Stepping up national development: Prioritising essential services for young children

Why prioritise services for young children?
- The first 1,000 days of life is a sensitive and rapid period of development. It lays the foundation for good health and social, emotional and intellectual development. To ensure good outcomes in childhood and later life, it is vital to invest time, energy and resources in early childhood.
- Early childhood development services protect young children from the adverse effects of poverty, violence and neglect. It is vital that these essential services reach all children and families, particularly those most in need.

What do young children and families need?
- Early childhood development starts at home, where the love, warmth and involvement of parents and caregivers help foster young children’s health, growth and well-being.
- Young children also need health services, good nutrition, early stimulation, social services and support for their caregivers.
- Children and families need different kinds of support at different stages of a child’s development – starting from conception through to the early years of schooling.
- These services need to reach caregivers and children where they are, for example, through clinics, homes, playgroups, ECD centres, multipurpose centres and schools.

Providing a continuum of care and support

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<th>Pregnancy (0 – 2 years)</th>
<th>3 – 4 years</th>
<th>5 – 9 years</th>
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<td><strong>Health</strong></td>
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<td>Prevention of mother-to-child transmission</td>
<td>School health services (health promotion, screening and referrals)</td>
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<td>Birth preparation</td>
<td>Screening for developmental delay</td>
<td>Integrated management of childhood illnesses</td>
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<td>Mental health screening and prevention of substance abuse</td>
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<td><strong>Nutrition</strong></td>
<td>Micronutrient supplements</td>
<td>Exclusive breastfeeding promotion (0 – 6 months) and optimal feeding support</td>
<td>Growth monitoring and treatment of severe malnutrition</td>
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<td>Prevention of low birth weight</td>
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Caregiver support
- Maternity and family responsibility leave
- Preparation for parenting
- Child care services for working or work-seeking caregivers
- Parenting education and support programmes

Early learning
- Protective and supportive environment
- Safe, stable, nurturing environment and responsive care
- Access to toys and books
- Early stimulation (caregivers touch, talk, listen and respond to children)
- Group programmes to develop social skills
- Opportunities to develop early literacy and mathematics skills
- Early birth registration and access to social grants
- Prevention and early intervention programmes
- Child protection services and psycho-social support

Social services and support
- Access to social services to prevent and address risk factors
- Care and support services to address barriers to learning
- Access to quality education in grade R and foundation phase

How are you helping young children in your community?