



**Australian Government**

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**Australian Institute of Family Studies**

**The efficacy of early childhood interventions**

This report was commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services. It is the product of the collaboration between the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research.

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# THE EFFICACY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTIONS



A report prepared for the Australian Government  
Department of Family and Community Services

**Sarah Wise, Lisa da Silva, Elizabeth Webster  
and Ann Sanson**



Australian Government  
Australian Institute of  
Family Studies



MELBOURNE INSTITUTE  
of Applied Economic and Social Research

Published by the Australian Institute of Family Studies

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*The efficacy of early childhood interventions*,  
by Sarah Wise, Lisa da Silva, Elizabeth Webster  
and Ann Sanson, AIFS Research Report No. 14,  
July 2005

Bibliography  
ISBN 0 642 39527 6

Designed by Double Jay Graphics  
Printed by Impact Printing

ISSN 1447-1469 (Print)  
ISSN 1477-1477 (Online)

## Director's foreword

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I am delighted that the Australian Institute of Family Studies could be involved in the research resulting in this report. Prepared cooperatively with the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, it represents an important step forward in establishing an evidence base concerning the efficacy of early childhood interventions in the current Australian context.

Although it is widely acknowledged that early childhood provides a unique window of opportunity for optimising children's capacity for learning, as well as a period where adverse experiences can have serious long-term effects, much less is known about how to transform this knowledge into effective interventions, nor how much investment should be made in these initiatives.

Information about effectiveness of programs currently operating in Australia is especially thin on the ground. One cannot assume that any type of intervention in early childhood will pay long-term dividends. Some interventions are more effective than others but, importantly, some are more cost-effective. It is necessary to scrutinise the evidence about cost effectiveness. As such, the report is especially timely, given the widespread interest in early intervention and prevention, not only across the nation but also internationally.

Cost-effectiveness has not been a particular focus in Australia. Such information is necessary to distinguish those initiatives that are worthy of investment and those that are not.

It is prudent that government is focusing on this issue, and appropriate that the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the Melbourne Institute should be supporting the Australian Government endeavours. The Institute is actively researching across areas such as crime prevention, prevention of drug and alcohol misuse, child abuse prevention, family and relationship support. These are important contributions to the Australian knowledge base. The availability of the Melbourne Institute's economic expertise has made for a very productive and complementary collaboration.

It is clear that early childhood interventions are generally worthy investments. It is my hope that governments and other stakeholders will accept the guidance contained in this report about how to produce knowledge about the returns on public investment that different programs produce. Children, families, and ultimately society, can all benefit from this knowledge.

I am grateful to the authors of this report, Sarah Wise and Lisa da Silva from the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and Elizabeth Webster from the Melbourne Institute and Ann Sanson now at the University of Melbourne, on their valuable contribution to the literature on early intervention and prevention. I am also grateful to the Family and Children's Policy Branch of the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services for its support in commissioning this work.

**Professor Alan Hayes**

Director  
Australian Institute of Family Studies

## Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to Peter Dawkins and Roger Wilkins of the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research for their advice and detailed comments on drafts of this report. Thanks are also due to Louise Hayes of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, who helped document and assess a portion of the early childhood interventions included in the evaluation.

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