



Draft Municipal Early Years Plan

2027 - 2031



Prompt: Places I like to visit with my family.

Drawing: The library with lots of books, games, people and comfy chairs



Prompt: What makes you feel happy at home?

Drawing: Playing with my family

Wodonga Council acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples of the Country. We also acknowledge them as Traditional Owners and Custodians across various lands. We pay our respect to their Ancestors, Elders, children and young people. We acknowledge the strength and resilience of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and recognise their continuous connections to lands, waters and communities across the country.

Executive summary

A person's early years shape lifelong health, wellbeing, learning, development and connection. In Wodonga, children and families are central to the strength of our community, and the *Wodonga Municipal Early Years Plan 2027 – 2031* (the Plan) provides a shared framework for how the council, services and community partners will support children aged 0 to nine years and their families.

Guided by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth's (ARACY) *The Nest Wellbeing Framework*, the Plan focuses on six wellbeing themes that reflect what children, families and the community told us matter most for children's wellbeing.

This Plan recognises that improving outcomes for children is a shared responsibility. It focuses on where Wodonga Council can make the greatest contribution through planning, services, partnerships, child-friendly places and advocacy, while working with others to address broader challenges affecting children and families.

Over the life of the Plan, coordinated local action, strong partnerships and evidence-informed advocacy will help create the conditions that support positive outcomes for children and families.

Statement of commitment to child safety

Wodonga Council is committed to being a child-safe organisation where children and young people are safe, respected, included and heard.

We uphold the rights and best interests of children and young people and have zero tolerance for child abuse, harm and neglect. Child safety is a shared responsibility across the council and is embedded in our leadership, governance, services, facilities, programs, events, partnerships and decision-making.

We will promote cultural safety, respect diversity, support inclusion, take concerns seriously and continue to strengthen our systems and practices so children and young people are protected, valued and supported when they engage with Wodonga Council.



Introduction

Wodonga is a growing regional city with a strong community identity and a significant population of young children and families. The early years play a critical role in shaping lifelong health, wellbeing, learning and development with children's experiences, relationships and environments laying the foundation for future success.

This Plan provides a shared framework for supporting children aged 0 to nine years and their families. Guided by community feedback, local evidence and ARACY's *The Nest Wellbeing Framework*, the Plan focuses on the areas where local action can make the greatest difference

It aligns with Wodonga Council's strategic directions, including the *Wodonga 2050 Community Vision*, *Council Plan 2025 - 2029* and *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025 - 2029*, while supporting regional and state priorities for children and families.

The Plan guides Wodonga Council's contribution to supporting children and families through planning, service delivery, partnerships, place-making and advocacy.

It:

- provides a shared local vision for children and families;
- guides planning, service development and decision-making;
- strengthens coordination across the early years system;
- supports child-friendly and inclusive places;
- identifies priorities for partnership and advocacy; and
- keeps children's wellbeing at the centre of local action.

Improving outcomes for children is a shared responsibility. While Wodonga Council has an important role to play, lasting change relies on collaboration between families, community organisations, early years services, schools, health providers and government agencies.

Supporting children in the early years is about creating the conditions for them to thrive through safe and welcoming places, accessible services, strong community connections and opportunities to participate. Investing in children and families today helps build a healthier, more connected and resilient community for the future.



Prompt: What makes you feel happy at home?
Drawing: Cuddles with my dad

Our framework

The *Municipal Early Years Plan 2027 – 2031* is guided by ARACY's *The Nest Wellbeing Framework*. The six wellbeing domains provide a shared framework for understanding children's wellbeing and focusing local action where it can make the greatest difference.

