

THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF CHILD WELLBEING

Tim Moore

*Presentation at Child Wellbeing Forum,
Hobart, 12 September 2019*

OUTLINE

- Development in the early years
- What is wellbeing?
- What factors shape the development of wellbeing?
- What are the benefits of investing in the early years?
- What should we invest in?
- Conclusions

DEVELOPMENT IN THE EARLY YEARS



Tim Moore, Noushin Arefadib,
Alana Deery, and Sue West (2017).

***The First Thousand Days: An
Evidence Paper.***

Parkville, Victoria: Centre for
Community Child Health, Murdoch
Children's Research Institute.

Full paper: <http://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccchdev/CCCH-The-First-Thousand-Days-An-Evidence-Paper-September-2017.pdf>

Summary: <http://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccchdev/CCCH-The-First-Thousand-Days-An-Evidence-Paper-Summary-September-2017.pdf>

THE FIRST 1000 DAYS: KEY FINDINGS

- The first 1000 days – the period from conception to the end of the second year – is the period of maximum developmental plasticity, and therefore the period with the greatest potential to affect health and wellbeing over the life course
- The adaptations and changes that occur during this period affect all bodily systems – neurological, immune, hormonal, muscular-skeletal, metabolic, cardio-vascular, and digestive systems
- The mind-brain-body (and microbiome) function as a single system

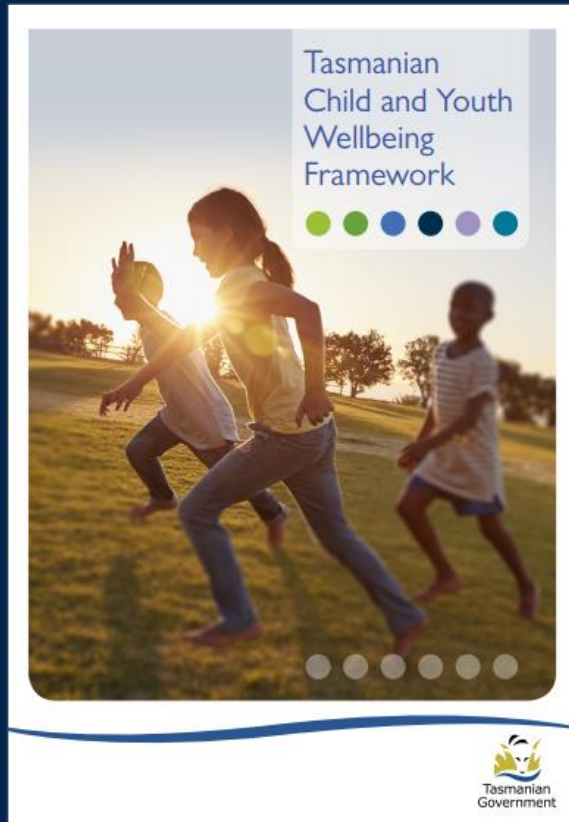
THE FIRST 1000 DAYS: KEY FINDINGS (cont)

- Some of these neurobiological changes can be transmitted across generations in various ways
- These changes can have lifelong consequences for health and wellbeing
- While change is always possible throughout the lifespan, development builds on these early foundations, and it becomes increasingly difficult to change trajectories the longer one is exposed to impoverished or stressful environments and experiences

WHAT IS WELLBEING?

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- Health and wellbeing is a total state that affects the whole person and every aspect of their functioning
- It is dynamic rather than static, and capable of change as the conditions that promote it vary
- Because health and wellbeing is an emergent characteristic, it cannot be targeted or promoted directly
- Instead, it must be approached obliquely, with the focus instead on creating the conditions that will lead to the emergence of a positive sense of health and wellbeing



Tasmanian Child and Youth
Wellbeing Framework (2018)



The Nest Action Agenda
(ARACY, 2014)

TASMANIAN CHILD AND YOUTH WELLBEING FRAMEWORK

Wellbeing is the state where a child or young person feels loved and safe; has access to material basics; has their physical, mental and emotional health needs met; is learning and participating; and has a positive sense of culture and identity.

