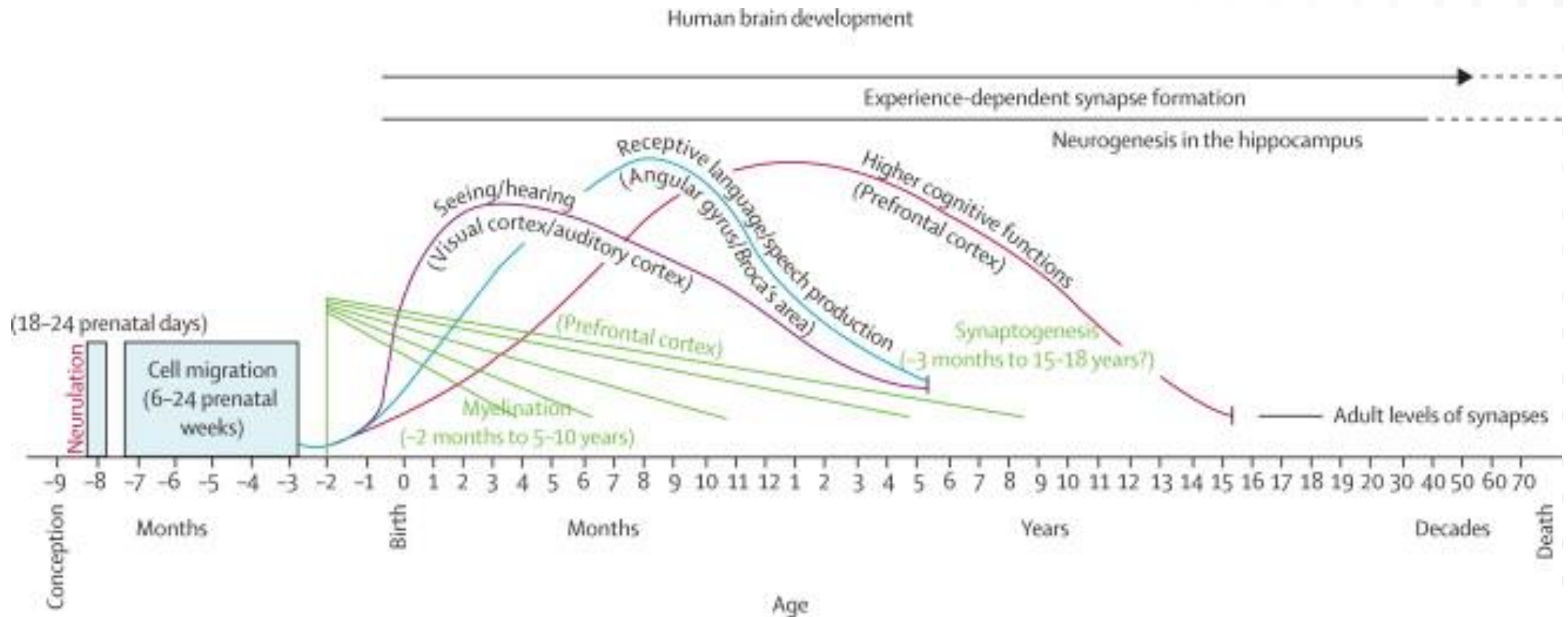
KEY

This index measures how many students are on track and missing out at four milestones, and who catches up and slips behind.

Source: *Educational opportunity in Australia 2015: Who succeeds and who misses out*. Mitchell Institute 2015

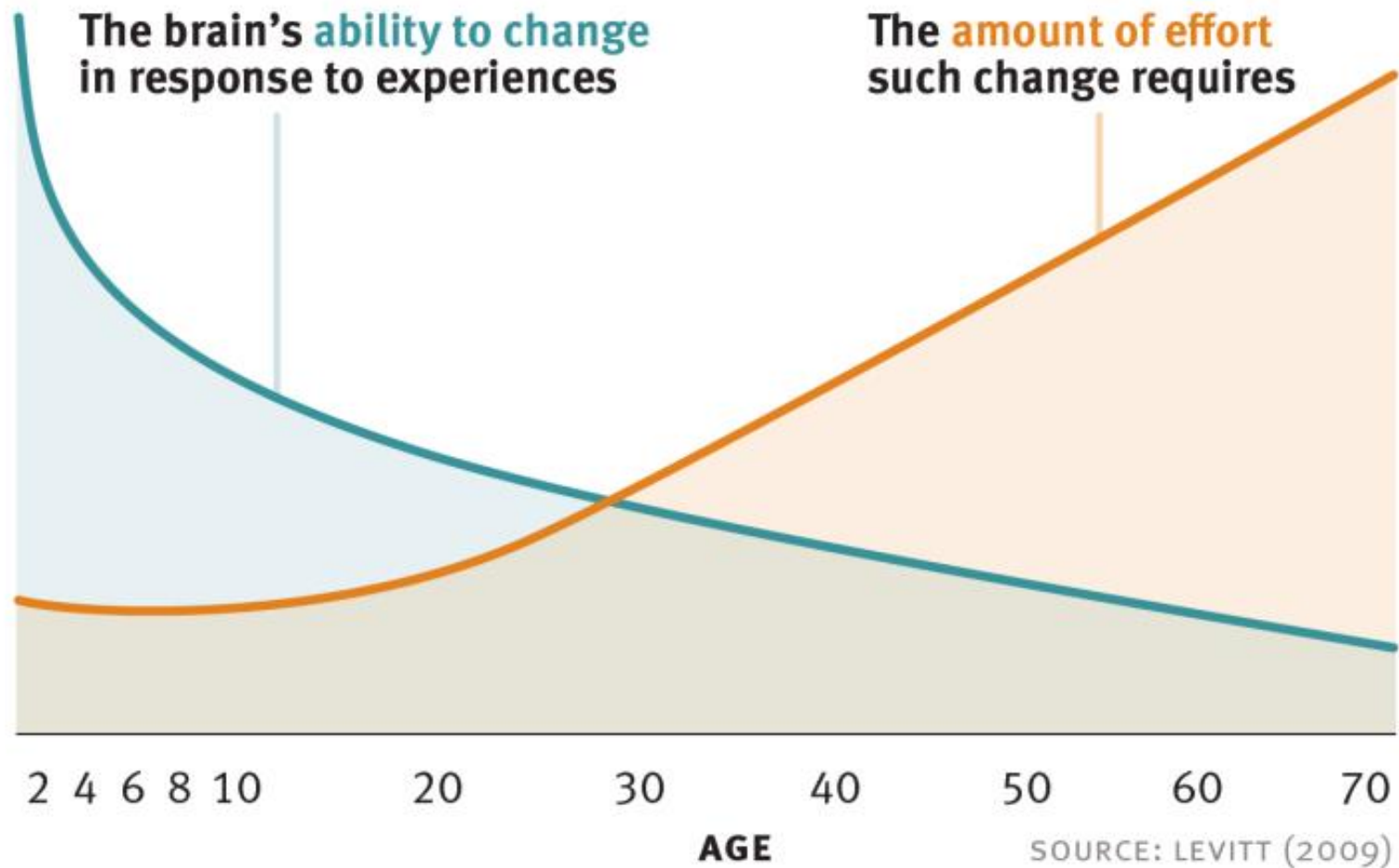
- Students who are on track
- Students who are off track
- Students who catch up between milestones
- Students who slip behind between milestones