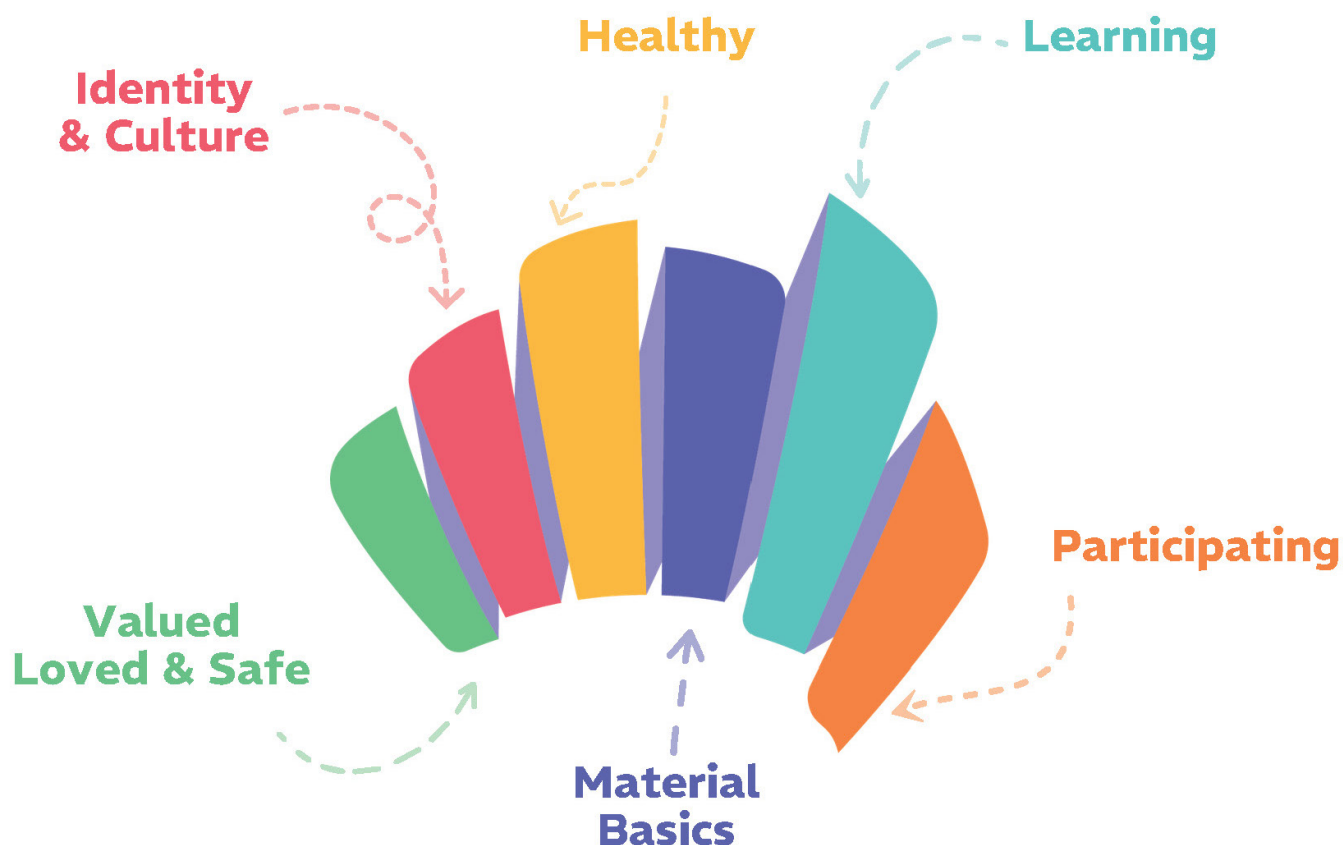


Figure 1: Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth *The Nest Wellbeing Framework (The Nest)*



Local context and what the evidence tells us

Wodonga is growing and changing, with more children and families, increasing diversity and continued demand for early years services and support. The evidence highlights both community strengths and opportunities to improve outcomes for children and families.

More children and families call Wodonga home¹



Children aged 0-9

5795 in 2021

6195 by 2031

7122 by 2046

More children means greater demand for services, facilities and child-friendly infrastructure.

Wodonga is growing¹



Population of Wodonga

47,354 in 2026

51,103 by 2031

62,837 by 2046

Planning needs to keep pace with a growing community.

Planning for future demand²



More children

More hours

More places needed

Population growth and reform will increase demand for kindergarten and pre-prep.

