

The Centre for Early Childhood Development ([CECD](#)) proudly announces our annual conference, “Quality Early Childhood Development in South Africa: A Call to Action”, in partnership with the South African Research Association for Early Childhood Education ([SARAECE](#)) and the [College of Cape Town](#).

This conference aims to connect stakeholders, share knowledge and information, and inspire engagement and action for quality early childhood development (ECD) in South Africa. The conference is taking place from 27 – 29 September 2023 at the College of Cape Town, Crawford Campus.

We are inviting those with an interest or passion for ECD – ECD principals and teachers, activists, NPOs, TVET colleges, academics, researchers, government officials and staff, as well as donors, to attend and to present.

The conference will cover the following themes:

1. Effective ECD programmes
2. Bridging the divide for quality ECD (policy, research and practice)
3. ECD leadership and management
4. ECD causes and calls for action

CECD is calling for papers and presentations that speak to these themes as part of our plenary and breakaway sessions. We are also hosting our upbeat, lively and quick-paced ‘Khawuleza’ event where speakers can showcase their work or tell their story within six minutes.

Examples of issues that could speak to the themes range from ECD advocacy and social justice, to policy, governance, funding and practice, ECD centre registration, ECD programmes and monitoring and evaluation, and leadership and management of ECD centres and organisations.

CECD also invites publishers and organisations to display their work through exhibitions during the three-day conference, in the plenary hall.

To submit a presentation, exhibit your work, attend the conference or find out more, please visit www.qualityecdconference.co.za or contact conference@cecd.org.za

We hope you enjoy this edition of EARLY YEARS.

The CECD Conference Team



Quality Early Childhood Development in South Africa:
A Call to Action

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27 - 29 September 2023
College of Cape Town, Crawford Campus

For more information visit
www.qualityecdconference.co.za
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SA MUST INVEST MORE IN CHILDREN — AND BETTER!

~ Elizabeth Ninan Dulvy and Servaas van der Berg

Underfunded and neglected, the critical early childhood development sector demands immediate attention to uplift children's health, educational outcomes and future prospects.



SA's children still perform far below expectations in international tests of reading, mathematics and science. Even in the early grades many have fallen far behind. In addition, health outcomes for children are poor for an upper-middle-income country. There is an urgent need to improve health and educational outcomes for young children before they enter school, as early deficits are often compounded in schools.

The early childhood development (ECD) sector has been underfunded and neglected in SA, despite its importance in ensuring children's future success. The recent shift of ECD functions from the department of social development to the department of basic education offers an opportunity to address these issues and improve ECD services in SA.

It is globally recognised that good quality investments in ECD can yield high returns, higher than interventions for any other age group. Investing in children's health and nutrition during their first 1,000 days can improve health outcomes over their lifetime. Quality ECD programmes that promote adequate stimulation better prepare children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, for entry into primary school and are linked to higher learning achievement.

There is now almost universal access to grade R (one year of preschool before entering primary education), but enrolment in ECD programmes is far lower, particularly for poor children. Access increases with age, but only 45% of those who do attend ECD reach the desired learning standards by age five. Child malnutrition is high, with a 27% prevalence of stunting among under-fives in 2016.

The World Bank and Stellenbosch University's (SU's) Resep research group, in partnership with the department of basic education, recently completed a Public Expenditure and Institutional Review (Peir) of ECD in SA, which finds that ECD outcomes are inconsistently measured, spending on ECD is low for a middle-income country and current spending on ECD services can be better targeted and more efficient.

Measurement of ECD outcomes in SA must be strengthened

The lack of data on ECD outcomes in SA is cause for concern. While globally, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) have collected data on children under five, SA has not implemented such surveys until the recent Thrive by Five Index Survey in April 2022. Worryingly, this survey found that only 43% of five-year-olds attending ECD programmes met expected learning standards and were not stunted. The measurement of ECD outcomes must be further strengthened, including for younger children and those not attending ECD programmes. This is essential to understand the problem and target interventions towards the poorest and most vulnerable children.

Spending on ECD interventions must increase

Despite the evidence of the importance of ECD interventions, government spent only R36.1bn in 2021/22 on ECD programmes for children aged naught-five, about 1.7% of public expenditure and 0.6% of GDP in 2021/22. This is extremely low compared to the spending on children in schools and to spending in comparable countries.

