

## **Early Childhood Development Expert Reference Panel meeting Communique, 21 February 2017**

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The inaugural meeting enabled the successful formation of a new Early Childhood Development Expert Reference Panel for the Northern Territory.

The panel members met with Northern Territory Government Ministers and together agreed that improving the wellbeing of all Territory children is a pillar to improving lifelong health wellbeing and prosperity for the NT.

### **Shift in emphasis to pre-birth to three**

Panel members agreed that the NT needs to ensure quality programs are in place to support children pre-birth to three years. This requires a shift in emphasis and investment toward an earlier stage than the commonly used scope of early years (pre-birth to 8 years). This does not mean that effort is not required across this age span but they agreed, *'we have to get it right for pre-birth to three years'*.

### **Strategic, equitable and coordinated investment**

There was recognition that there is significant investment in the current system, which has strengths and shortfalls. *'Our service system is not universal. It is patchy and ad hoc with significant gaps the further you are away from an urban area.'*

Members agreed there is an overriding need for a more coordinated strategic approach to investing in our children. The principles of equity of access and needs based planning must underpin investments.

Panel members agreed that improving the social determinants of health is critical for stronger Early Childhood Development outcomes.

### **Understanding the scale of the challenge and the need for a systems change**

The members reviewed data reflecting the scale of the challenges in the Territory for children coming into contact with the child protection system. This data reinforced the imperative for swift and broad-scale action. *'We have an opportunity now to change our future.'*

The panel is due to meet again in March.