

Media Statement

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Auditor-General's Report: Giving Victorian children the best start in life

A report by **Auditor-General, Des Pearson** on the results of a performance audit into access and participation in early childhood services, was tabled in the Victorian Parliament today.

The report, *Giving Victorian children the best start in life*, examined whether the “municipal early years plans”, “Best Start” and “children’s centres” initiatives implemented by the Department of Human Services were leading to an increased number of children using maternal and child health centres, and attending kindergarten.

The department spent around \$250 million in 2005-06 for the early years’ services program. Over the past 5 years, participation in maternal and child health services averaged 89 per cent, and for kindergarten services, participation averaged around 94 per cent. Participation levels over this period were generally in line with the department’s targets.

While the report highlighted that there was some qualitative evidence that the department’s initiatives had improved access and participation in children’s early years’ services, there was insufficient quantitative data to show that the department’s initiatives directly contributed to the increased use of the services.

Mr Pearson said that although the department’s 3 early childhood initiatives were soundly based and generally well implemented, the challenge for the department was to improve its targeting and monitoring of vulnerable clients.

“The department also needs to further develop its performance measurement and evaluation framework to ensure that it is better placed to assess the effectiveness of its initiatives”, Mr Pearson said.

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Direct link to report: http://www.audit.vic.gov.au/reports_par/agp118cv.html

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