Learning & development in the first 5 years



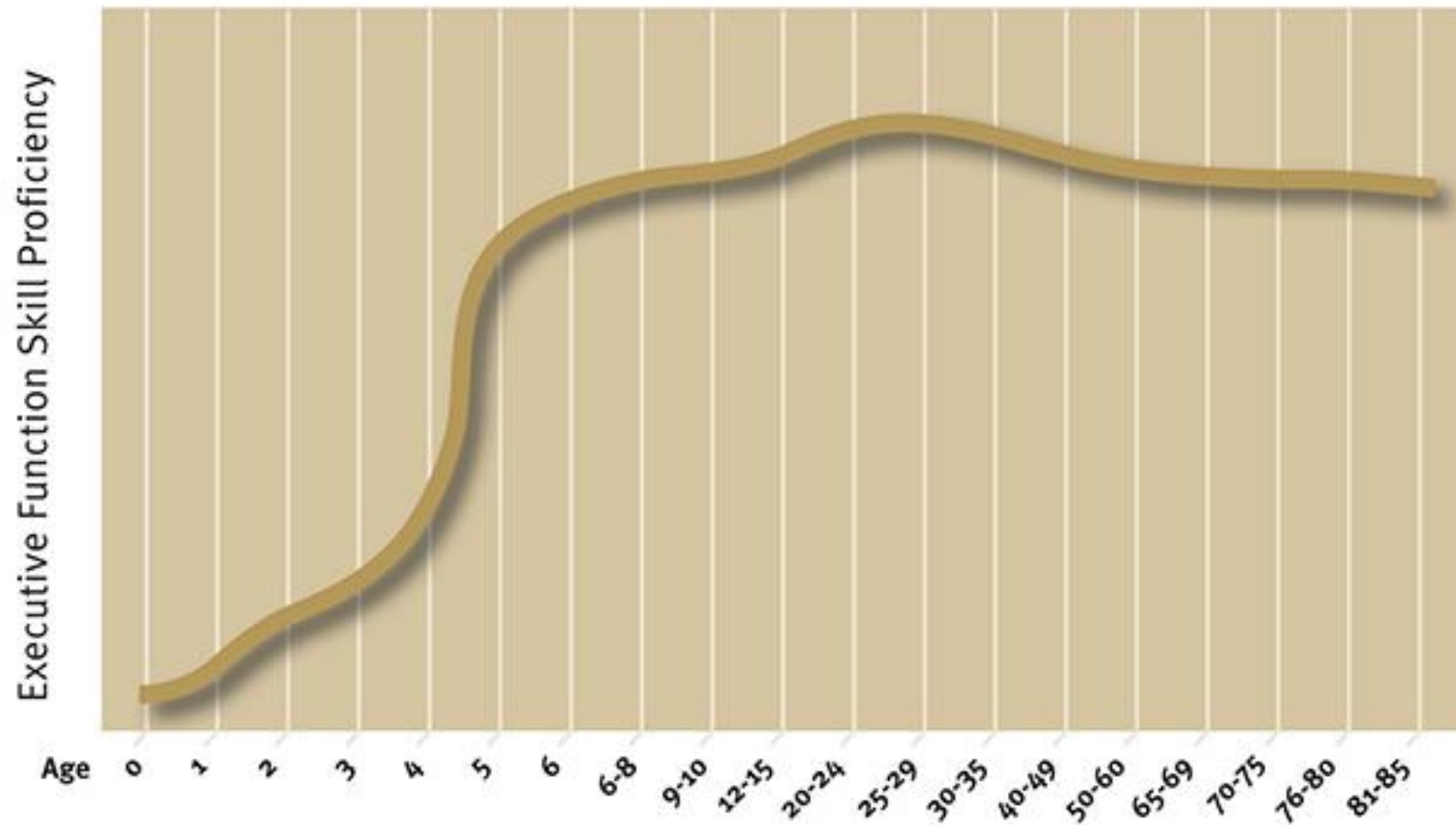
Thompson, R.A., Nelson, C.A. (2001). Developmental science and the media: early brain development. *Am Psychol*, **56**: 5–15.

