

Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)

# Guide to physical health and wellbeing

Resources for Queensland  
early childhood education  
and care services



# Physical health and wellbeing

This document has been designed to support early childhood education and care services to understand the AEDC domain 'Physical health and wellbeing' to inform curriculum programming, planning and quality improvement.

Children's physical health and wellbeing development is shaped by both hereditary and environmental factors. The AEDC reveals three specific areas of physical health and wellbeing which support children's development, learning and engagement as they start school:



A strong sense of physical and psychological wellbeing enables children to confidently and optimistically engage and respond to others and the environment around them. The development of motor skills (gross motor, fine motor, perceptual motor) affords children greater autonomy and independence. Healthy lifestyles that balance sound nutrition, physical activity, personal safety and rest also underpin the development of children's physical wellbeing.

## Protective factors

Families and early childhood educators can help increase protective factors and reduce risk factors in a child's life. Protective factors that support children's physical health and wellbeing include good nutrition, established routines, activity, family stability, participation in community activities such as sport and access to outdoor play spaces.

Educators can play a vital role in equipping parents or other primary caregivers with knowledge, skills and support, to influence and enhance children's physical health and wellbeing outcomes.

## Supporting children's physical health and wellbeing

Children's confident exploration and participation in the world around them is in part reliant on their physical health and wellbeing. Health risks such as tiredness and inconsistent daily routines impact on children's engagement. When these factors are evident, educators may need to implement specific intentional strategies to support children's engagement. In many cases this does not mean a change in everyday practice, but rather taking the time to draw children's specific attention to what is happening around them. Similarly, making the most of opportunities to support parent's knowledge and understanding about physical health and wellbeing is important.



Throughout the day, many opportunities arise to enhance and embed positive physical health and wellbeing dispositions, skills and knowledge. Perhaps:

- Offer a pictorial checklist for children to help them pack their bags at home (this might include a picture of a hat, drink bottle, lunch box, library bag).
- Hold high expectations for children's management of their belongings. Encourage them to unpack and pack their own bags so they know where their belongings are.
- Involve children in planning and preparing for routine experiences throughout the day (e.g. 'We are going to have morning tea now. What do we need to get ready?').
- Model healthy eating and drinking practices. Engage children in preparing or cooking everyday healthy foods or snacks. Use everyday mealtime opportunities to reinforce healthy eating and choices using terms such as 'everyday' food and 'sometimes' food.
- Discuss the flow of the day with children. Use a clock to notice time segments during the day (e.g. 'Let's be ready to meet on the mat together when the big hand is on the twelve', or 'We were busy playing for an hour. Now it's time to have a drink of water and read a story').



- Talk with children about patterns of movement and rest. Find opportunities for children to stretch, take slow breaths, develop a sense of what it means to be calm and still. Intentionally discuss and model calmness during children's rest periods.
- Encourage children to design and construct obstacle courses which might target specific skills (e.g. hand-eye coordination, upper body strength).
- Capitalise on children's interests to foster motivation for movement. Incorporate their favourite music or movie themes in playful activity. Provide open-ended materials such as large cardboard boxes, which children can transform.

### Reflection

- What do the AEDC results reveal about children's physical health and wellbeing in your community?
- The physical health and wellbeing domain encompasses a broad range of factors. What aspects of physical health and wellbeing would you identify as the areas of greatest priority for the children in your care?
- How does your service help children develop their fine and gross motor skills through play?
- How does your service support and encourage children to be independent regarding their own needs?



## Partnerships with families and communities

Working together can help families and educators gain a deeper understanding of the benefits of physical activity and wellbeing for children. These include:

- healthy eating
- developing strong bones and muscles
- refining fine, gross and perceptual motor skills
- promoting and enhancing physical skills through play
- fostering and improving self-confidence and independence.

Educators can raise awareness of the benefits of physical wellbeing through:

- ensuring documentation showcases physical health and wellbeing experiences and opportunities
- promoting outdoor and physical play as vital to learning and development
- compiling a centre recipe book or suggestions for quick and healthy meals and lunch boxes
- collating a list of community gardens or play spaces in the local area
- asking children to bring refillable water bottles to the service and offering water only (discouraging other sugary drinks)
- showcasing the fun-filled and bonding benefits of families joining together in outdoor experiences.

Educators can also offer opportunities for families to engage in physical activity through activities such as a walking program for parents or family events that include an outdoor play element.



### Kristy's story

Children in the Springfield community were showing vulnerability in the physical health and wellbeing domains of the AEDC. Upon examining the data, Centre Director Kristy-Lee Hudspith, implemented an external physical education program, providing two half-hour sessions for the children once a week.

Further, they supported children at the service to get involved in growing their own produce in gardens and cooking experiences where they are learning to prepare fresh ingredients and eat nutritious meals.

'We talk a lot with the children about how they are feeling and what makes them feel hungry and then we give them opportunities to discuss the amount they wish to eat', said Kristy.

Early childhood services can also form partnerships and help families to access community services. Some of the services families and staff can access for support include:

- dietitians
- physiotherapists or occupational therapists
- community health services
- sporting associations (e.g. athletics, gymnastics or swimming clubs).

### Reflection

- What health and physical activity initiatives are being undertaken in your local area that could support children and families at your service? (e.g. networks, newsletters, information sessions). Could you reach out to others or initiate something?
- How can you encourage and support families to help develop their child's fine, gross and perceptual motor skills?
- How can your service provide opportunities for parents to engage in activities that promote knowledge of physical health and wellbeing to support children's development?

## Resources for educators and families

**Department of Health**, *Get up and grow*, available at [www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-early-childhood-nutrition-resources](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-early-childhood-nutrition-resources). A program about healthy eating and physical activity including resource guides for educators and families with cook books and posters. Specific resources are available for educators working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Numerous translations are available.

**Department of Health**, *Move and play every day*, available at [www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/F01F92328EDADA5BCA257BF0001E720D/\\$File/FS%200-5yrs.PDF](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/F01F92328EDADA5BCA257BF0001E720D/$File/FS%200-5yrs.PDF). A fact sheet on the Australian physical activity guidelines for children aged birth to five.

**Nutrition Australia**, available at [www.nutritionaustralia.org](http://www.nutritionaustralia.org). A website full of healthy eating and lifestyle information.

**Early Childhood Australia**, *Children's health and nutrition*, available at [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/parent-resources/childrens-health-nutrition](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/parent-resources/childrens-health-nutrition). Fact sheets and information on a range of topics affecting physical health and wellbeing.

**Queensland Government**, *Daily Physical Activity Guide*, a 'how to' manual for early childhood professionals, primary and secondary teachers available as an app. [www.nprsr.qld.gov.au/community-programs/school-community/physical-activity-guide.html](http://www.nprsr.qld.gov.au/community-programs/school-community/physical-activity-guide.html)



To access further AEDC resources please visit [www.dete.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood](http://www.dete.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood).

To access the AEDC data please visit [www.aedc.gov.au](http://www.aedc.gov.au).