Of this amount, almost three quarters was spent on cash transfer programmes such as the child support grant, care dependency grant and foster care grant. Very little was spent by provincial departments of social development on childcare and child protection services. Most of the rest of the spending was on early learning interventions by provincial education and social development departments.

Given the high prevalence of stunting, malnutrition and food hunger reported in SA, we were surprised to observe how little direct nutritional support for younger children below grade R exists (though admittedly it is difficult to identify all funds spent on nutrition services for preschool children by the departments of health, social development and basic education).

Spending on ECD is insufficient to meet the needs of children, particularly those from poor families. For example, the ECD subsidy, which aims to support ECD provision for children from poor families (R17 per child per day for up to 264 days per year), only reaches about 40% of poor children. In addition, this subsidy is inadequate to cover ECD programme operating costs, estimated at about R31 per child per day.

Better targeting and implementation of existing ECD interventions

Most ECD programmes are run by private providers. If they are registered and serve poor children, they qualify to receive

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government subsidies. But there are substantial barriers discouraging private providers from offering such services. To register, a provider must comply with a plethora of municipal bylaws, building and zoning requirements and meet infrastructure standards to obtain environmental health and safety certification. That is why the Peir report recommends reviewing municipal bylaws to make them less onerous for ECD providers and supporting providers to comply with infrastructure requirements.

Staff in ECD programmes often have limited qualifications — over 60% do not meet the NQF level 4 requirement (equivalent to matric). The government does offer upskilling programmes, but these take staff out of the ECD programme for an extended period, and many do not return. Our report recommends a practical approach used in countries such as Ghana and Kenya to conduct a needs assessment of staff and to develop shorter, entry-level national qualifications that can be subsidised and widely introduced through accredited training providers.

Most spending on ECD is channeled through social grants, especially the child support grant. However, the child support grant reaches relatively few children under the age of one — the age group most at risk. The cumbersome grant application process requires substantial documentation and in-person submission, which cause delays. The Peir recommends that women should be allowed to apply for the grant during the second trimester of pregnancy and that conditional approval be given based on the provision of a birth certificate after the child is born.

This would get more resources to the caregivers when they are most needed. Additionally, linking the grant programme with information about stimulation and improved nutrition support services could yield better child development outcomes if it is co-ordinated with community-based health and social workers.

There is thus much that needs to be done to improve ECD outcomes for young children. This includes streamlining regulations for ECD programmes to register and receive subsidies, providing adequate support for private providers, improving the skills of ECD staff, and increasing funding and co-ordination between government departments to ensure access to high-quality ECD services for all children.

This would, in time, also improve educational and health outcomes for all children.

Ninan Dulvy is Southern Africa programme leader for human development at the World Bank. Van der Berg, a professor of economics at Stellenbosch University, held the National Research Foundation's SA research chair in the economics of social policy

SOME CRÈCHES NEVER GOT THE PROMISED COVID RELIEF FUNDS, AND NOW IT'S TOO LATE

~ Mary-Anne Gontsana

Early Childhood Development relief programme comes to an end

The R496-million programme for Early Childhood Development Centres to mitigate the effects of the Covid pandemic has come to an end.

The centres were invited to apply for a once-off payment of up to R4,186 per staff member.

But many ECD centre owners complained that the application process was cumbersome and some have never received their funding.



Helen Diedericks runs an Early Childhood Development Centre from her home in Heideveld, Cape Town. Though she says her application for Covid relief funding was approved, she never received the money, and now the programme has come to an end. Photo: Mary-Anne Gontsana

It is a cold and quiet Monday morning out on the streets of Heideveld, but when you walk into the Little Footsteps Educare, you are greeted by warmth, children's cries, singing and dancing.

Teacher and owner Helen Diedericks mutes the sing-along on the TV and tells her little learners to sit down and prepare themselves for snack time. They jostle and shout. Some sit on the floor and a few run around before finally settling down for a snack.