Neuroplasticity



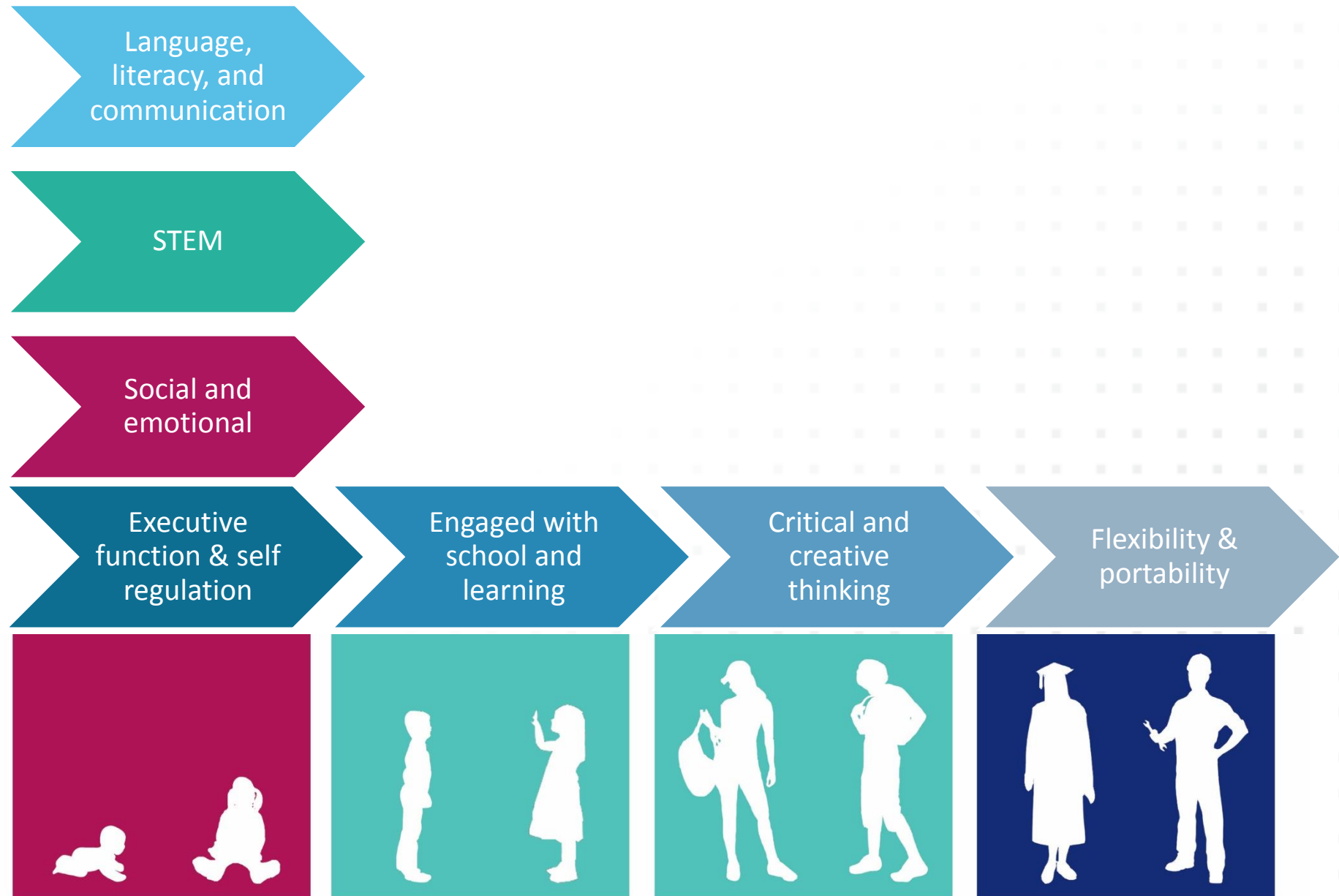
Why do the early years matter?

Executive Function Skills Build Into the Early Adult Years



Center on the Developing Child (2012). *Executive Function* (InBrief). Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.

Skills & knowledge young children need



Early language learning

- Language development is crucial: acquisition of vocabulary and communication skills
- Predicts children's success in learning to read, which is foundational to a range of academic skills
- Language acquisition -> the means by which other skills are acquired
- Early gaps increase over time – “children who have better language skills are better able to acquire further language skills over time” (Stanovich, 1986)
- How: exposure to speech, quality of speech, relevant speech, attention, “Serve and return”, reading

Burger, K. (2015). "Effective early childhood care and education: Successful approaches and didactic strategies for fostering child development." European Early Childhood Education Research Journal **23**(5): 743-760.

Gaps in quality at home and in ECEC

“There is a large gap in the level of quality (instructional support and emotional support) experienced by children from low and high socioeconomic families when they are aged 3-4 years. This gap evens out as children get older, and the gap between high and low socioeconomic families also reduces.”

Quality is key in Early Childhood Education in Australia

www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/papers/quality-key-early-childhood-education-australia/

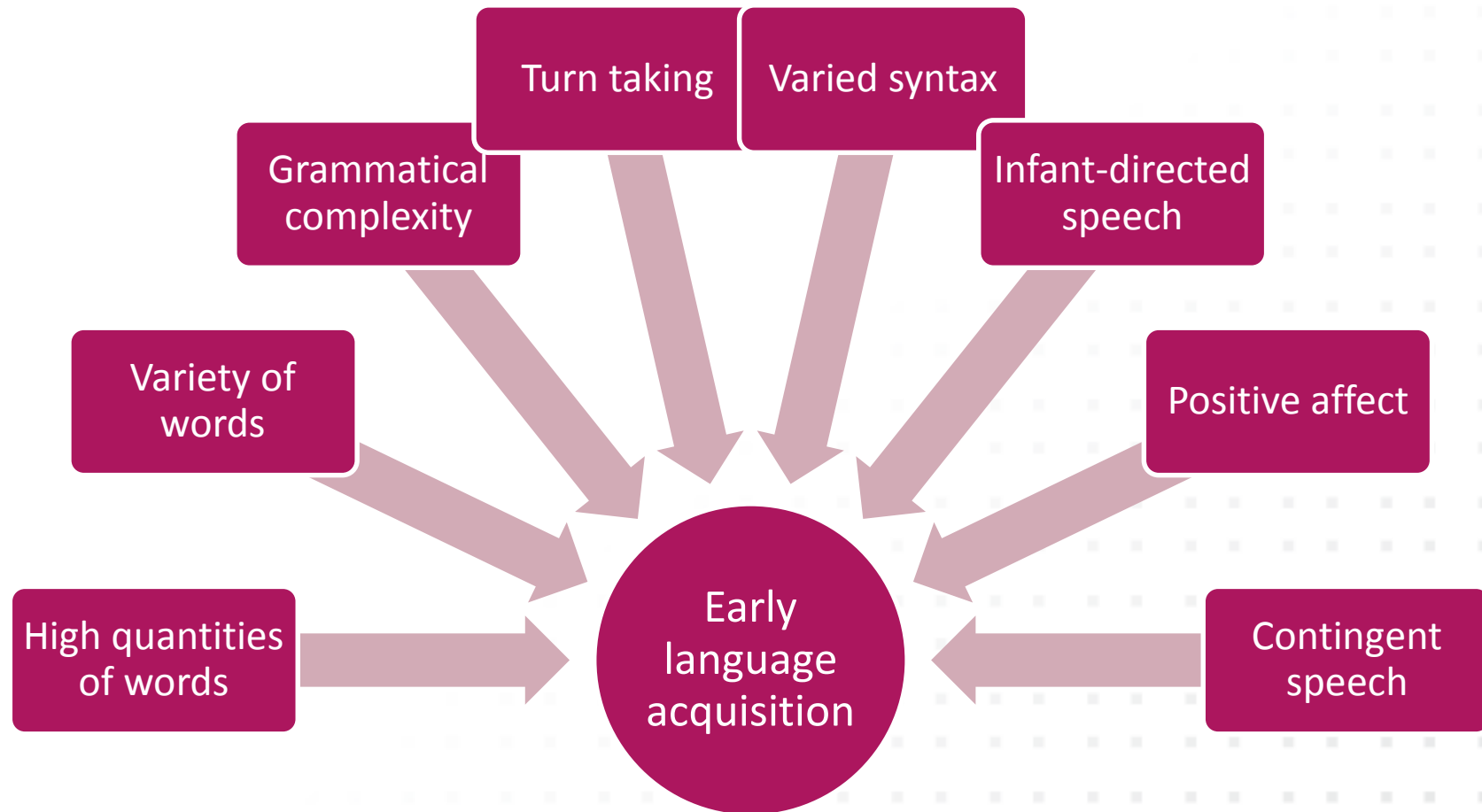
Bottom 25% of services:

< 11 words spoken
per minute

Top 25% of services:

> 40 words spoken
per minute

Keys to early language acquisition



Head Zauche, L. et al (2017). The Power of Language Nutrition for Children's Brain Development, Health, and Future Academic Achievement. [J Pediatr Health Care](#). 31(4):493-503. doi: 10.1016/j.pedhc.2017.01.007.

http://www.nursinglibrary.org/vhl/bitstream/10755/602027/1/2_Head_L_p72443_1.pdf

Reading on repeat

"Neural research shows that when parents and caregivers interact verbally with children—which includes reading to them—kids learn a great deal more than we ever thought possible," says G. Reid Lyon, Ph.D., chief of the child development and behavior branch of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in Bethesda, MD. These gains range from improved logic skills to lower stress levels. But perhaps the most profound benefit discovered in recent years is the way bedtime stories can rewire children's brains to quicken their mastery of language.

- *Patti Jones (2017) The Brainy Benefits of Bedtime Stories.*
<http://www.parents.com/fun/entertainment/books/the-brainy-benefits-of-bedtime-stories/>

STEM in the early years

- Young children can develop complex skills across STEM
- Understanding of size, shape and patterns; Counting; Recognising numerals, identifying matching sets
- ICT – digital natives!
- Early gaps tend to persist and widen throughout schooling -> cognitively foundational
- How: block building, puzzles, art, songs, rhymes, games, problem-solving tasks, exploration and inquiry (Burger, 2015)

Spatial thinking

- “Activities that build children’s spatial thinking can be fun and engaging ways for parents and caregivers to interact with preschoolers, and are a great way to combine technology with physical activity”

Reading time	Select books to read together that focus on spatial thinking skills like navigation, landmarks, or compasses
Meal time	Preparing food together is a great way to practice using spatial vocabulary. Ask your child to assist you in making simple meals.
Play time	Playing digital apps together (eek!) not only provides practice with using spatial vocabulary and navigation, it also provides moments for bonding and collaborative play

- **Sherwood, H., & Lewis Presser, A. (2017).** Finding Their Way: Family Engagement with Digital Math Activities Helps Children Develop Spatial Skills.
<https://globalfrp.org/Articles/Finding-Their-Way-Family-Engagement-with-Digital-Math-Activities-Helps-Children-Develop-Spatial-Skills>

Social and emotional development

- Social development: learning the values and skills needed to interact with others

Approaching others	Listening	Taking turns
Sharing	Treating others with respect	Showing affection appropriately
Resolving conflict	Communicating effectively	Self-control

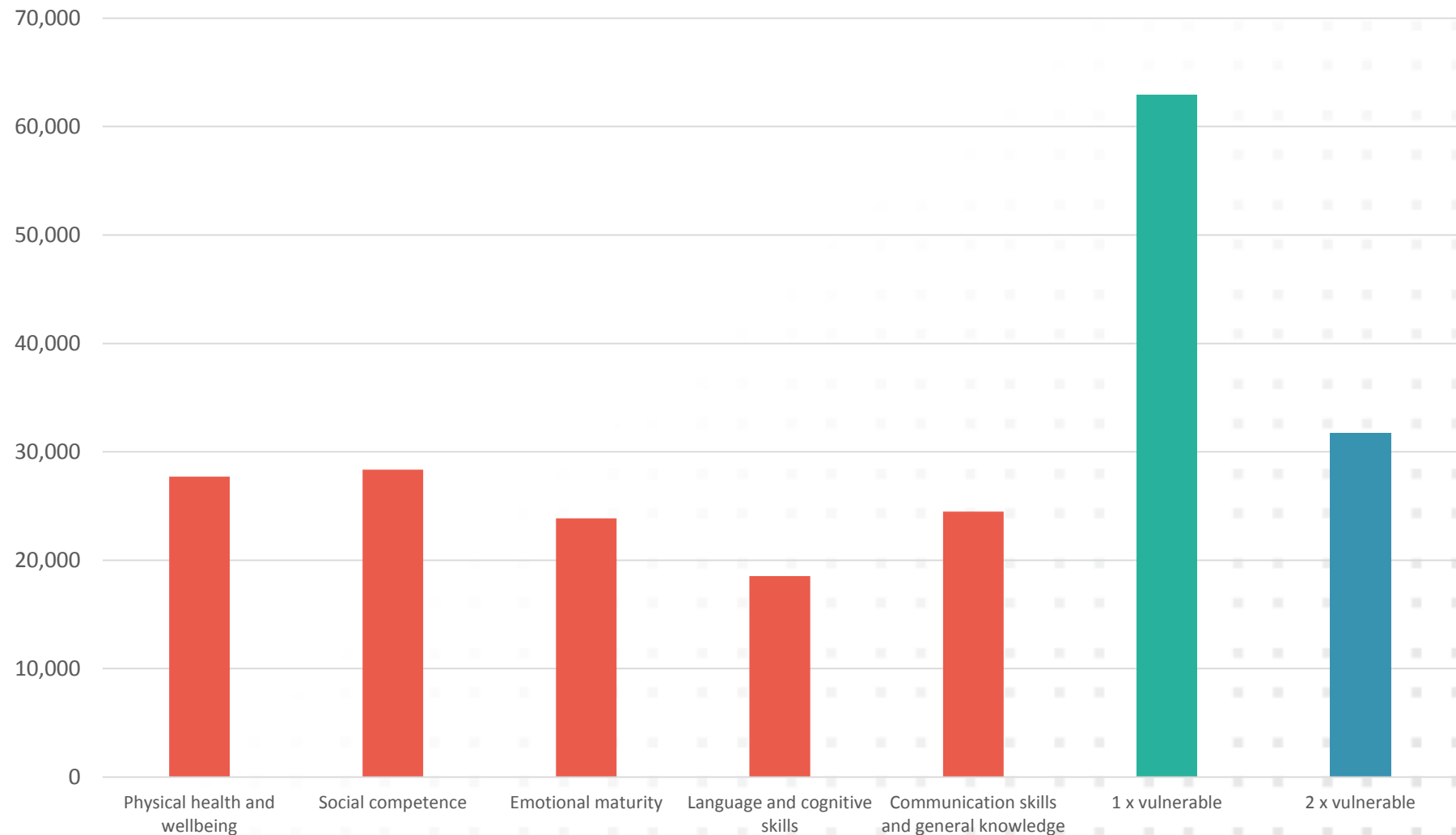
- Emotional development: ability to recognise emotions in the self and others, including ability to respond to emotions with socially appropriate behaviours, ability to regulate positive and negative emotions