The Six Domains of Child and Youth Wellbeing

Being loved and safe

Having material basics

Being healthy

Learning

Participating

Having a positive sense
of culture and identity

WHAT SHAPES THE DEVELOPMENT OF WELLBEING?

THE FIRST 1000 DAYS: KEY FINDINGS (cont)

- Early development is shaped by the lifestyles and conditions experienced by parents before conception, and by experiences and exposures in the womb, and in infancy
- *Specific experiences and exposures* that shape development and well-being include: caring relationships, family environments, physical and built environments, community environments, environmental toxins, nutrition, stress, and poverty
- *General features of the environment* that shape development include: social climate change, mismatch conditions, and the social determinants of health and well-being

ADVANCING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT: FROM SCIENCE TO SCALE

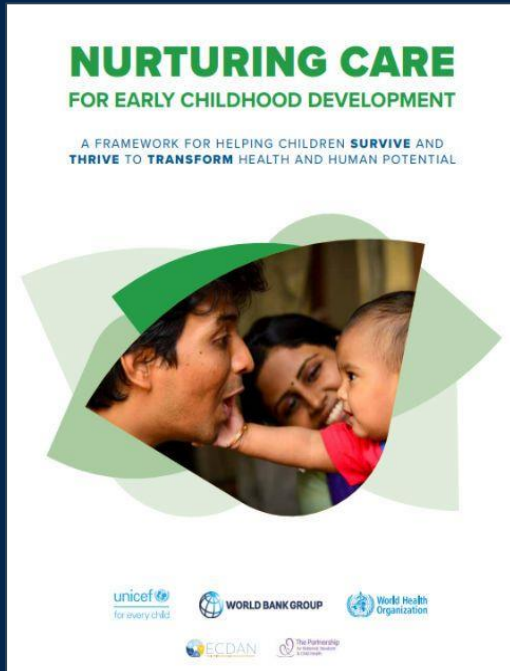
(Black et al., 2017; Britto et al., 2017; Richter et al., 2017)

Key messages from the Lancet Series

- The beginning of a child's life (pregnancy to age 3) is a period of special sensitivity for child development
- The most formative experience of young children come from nurturing care received from parents and other caregivers
- To create an enabling environment for nurturing care, policies and services are essential
- Investing in Early Childhood Development is smart; it increases health, productivity and social cohesion along the life course and has intergenerational benefits



NURTURING CARE FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (WHO, UNCICEF and World Bank Group, 2018)

