

Invest early to drive national development

What do young children need to thrive?

- To build a strong foundation, we need to start early – during pregnancy or even preconception – as a healthy mother makes for a healthy baby.
- All young children are born ready to learn, and they need nurturing care to help them thrive. This includes good health, adequate nutrition, early learning opportunities, a safe and secure environment, and caregivers who are sensitive and responsive to their needs.
- Young children and their families also need support from essential services such as health care and early learning programmes.
- These services should be of good quality and reach all children and families, starting with those most in need to make sure no child is left behind.

A continuum of care and support

Services should be tailored to support the changing needs of pregnant women, infants and young children at each stage of their development – from conception until the start of formal schooling.



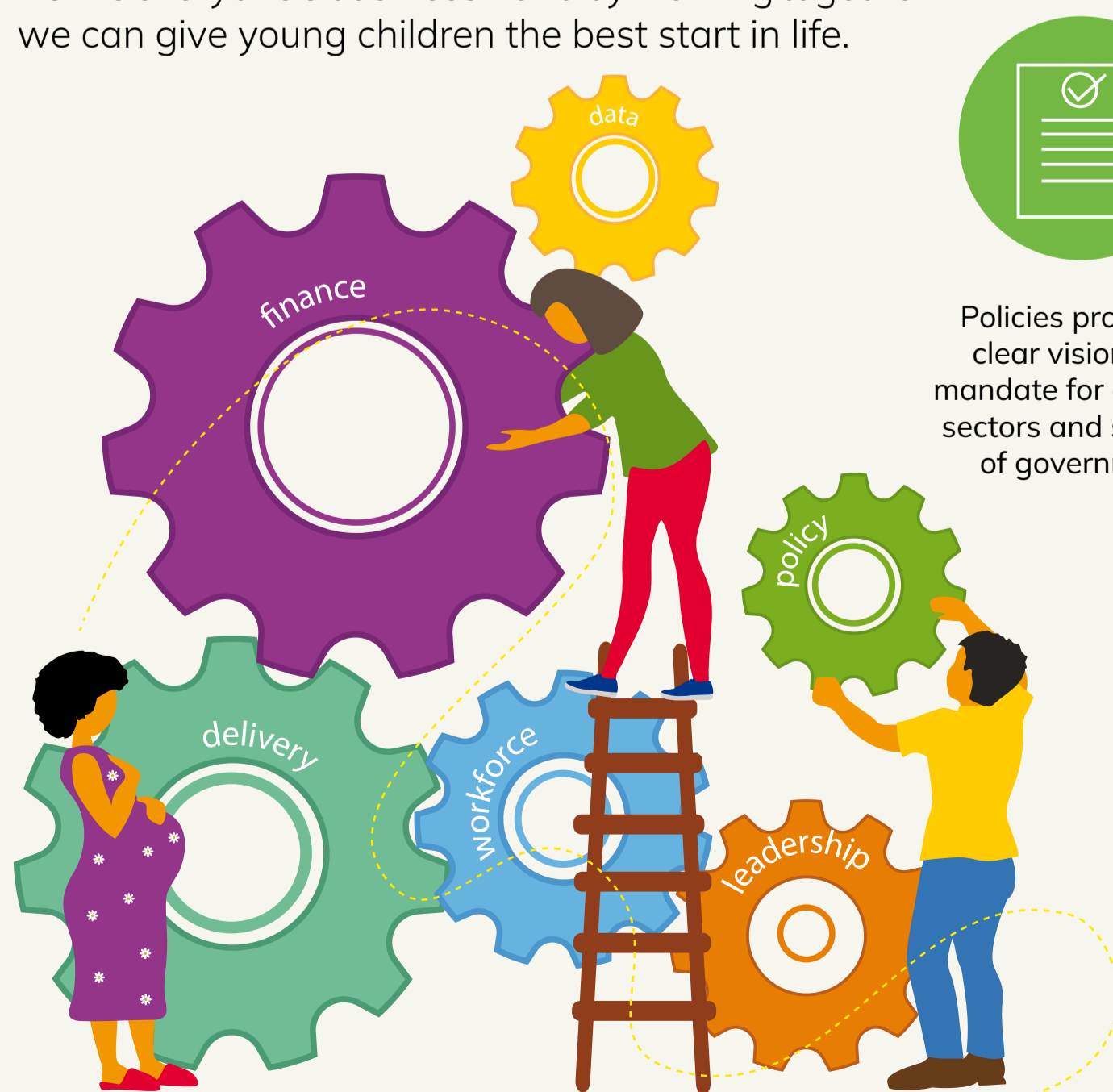
Why invest in early childhood development?