Social and emotional development

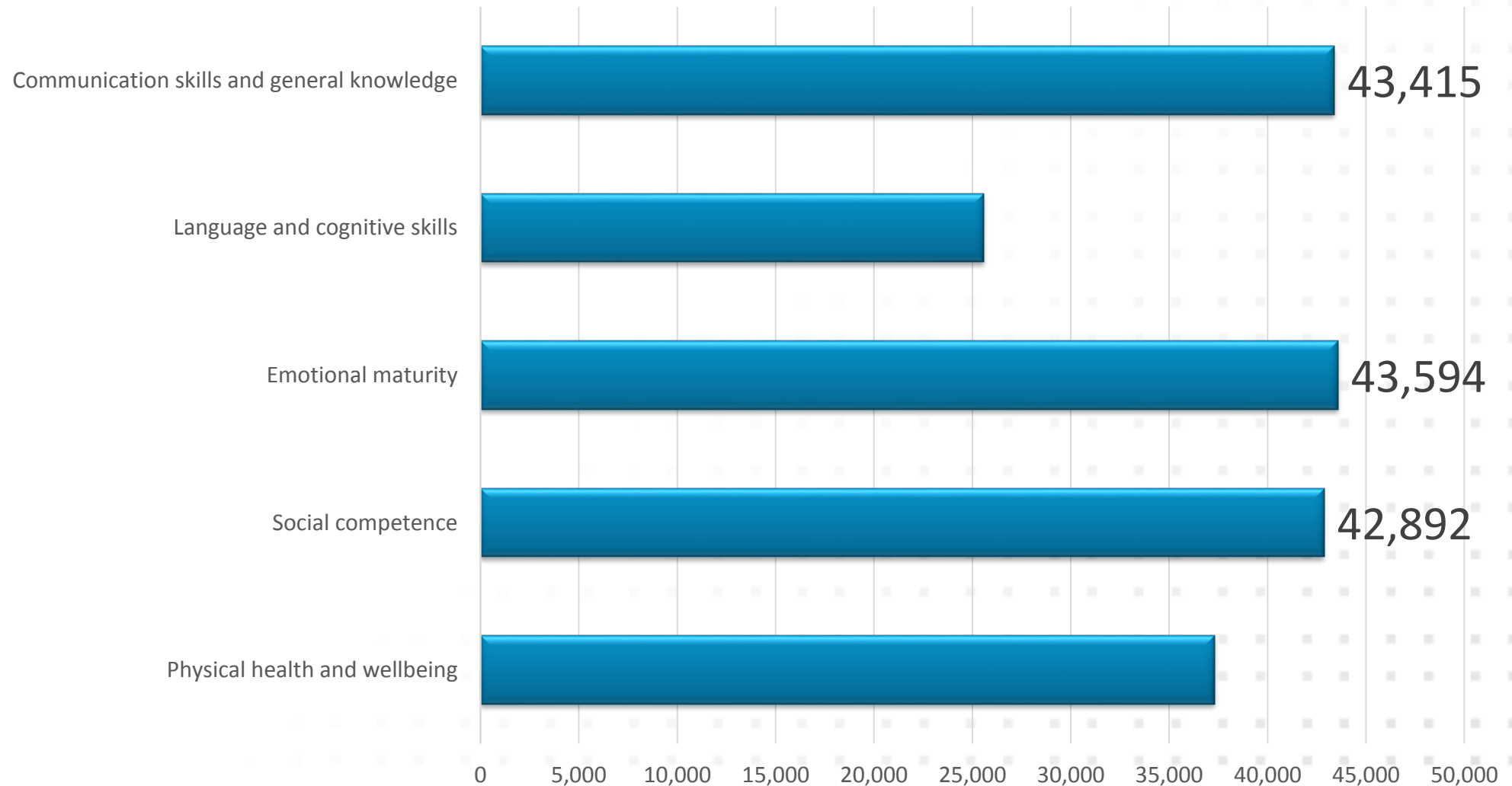
- Three key components to effective strategies:
 1. Parent education: providing positive strategies to reduce hostile, rejecting and inconsistent parenting practices; supporting parents to be emotionally positive and give attention to children's positive behaviours
 2. Teacher training: increasing positive teaching strategies and enhancing responsive social interactions. Giving teachers ways to assist children by modelling and practising social and emotional skills throughout everyday activities
 3. Child-directed training: guided practicing using positive skills in role plays and games. Assisting children to recognise, name and regulate their emotions.