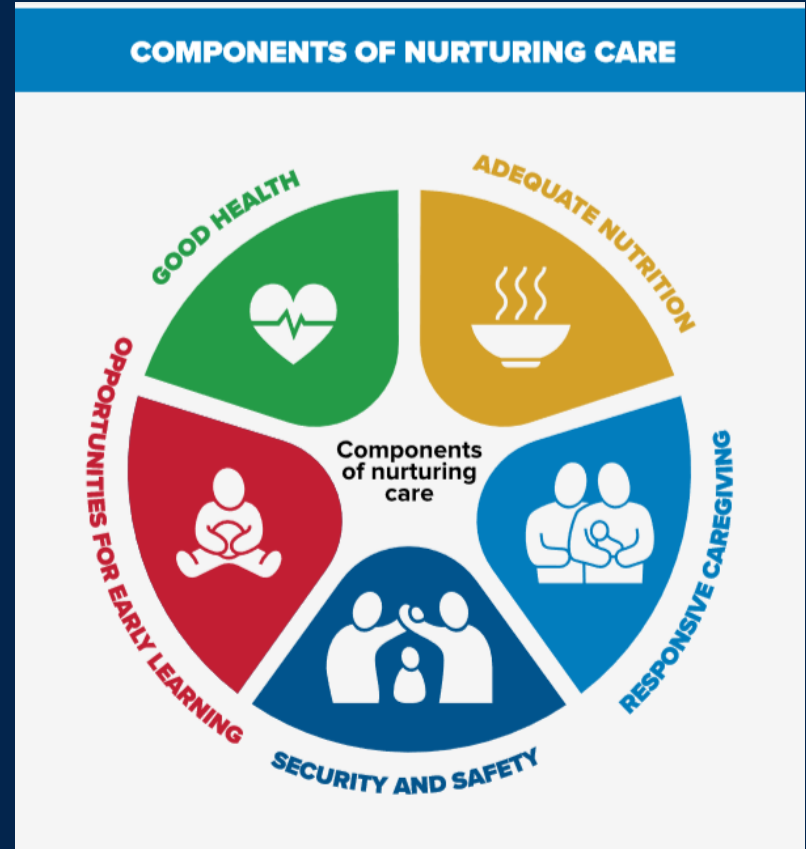


The Framework describes

- how a whole-of-government and a whole-of-society approach can promote and strengthen the Nurturing Care of young children,
- what the guiding principles for doing so are,
- what strategic actions are needed, and
- the monitoring of targets and milestones that are essential to progress.

Nurturing care refers to a stable environment created by parents and other caregivers that ensures children's good health and nutrition, protects them from threats, and gives young children opportunities for early learning, through interactions that are emotionally supportive and responsive.

WHO, UNICEF & World
Bank Group (2018)

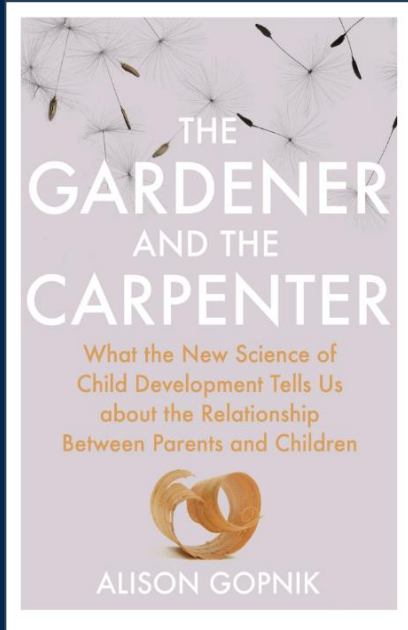


ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS FOR NURTURING CARE



NURTURING CARE AT THE CENTRE OF THE GLOBAL STRATEGY AND THE SDGs





Alison Gopnik (2016). **The Gardener and the Carpenter: What the New Science of Child Development Tells Us About the Relationship Between Parents and Children.** London, UK: The Bodley Head.