A diverse community³



10.6%

First Nations children

8.6%

Languages other than English

Services, spaces and information should be inclusive, culturally safe and accessible.

Not all children start school equally prepared³



27.5% vulnerable on one or more domains

14.5% vulnerable on two or more domains

Some children may need additional support to thrive and participate fully.

Some families experience barriers to access⁴



Cost

Transport

Wait times

Service navigation

Removing barriers can help families access support earlier.

Source:

1. Population and household forecasts, 2021–2046, prepared by .id (informed decisions), February 2025.
2. Department of Education Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan (KISP) for Wodonga Rural City and Best Start, Best Life reforms, including Pre-Prep rollout.
3. Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) Community Profile 2024, Wodonga Community, Table 1.2 Demographic Information and Community Summary Indicators.
4. Municipal Early Years Plan consultation findings and stakeholder engagement.

What our community told us

Children, families, community members and stakeholders consistently highlighted the importance of safe and welcoming places, inclusion and belonging, opportunities to learn and play, strong relationships and access to support when needed. Their feedback has informed the wellbeing themes, priorities and actions contained throughout this Plan.

Consultation highlighted many strengths across Wodonga's early years system, while also identifying opportunities to improve access, inclusion, coordination and support.



What is working well

- Trusted local services and staff
- Valued parks, libraries and community spaces
- Strong local partnerships
- Growing focus on inclusion and belonging



Opportunities

- Earlier support for children and families
- Better service coordination
- More inclusive participation opportunities
- Greater investment in child-friendly places

Vision

Reflecting this evidence and community voice, the Plan is guided by the following vision and principles.

Wodonga is a child-friendly community where every child is safe, healthy, included and supported to thrive.



Principles

The following principles guide this plan and the way Wodonga Council will work with children, families and partners.

	Children first Children's wellbeing, safety and development are central to this plan.
	Families matter Families are children's first and most important relationships. Their strengths, knowledge and lived experience are valued.
	Children's voices count Children have the right to be heard and to influence the places, services and decisions that affect them.
	Equity and inclusion Every child should have the opportunity to participate, belong and reach their potential.
	Early support The earlier families can access support, the better the outcomes for children.
	Partnership Stronger outcomes depend on the council, services, community and government working together.
	Place Safe, welcoming and child-friendly places help children and families feel connected.
	Evidence-informed action Local evidence, community voice and <i>The Nest Wellbeing Framework</i> will guide our priorities and decisions.
	Wellbeing themes The wellbeing themes reflect what children, families, community members and stakeholders identified as most important for children's wellbeing. Informed by community feedback, local evidence and ARACY's <i>The Nest Wellbeing Framework</i> , they provide a shared focus for action over the life of this Plan. Each theme identifies the outcomes, focus areas and the council's contribution that will help guide implementation.

From plan to action: how council will contribute

This Plan provides the strategic framework for how the council will contribute to improved outcomes for children aged 0 to nine years and their families. Implementation will occur through the council's annual planning, budgeting, service planning, infrastructure planning, partnerships, advocacy and community engagement activities.



Planner

Wodonga Council applies an early years and child-friendly lens across strategic planning, infrastructure planning, policy development and decision-making to ensure children and families are considered as Wodonga grows and changes.



Enabler

Wodonga Council creates the conditions that support positive outcomes for children and families by supporting safe, inclusive and welcoming environments, participation opportunities, information sharing, community connection and locally responsive initiatives.



Partner

Wodonga Council works with families, early years services, schools, health providers, community organisations, Aboriginal organisations, government agencies and regional networks, recognising that shared effort leads to stronger and more sustainable outcomes for children.



Service provider

Wodonga Council delivers a range of universal services, facilities, programs and community settings used by children and families, including Maternal and Child Health, immunisation, kindergarten, libraries, community facilities, parks, playgrounds, events and engagement activities.



Advocate

Wodonga Council advocates for the needs, priorities and voices of children and families at local, regional, state and national levels, informed by evidence, community engagement, service data and lived experience.

The focus areas identified under each wellbeing theme show where effort will be directed over the life of the Plan. Specific actions will be developed, prioritised and reviewed through annual service planning, business planning and partnership processes.