Not all children start school on equal footing

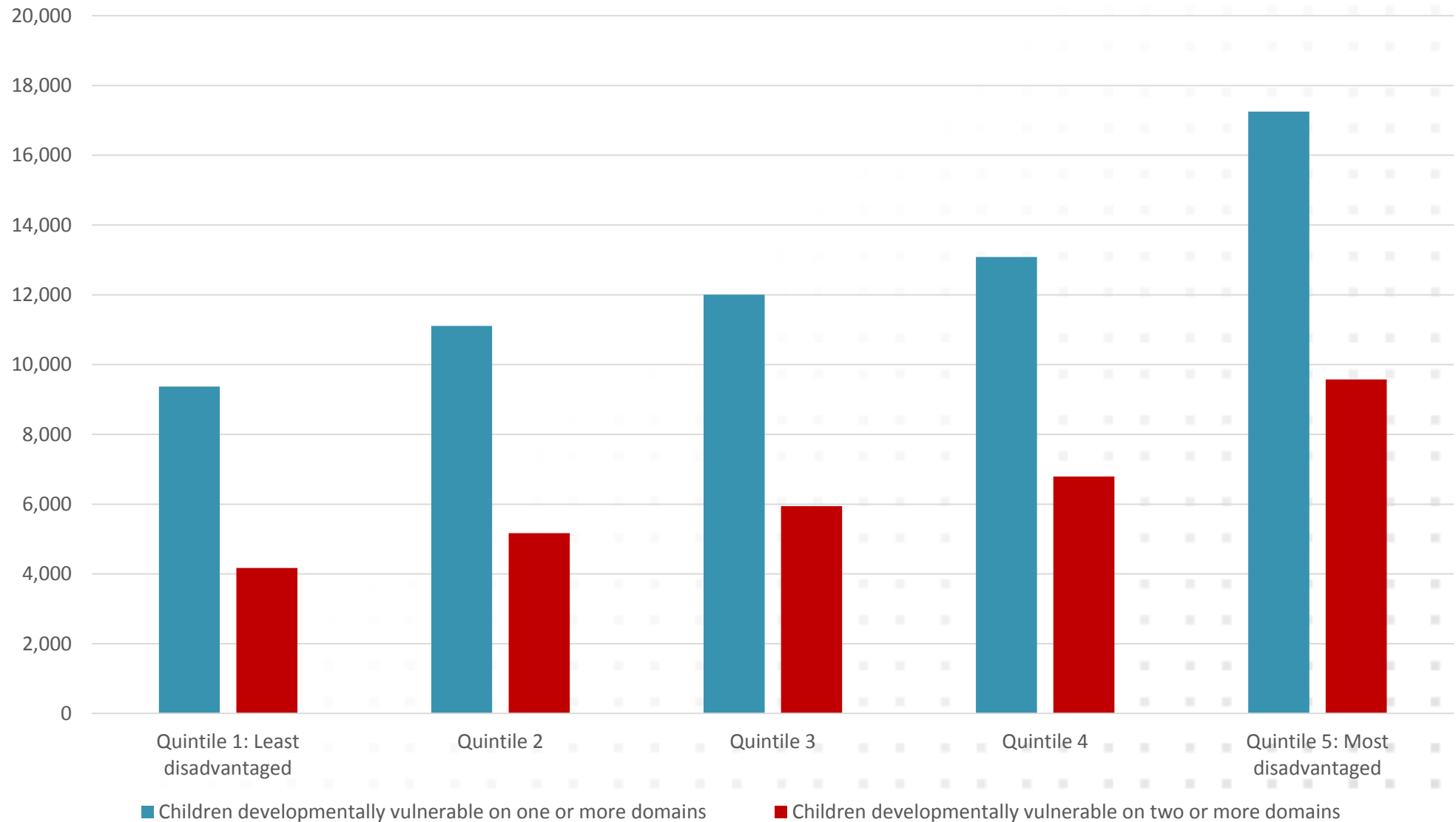
Number of children developmentally vulnerable (AEDC, 2015)



Number of children developmentally at risk (AEDC, 2015)



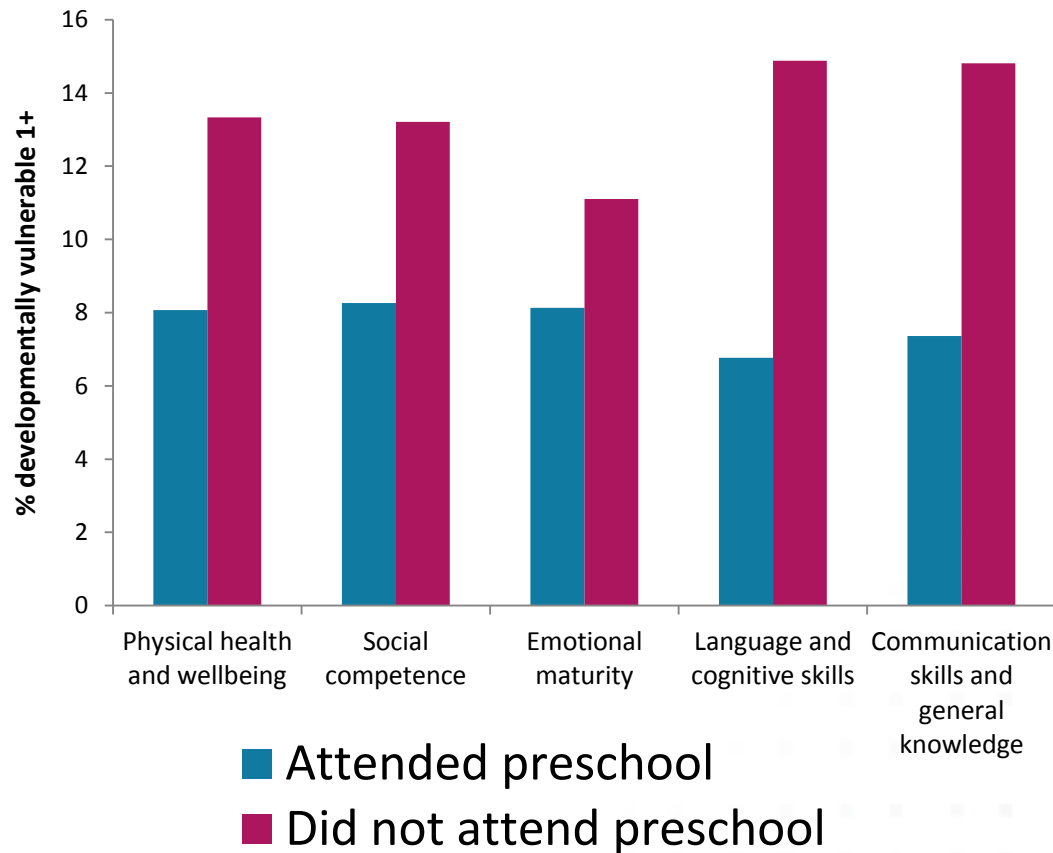
Number of children developmentally vulnerable (AEDC, 2015)



Why are there gaps?

