



# National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy

## Questions & Answers

### 1. WHEN WAS THIS POLICY APPROVED?

The *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy* was approved by Cabinet on 9 December 2015.

### 2. WHEN WILL THE APPROVED POLICY BE AVAILABLE?

The *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy* will be available within the next few weeks. There are certain processes that need to be followed, such as the final editing and formatting, the Minister to sign off on the foreword, gazetting process through the government printers, amongst others.

### 3. WHAT DOES THIS POLICY AIM TO DO?

The *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy* will give direction and facilitate the provision of a comprehensive package of early childhood development services for all infants and young children, including children with special needs, children with disabilities and other developmental challenges.

It will ensure the best possible start in life for all children and contribute to the long term prosperity of our country. In short, the policy provides:

- An overarching multi-sectoral enabling framework of early childhood development services, inclusive of national, provincial and local spheres of government;
- A comprehensive package of early childhood development services and support, with identified essential components;
- Identifying the relevant role players, their roles and responsibilities for the provision of the various components of early childhood development services; and
- Leadership, coordination and collaboration in the delivery of early childhood development services.

### 4. WHAT AGES DOES THE POLICY COVER?

The policy covers the period from conception until the year before children enter formal school or in the case of children with developmental difficulties and/or disabilities until the year before the calendar year they turn seven (7), which marks the age of compulsory schooling or special education.

### 5. DOES IT INCLUDE CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES?

Yes, the *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy* includes children with disabilities. The policy is rooted in inclusion of young children with disabilities in ECD services and programmes with a focus is on prevention, early screening and intervention, appropriate support and early learning and developmental opportunities.

### 6. WHY IS THE AGE FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES SET AS THE YEAR BEFORE THEY TURN SEVEN?

The *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy* operates within the context of all other government policies.

The age of seven is the year of compulsory schooling and/or special education in South Africa, and as such children with disabilities need to enter that part of the educational, development and care system. The *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy's* scope is only for children in the age ranges as indicated.

### 7. WHAT PROCESS DID THE GOVERNMENT FOLLOW IN DEVELOPING THE POLICY?

The Government of South Africa developed a draft policy based on the latest evidence on early childhood development, the ECD Diagnostic Review, the resolutions from the Buffalo Conference and the country's child rights and international benchmarks. The process of developing the draft policy was also informed by four(4) expert consultations on scale, media and communication, developmental delays/disabilities and nutrition as well as consultations in all nine(9) provinces in November and December 2013, and a national consultation on the draft policy in March 2014. A special consultation was also held with organisations working with children with disabilities.

This resulted in a draft policy document that served as a discussion document towards a *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy*. It was gazetted for public comment (from 13 March to 24 April 2015), providing opportunity for all interested parties, including relevant stakeholders, to give their input. Thereafter, the Government considered all the comments that were received to review the draft policy and to finalise the proposed policy, which was submitted to Cabinet for approval.

### 8. HOW WERE THE COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM THE PUBLIC ASSESSED AND INCLUDED IN THE ECD POLICY?

Upon receipt, all comments were registered in accordance with government procedures and an acknowledgement of receipt was also sent. The comments were then consolidated into one document (408 pages) for review by the National Inter-Departmental Committee for Early Childhood Development (NIDC for ECD), which held several joint sessions on this exercise. The NIDC for ECD meticulously went through each comment and reviewed it against set criteria, which included whether it is based on evidence, does it adhere to the child rights principles; is it in line with overall vision of Government for early childhood development, does it support the *National Development Plan: Vision 2030*, etc. This was important as the comments were quite diverse with different views and opinions.

Following this, the NIDC for ECD had to decide whether to accept a comment, accept it with amendments (especially when there were different views), not to accept a comment, or to refer it for a Ministerial decision. This was a thorough process and took time. Everyone can be assured that every comment got equal attention, was weighed against criteria and considered.

A few things about the inclusion of comments:

- In many instances, comments were made on parts of the policy that were already captured in another part of the policy. Thus, it was already in the policy and to avoid duplication it was not included again.
- Some comments stimulated a debate and discussions, especially when there were a few on the same issue and this resulted in the merging of these comments (keeping the underlying principles) in a newly worded input.