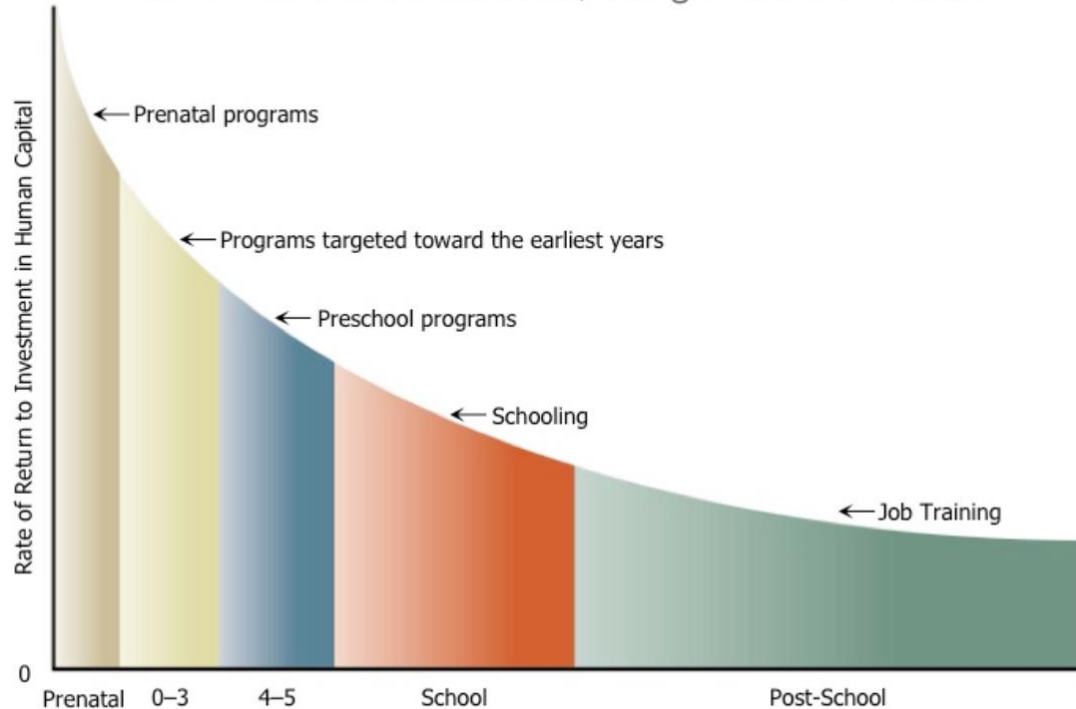
Alison Gopnik contrasts two ways of being a parent:

- In one, being a parent is like being a ***carpenter***: the job is to shape the raw material of the child into a final product that will fit what you had in mind to begin with.
- In the second approach, caring for children is like tending a garden, and being a parent is like being a ***gardener***; when we garden, we create a protected and nurturing space for plants to flourish.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF INVESTING IN THE EARLY YEARS?

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IS A SMART INVESTMENT

The earlier the investment, the greater the return



Source: James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics

THE HECKMAN EQUATION

*Human development is
economic development*
(Heckman, 2016)

<https://heckmanequation.org>

+ Invest

Invest in educational and developmental resources for disadvantaged families to provide equal access to successful early human development.

+ Develop

Nurture early development of cognitive and social skills in children from birth to age five.

+ Sustain

Sustain early development with effective education through to adulthood.

= Gain

Gain a more capable, productive and valuable workforce that pays dividends to America for generations to come.

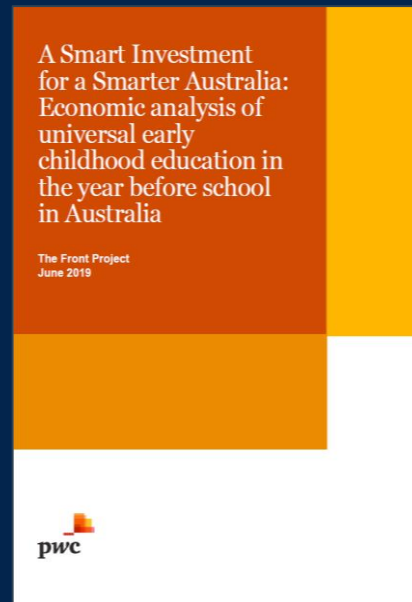
AUSTRALIAN COST-BENEFIT ANALYSES



PwC (2014)



Strong Foundations Partnership (2019)



PwC (2019)



Daly et al. (2019)

The first thousand days:
A case for investment

Strong Foundations collaboration | April 2019



Scenario 1: Reducing the prevalence of smoking amongst pregnant women

In Australia, around **10%** of mothers smoke while pregnant, meaning that smoking affects **31,110** children in the antenatal period per year.

The annual potential benefit of all pregnant mothers ceasing smoking is close to **\$1 billion.***

For each woman who stops smoking during pregnancy, an estimated saving of **\$29,000** is projected over her child's lifetime.*

50% of this total is due to a reduction in obesity costs

35% as a result of increased earnings

15% accounts for a reduced likelihood of smoking as an adult

* Nominal lifetime value

Scenario 2: Improving housing stability

In Australia, an estimated **27%** of families with dependent children rent their home. Based on this, an estimated **84,000** children are born into a rented home each year.