- Social, environmental, biological, genetic
- Home learning environment
- Access and use of high-quality ECEC

Preschool works



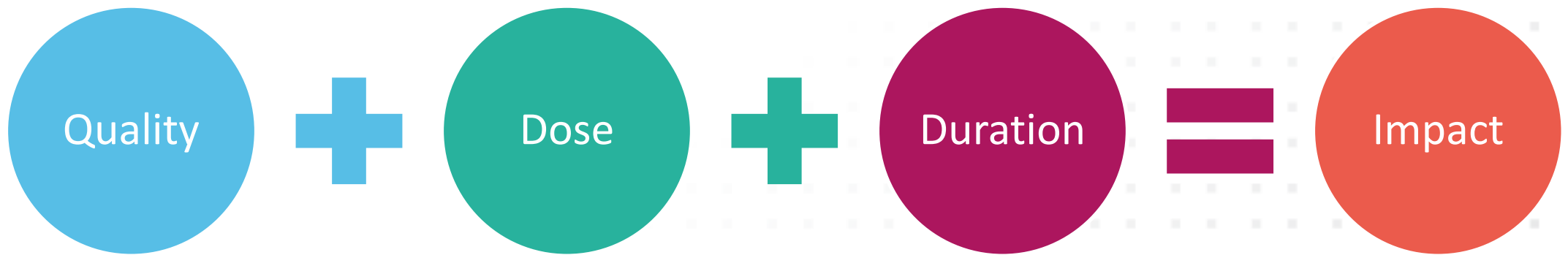
- It significantly reduces developmental vulnerability – across all domains
- It impacts all children & benefits disadvantaged children the most

BUT

It is not a silver bullet

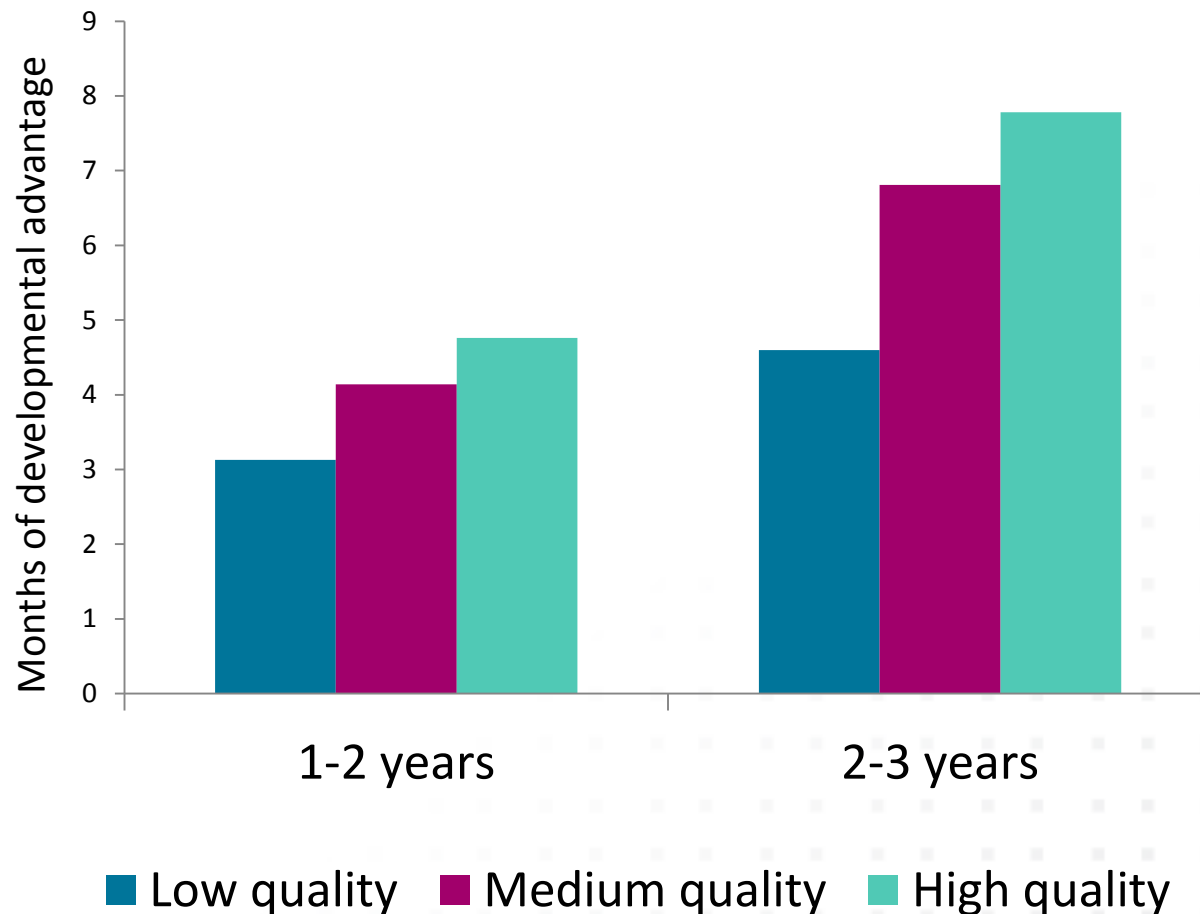
And it only works if you do it right

Preschool works when ...



Preschool works when ...