Through implementation, the council will work with partners to strengthen access to services, community connection, child-safe and welcoming environments, meaningful participation and collaboration across the early years system.



Theme 1: Valued, loved and safe

Goal

Children are safe, secure and nurtured in their families, services and communities.

Why it matters

Children thrive when they experience safe environments, trusted relationships and a strong sense of belonging.

Our focus

- Child-safe, trauma-informed and welcoming environments
- Early support, referrals and family connection
- Stronger service collaboration and shared responsibility for child safety
- Opportunities for belonging, connection and trusted relationships

Priority actions

The council's role

		Planner	Enabler	Partner	Service provider	Advocate
1.1	Embed child-safe, trauma-informed and family-friendly practice across relevant council services, facilities, programs and partnerships	✓	✓		✓	
1.2	Promote clear, accessible and consistent information about local services, supports and referral pathways		✓	✓		
1.3	Facilitate collaboration between local services to support earlier identification, referral and access to support		✓	✓		✓
1.4	Use family feedback, partner insights and child safety evidence to inform continuous improvement	✓	✓			

What success looks like

Children and families feel safe, supported, connected and able to access help when they need it.



Theme 2: Material basics

Goal

Families can access the essentials children need to grow, develop and participate.

Why it matters

Access to housing, transport, services and community opportunities help create the conditions children need to grow, develop and participate.

Our focus

- Accessible information about local services and supports
- Affordable and inclusive participation opportunities
- Consideration of vulnerable families in planning and service delivery
- Advocacy on housing, transport and material disadvantage

Priority actions

The council's role

		Planner	Enabler	Partner	Service provider	Advocate
2.1	Facilitate access to services, supports and participation opportunities through information sharing, referral pathways and inclusive service design		✓	✓		
2.2	Use local evidence and community feedback to identify and address barriers to services, supports and participation opportunities where the council has influence	✓	✓			
2.3	Apply a child, family and vulnerability lens to relevant council planning, infrastructure and service decisions	✓	✓			
2.4	Use local evidence and community voice to advocate for improvements relating to housing, transport, food security and service access			✓		✓

What success looks like

More children and families can access the services, supports and opportunities they need to participate fully in community life.



Theme 3: Healthy

Goal

Children are supported to achieve the best possible physical, developmental, social and emotional wellbeing.

Why it matters

Early health and wellbeing support provides the foundation for lifelong learning, participation and resilience.

Our focus

- Participation in universal health and wellbeing services
- Early identification and support for developmental concerns
- Prevention, health promotion and healthy lifestyles
- Advocacy for equitable access to specialist services

Priority actions

The council's role

		Planner	Enabler	Partner	Service provider	Advocate
3.1	Maintain strong participation in universal health and wellbeing services, including Maternal and Child Health and immunisation				✓	
3.2	Strengthen early identification and referral pathways for developmental, health and wellbeing concerns			✓	✓	✓
3.3	Promote health, wellbeing, active play and nature-based opportunities through community settings and partnerships		✓	✓	✓	
3.4	Use local evidence and partner insights to advocate for improved access to allied health, developmental, mental health and specialist services			✓		✓

What success looks like

Children and families can access the support they need early and experience improved health and wellbeing outcomes.



Theme 4: Learning

Goal

Children are supported to learn, explore and develop through quality early learning experiences and strong transitions.

Why it matters

Quality learning experiences help children build the skills, confidence and connections they need to thrive.

Our focus

- Access to inclusive and high-quality early learning
- Positive transitions from early years settings to school
- Play-based learning, creativity and exploration
- Inclusion and support for children with additional needs

Priority actions

The council's role

		Planner	Enabler	Partner	Service provider	Advocate
4.1	Strengthen transitions between home, early years services, kindergarten and school through local partnerships and shared planning		✓	✓	✓	
4.2	Promote opportunities for literacy, communication, creativity, play and nature-based learning through the council and partner settings		✓	✓	✓	
4.3	Support inclusive participation in learning opportunities for children who may face barriers to learning and development			✓	✓	✓
4.4	Use participation data, population forecasts and service information to inform kindergarten planning and future infrastructure needs	✓		✓		✓

What success looks like

Children are engaged in learning, supported through key transitions and able to reach their potential.