Based on the available evidence, we modelled the economic gains that result from home ownership, and used these to consider the potential benefits that stability, housing security and community relationships could provide:

Growing up in a home owned by his or her parents or primary caregiver leads to societal benefits of approximately **\$36,000** over the lifetime of that child.*

94% is due to an increase in earnings as an adult.

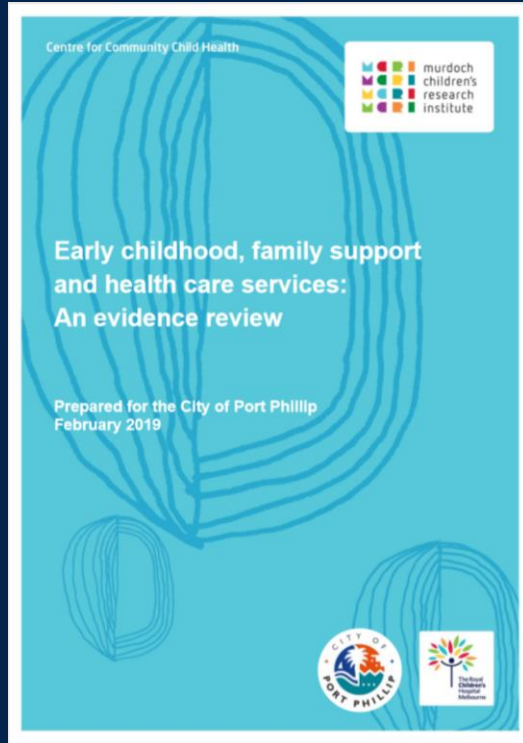
If every Australian child grew up in a home that his or her parent owned, the annual potential economic benefit would be nearly **\$3 billion.***

* Nominal lifetime value

WHAT SHOULD WE INVEST IN?

WHAT SHOULD WE INVEST IN?

- Address the conditions under which families are raising young children – these have a greater impact on child and family functioning than services
- Provide integrated high quality early childhood and family support services
- Focus on midstream and upstream actions rather than primarily focusing on downstream (presenting) problems
- Focus on the first 1000 days, not just the second 1000 days
- Co-design services and environments with families and communities



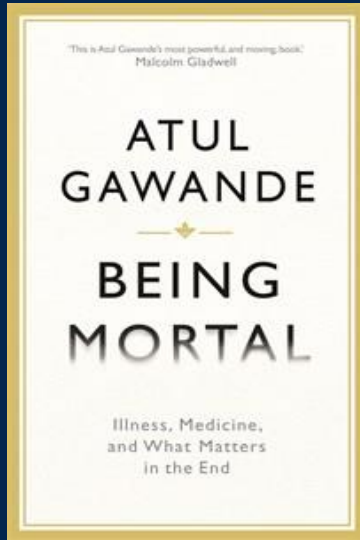
Moore, T. G. (2019). *Early childhood, family support and health care services: An evidence review.*

Prepared for the City of Port Phillip.
Melbourne, Victoria: Centre for
Community Child Health and the City
of Port Phillip.

CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

- The foundations of wellbeing are laid down in the early years and are sustained by continued nurturing and enabling environments
- The development of health and wellbeing is shaped by the health and wellbeing of their parents and grandparents prior to the conception of the child, and the health and wellbeing of now will affect the health and wellbeing of their grandchildren
- This means that the responsibility for wellbeing is not the responsibility of parents alone but of all society



We've been wrong about what our job is in medicine. We think our job is to ensure health and survival. But really it is larger than that. It is to enable well-being. And well-being is about the reasons one wishes to be alive.

Gawande, A. (2014). **Being Mortal: Illness, Medicine and What Matters in the End.** London, UK: Profile Books.

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The Centre for Community Child Health is a department of The Royal Children's Hospital and a research group of Murdoch Children's Research Institute.