High quality early education for 2-3 years has the biggest impact



High quality learning environment **designed for 3 year olds** -

- Developmentally appropriate
- Play-based, inquiry focused
- Balance of child-led and educator-led learning
- Intentionally supporting development and mastery of new skills over time

THE HOW

Implementation challenges and opportunities

Universal provision of quality early childhood education, delivered with greater intensity for the children who need it, is a key strategy for changing the trajectories of children

Key issues

- Universal vs targeted

- Investment priorities and thresholds of need *or* proportionate universalism in practice

- Reaching the priority cohorts

- Addressing barriers to access – financial and non-financial

- Quality vs reach

- How to maintain (or improve!) quality while scaling up access

- Defining a preschool program

- Specifying structural and process quality elements (esp dose and quals)

- Practicalities

- Mapping access/places, workforce (numbers and capacity), market design, data infrastructure, funding mechanisms

Universal – efficient & effective

- All children benefit from pre-school
- Only half of children with developmental vulnerabilities are in the bottom two economic quintiles
- Participation in preschool programs is strongly influenced by community norms
- Most families don't travel more than 4km to attend preschool
- Families experiencing barriers to access are more likely to attend a universal service open to all children
- Children do better in mixed cohorts, with peers with diverse backgrounds and strengths
- Economies of scale contribute to a high-quality system

Ensuring there is a high-quality preschool program available in *every local service* is the best way to make sure everyone has access

Policy priorities in early learning



Australia needs to accelerate

Access to
early learning
for all children

The right
quality, dose
and duration

Investment
proportionate
to impact

Access for all children

- Reframing the perception that early education is less important than school education
- Embedding and resourcing family engagement
- Prioritising access to early education services in future planning and development



Family engagement

The diagram features a blue circle on the left containing the text 'Family engagement'. To its right is a light blue vertical rectangle divided into three horizontal sections. The top section is labeled 'Embedding relationships with families', the middle section 'Active outreach for families not accessing early education', and the bottom section 'Families as active partners in their children's learning'. The background of the slide has a subtle grid of small dots.

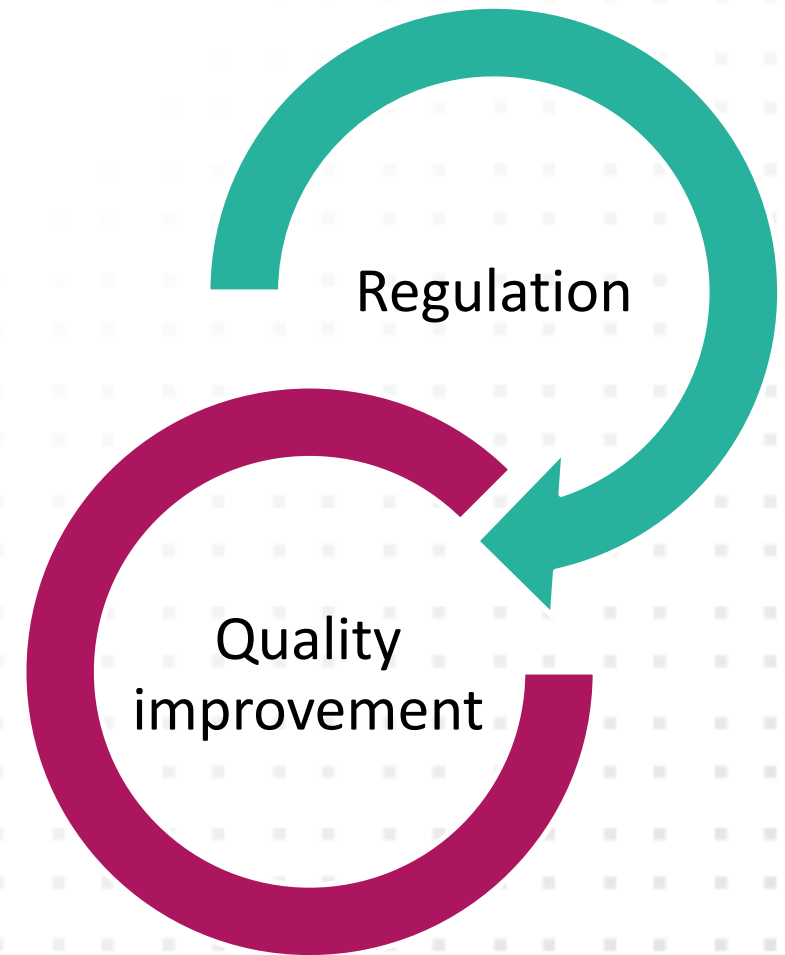
Embedding relationships with families

Active outreach for families not accessing early education

Families as active partners in their children's learning

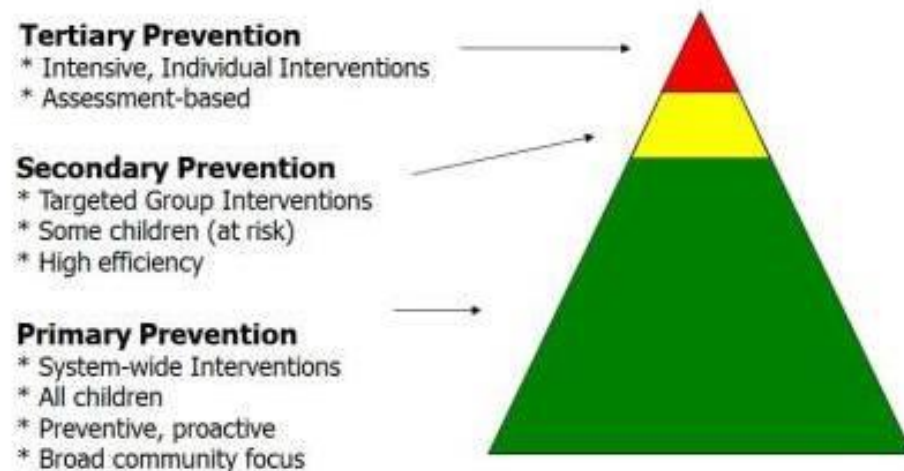
Quality, dose and duration

- Ensuring all services meet the NQS as a matter of urgency
- Ongoing commitment to the NQF as a regulatory framework and quality improvement strategy
- Resolving workforce issues that impact the capacity of the sector to improve quality
- Investing in higher-intensity and higher-quality programs for children who will benefit most from them



Investment proportionate to impact

- Building the data and evidence infrastructure needed to drive policy reform and maximise investment decisions
- Lifting public investment in early education,
- Targeting investment to ensuring access to the highest quality ECEC for the children who need it most



Adapted from Sugai, 2002.

Priority recommendations

1. Universal access to preschool
2. High-quality, high-intensity programs for the most vulnerable children
3. Ensure all services are Meeting the NQS – cap the time services can be “working towards”
4. Deliver a national early childhood data strategy
5. Commence a national campaign to strengthen family and community knowledge and beliefs about children’s early learning

Thank you

- Quality is key in Early Childhood Education in Australia
www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/papers/quality-key-early-childhood-education-australia/
- Two Years are Better Than One
www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/reports/two-years-preschool
- Quality Early Education for All
www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/reports/quality-early-education-for-all

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