Diedericks is one of many early childhood development (ECD) educators who has been left disappointed by the ECD Stimulus Relief Fund. The fund was launched in February 2021, by the national Department of Social Development (DSD), as a

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<https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/opinion/2023-06-05-elizabeth-ninan-dulvy-and-servaas-van-der-berg-sa-must-invest-more-in-children-and-better/>



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measure to cushion the impact of the Covid pandemic on early childhood development programmes.

The DSD received R496-million to assist ECD centres, which were offered a maximum once-off payment of R4,186 per staff member.

But applying for funding proved to be a nightmare for some ECD centres. The process had to be done online through a government portal and the centres had to be part of government's central supplier database.

"I applied in 2021, a little after this initiative was announced," said Diedericks. "I went through the nightmare of the application and verification process. It was so frustrating it had me in tears. But after much difficulty and back and forth, I was ultimately verified before the end of 2021. After that all I did was wait, but nothing came."

As 2021 went by, complaints about non payment of funds started. In May 2021, staff of ECD centres embarked on a three-day national protest over what they called the "appalling and virtually non-existent roll out of the employment stimulus relief fund".

Protests and complaints continued through 2021 and 2022, even as early childhood development was switched from the DSD to the Department of Basic Education in April 2022.

Now the ECD Employment Stimulus Relief Fund project has closed.

Western Cape Education Department spokesperson Bronagh Hammond said after excluding duplicate applications and verification of sites, applications at 2,286 ECD sites in the province were considered.

"Of the 2,286 ECD sites, 2,149 sites (94%) have been paid. The project has now ended. It closed in March 2023."

"Some sites could not be paid due to unverified staff applications, and invalid banking details or closed accounts."

She said applicants had been contacted and an audit company appointed to do site visits as part of the verification process.

But Diedericks, who operates from her home, with 15 learners aged between three months and five years, said she was never contacted by anyone after her application was verified.

"If we had got the funds it would have helped a lot, because I would've been able to pay salaries and buy some groceries for the crèche. Now we depend solely on fees that sometimes the parents cannot even afford. When I started this crèche in 2017, it wasn't for gain, it was to service the community, which is why even if parents can't pay school fees sometimes, I will never turn the child away," said Diedericks

Another applicant, Boniswa Mxhakaza, principal of the Khanyisa Educare in Makhaza, Khayelitsha, said the last time she dealt with the application process was last year.

"Every time I would apply for myself or the staff, I would get a response wanting more information or saying there's incorrect or outstanding information. And each time I would go back and fix these problems. But here I am today – no communication about where my application ended up," said a frustrated Mxhakaza.

Khanyisa Educare was established in 2005, and has 130 learners, aged one to six years.

The Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD) said the rollout of the relief fund was "the perfect example of how the government should not administer emergency relief funds to the country's most vulnerable".

Yusrah Ehrenreich, advocacy and social justice manager at the CECD, said national government was responsible for receiving, verifying and approving applications and approved applicants were paid by the provinces. Some provinces, like the Western Cape, also ran their own verification process before making payments.

Ehrenreich said the national government had failed to pay all eligible ECD workers the promised relief funds.

"The reasons for non-payment given by government are weak, inadequate, and unacceptable; we are shocked that blame is being shifted onto the ECD applicants, when it has always been clear that the reason thousands of ECD principals, managers, teachers, cooks and other staff have not been paid is because of a government application process that was not fit for purpose, fraught with complications and complex technical problems; with poor communication from DSD/DBE to the ECD sector. If their system did not allow applicants to apply effectively, that is the fault of DSD's system, not of the applicants," said Ehrenreich.

She said the relief fund was intended to alleviate the effects of the pandemic and national lockdowns on ECD centres and their workforce, but due to government's mishandling of the funds, most of the workers had not received any relief and the sector would take years to recover from the pandemic.

"ECD centres closed, ECD staff left the sector to find more sustainable employment, and children are left without quality care and education, whilst their caregivers struggle to put food on the table."

"Frankly, DSD, DBE and the government at large, should be ashamed. The children of South Africa cannot afford to have their government fail them."

GroundUp sent questions to the DBE on 8 June and followed up on 9 June and 12 June but no response has been received.

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<https://groundup.org.za/article/some-creches-never-got-the-promised-covid-relief-funds-and-now-its-too-late/>