Theme 5: Participating

Goal

Children and families can participate in community life, connect with others and feel they belong.

Why it matters

Participation helps build confidence, connection, wellbeing and a sense of belonging.

Our focus

- Welcoming places, programs and events for children and families
- Opportunities for play, recreation and community connection
- Connected neighbourhoods and community spaces
- Reducing barriers to participation

Priority actions

The council's role

		Planner	Enabler	Partner	Service provider	Advocate
5.1	Support free, low-cost and accessible opportunities for children and families to connect, play, learn and participate in community life	✓	✓		✓	
5.2	Apply a child-friendly lens to neighbourhoods, parks, playgrounds, libraries, recreation facilities, community facilities and neighbourhood planning	✓	✓		✓	
5.3	Promote awareness of local activities, services and opportunities available to children and families		✓	✓		
5.4	Use participation data and community feedback to identify and address barriers to participation where the council has influence	✓	✓		✓	

What success looks like

More children and families are connected to their community and feel welcome, included and involved.



Theme 6: Identity and culture

Goal

Children grow up with a strong sense of identity, belonging and connection to culture, community, Country, place and shared history.

Why it matters

A strong sense of identity, culture, place and shared history helps children understand where they belong, feel connected to their community and participate with confidence.

Our focus

- Culturally safe and inclusive services and spaces
- Celebration of Aboriginal culture, connection to Country, Australia's shared history and diverse cultural heritage, and Wodonga's local history
- Stronger relationships with Aboriginal and multicultural communities
- Children's voices, family stories and local identity informing planning and decision-making

Priority actions

The council's role

		Planner	Enabler	Partner	Service provider	Advocate
6.1	Strengthen culturally safe, inclusive and welcoming practice across relevant council services, programs and community settings		✓	✓	✓	
6.2	Continue engagement with Aboriginal organisations, multicultural communities and families to inform planning and service design		✓	✓		
6.3	Support Aboriginal-led, multicultural and community-led opportunities that strengthen culture, belonging, connection to Country, local identity and shared history.		✓	✓	✓	
6.4	Create meaningful opportunities for children, families and communities to share their perspectives, participate in community life and inform council planning and decision-making	✓	✓	✓		

What success looks like

Children and families feel valued, respected, connected and able to contribute to community life.

Measuring progress

This Plan aims to improve outcomes for children and families across Wodonga.

Progress will be monitored using population-level indicators, service participation data, local evidence and feedback from children, families and stakeholders. The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) will remain an important measure of children's wellbeing and development over the life of the Plan.

Wodonga Council will review progress throughout the life of the Plan and use emerging evidence, community feedback and partnership insights to inform future planning, investment, advocacy and continuous improvement.

While available data can identify broad population trends and indicators of child wellbeing, implementation of this Plan will help Wodonga Council and its partners better understand which children and families may be missing out on services, supports or participation opportunities, what barriers contribute to this, and where local action, partnership or advocacy can improve access and outcomes.

Accountability and governance

Supporting children in the early years is a shared responsibility.

Wodonga Council provides stewardship of this Plan, working alongside families, community organisations, early years services, schools, health providers, government agencies and regional partners. Child and Family Services will coordinate implementation, supporting collaboration across council and the broader early years system.

Responsibilities

Responsibility	Role
Wodonga Council	Strategic oversight, monitoring and reporting.
Child and Family Services	Coordination of implementation and review.
Internal council services	Embedding an early years lens across planning and service delivery.
Partner organisations	Collaboration, implementation and shared advocacy.
Regional networks	Regional coordination and collective advocacy.
Community and families	Ongoing participation, feedback and lived experience.

Progress will be reviewed and reported through existing council planning and reporting processes to ensure the Plan is responsive to community needs and emerging priorities.



Prompt: Places I like to visit with my family
Drawing: Rainbow maze park