## 9. WHAT IS THE NAME OF THE POLICY?

The approved name is the *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy*. If you want to cite it in research or any other document, the citation is as follows:

Republic of South Africa. 2015. *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy*. Pretoria: Government Printers.

## 10. DOES IT REPLACE OTHER POLICIES, E.G. HEALTH POLICIES, ETC?

This is the latest early childhood development policy for the country, which provides for an integrated approach. It sets clear policy positions for the early childhood development sector in rendering services for infants and young children. It brings together the range of services provided across departments to ensure an integrated comprehensive approach in serving South Africa's infants and young children as well as their parents.

Unless otherwise indicated, (i.e. that a specific policy is repealed), sectoral policies are still valid. However the *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy* sets clear targets in the transformation of the early childhood development sector and subsequent policy changes.

## 11. DOES IT AFFECT THE REGISTRATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES?

No, not immediately. The provisions and requirements of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 and its Regulations are still effective and should be followed until all the relevant legislation, including the Children's Act, is amended. The *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy* will direct the amendments to the Children's Act, which may change the provisions for registration of early childhood development programmes and partial care facilities.

## 12. WILL IT IMPACT ON THE FUNDING THAT SOME EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES RECEIVE?

The *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy* states that the funding of early childhood development programmes have to change. However, it sets target dates for this in the future with the indication that clear funding norms and policies must be developed. Otherwise, the current funding approach will continue until such time that objectives as set out in the *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy* are reached.

## 13. WHY WAS THE ECD AGENCY PROPOSED NOT INCLUDED IN THE FINAL POLICY?

There were quite divergent views on the proposed ECD Agency in the draft policy. Some were for such an agency and others were against it. The draft policy also proposed other possible options. Careful consideration on this matter resulted in the decision that the better option is to strengthen the existing structures, as it will facilitate the implementation of the *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy*.

This policy asserts the leadership and coordination role of government, and strengthens the role of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on ECD, supported by the National Inter-Departmental Committee on ECD; a government led inter-sectoral forum to ensure participation of the non-governmental sector; and inter-governmental forums at national, provincial and local level in terms of the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act 13 of 2005.

The Government is also further undertaking a process of a feasibility study on coordination mechanism for early childhood development as part of the implementation of the *South African Integrated Programme of Action for Early Childhood Development-Moving Ahead (2013/14-2016/17)*.

## 14. WHEN WILL THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL INTEGRATED EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT POLICY START?

Some of the aspects in the policy are currently being implemented i.e. primary health care services, early learning and development programmes, immunization, social assistance, to mention a few. However, a national implementation plan will be developed to guide the implementation and to assist provinces and municipalities to develop their own plans. This will happen against the timelines set in the *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy*.

## 15. HOW WILL THIS POLICY CHANGE THE SOUTH AFRICAN INTEGRATED PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT-MOVING AHEAD (2013/14-2016/17)

The policy already took into account many of the provisions of the *South African Integrated Programme of Action for Early Childhood Development-Moving Ahead (2013/14-2016/17)*, and the policy was one of the key actions set out in this plan. The Inter-Departmental Committee for Early Childhood Development will review the aforementioned and propose amendments, if needed, which will be submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

## 16. THE POLICY SAYS THAT EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IS A PUBLIC GOOD. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

It is globally recognised that investing in quality services for infants and young children has a high return later in life. This means that when we lay a good foundation in the early years of life to enable children to perform better in school, they are more likely to be gainfully employed as adults and live as healthy contributing adults for a better society.

This is also why the provision of early childhood development (ECD) services is regarded as a public good, based on the recognition that early childhood development services not only contribute to the realisation of the rights, development and outcomes of the child, but also to the growth and development of society as a whole in the medium and long term. This is also clearly indicated in the *National Development Plan: Vision 2030*, which states: "Make early childhood development a top priority among the measures to improve the quality of education and long-term prospects of future generations"

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