- A child's brain is built only once and its development is shaped in powerful ways by young children's experiences, relationships and living conditions.
- Investing in the health and well-being of pregnant women and young children boosts lifelong health, education and employment prospects.
- Protecting young children from harmful experiences can help break the intergenerational cycles of poverty, violence and ill-health, and is a key driver of national development.

	Preconception and pregnancy	0 – 2 years	3 – 5 years
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sexual and reproductive health services Antenatal care (starting early) Monitoring, early detection and management of disease/complications Prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV Screening and support for mental health, violence and substance abuse Respectful maternity care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safe childbirth Support during labour (including birth companions) Essential perinatal and newborn care Postnatal care Routine immunisation Integrated management of childhood illnesses Early identification and intervention for developmental delay, disability and long term health conditions Screening and support for mental health (mother and child) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary health care (including outreach to ECD centres) Promotion of adequate sleep and physical activity Integrated management of childhood illnesses Early identification and intervention for developmental delay, disability and long term health conditions Screening and support for mental health (mother and child)
Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optimal maternal nutrition – starting preconception Micronutrient supplementation Prevention of low birth weight Food security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for breastfeeding and complementary feeding Vitamin A supplementation and deworming Growth monitoring and counselling Early identification and treatment of malnutrition Food security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adequate, safe and nutritious diet Nutrition support for children at ECD programmes Vitamin A supplementation and deworming Growth monitoring and counselling Early identification and treatment of malnutrition Food security
Support for caregivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Income support for pregnant women Guidance to support a healthy pregnancy, birth and infant care e.g. MomConnect Maternity leave Support from partner, friends and family Safe, healthy homes and communities, including water and sanitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early birth registration Early access to the Child Support Grant, and other social grants where needed Affordable childcare for working or work-seeking caregivers Parent support to promote responsive caregiving, child-directed learning and positive parenting Maternity, parental and family responsibility leave Supportive partner, friends and family Safe, healthy homes and communities, including water and sanitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to social grants Affordable childcare for working or work-seeking caregivers Parent support to promote responsive caregiving, child-directed learning and positive parenting Family responsibility leave Supportive partner, friends and family Safe, healthy homes and communities, including water and sanitation
Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevention, screening and interventions to stop intimate partner violence Challenging social norms that support violence against women and children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevention of intimate partner violence Positive (non-violent) parenting Safe spaces to play and learn Child protection services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevention of intimate partner violence Positive (non-violent) parenting Safe spaces to play and learn Prevention of bullying and corporal punishment in early learning programmes Child protection services
Early learning		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play and learning opportunities from birth Caregivers who talk and play with their children Play materials and books in the home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structured early learning programmes that promote learning through play Group activities that develop social skills Opportunities to develop early literacy and numeracy skills Play materials and books at home

Working together to build a strong ECD system

ECD is everyone's business – and by working together we can give young children the best start in life.



Policies provide a clear vision and mandate for different sectors and spheres of government

Strong leadership coordinates action at national, provincial and local level

Adequate and sustainable public funding improves quality and access to ECD services

The ECD workforce is equipped to support pregnant women, young children and families

Good quality data enable population-based planning and guide quality improvement

Effective local delivery systems ensure children receive the right support, at the right time

Strong referral systems between government services and NGOs are needed to provide seamless support.

Services strive to create an inclusive supportive environment that enables all children to thrive.

Providing extra care

All young children need support, but some need extra care to overcome challenges such as poverty, violence, and disabilities.

Early identification and intervention is essential to minimise harm and ensure children and families get the help they need.



Helping children thrive

This poster was conceptualised by Loni Lake and designed by Mandy Lake-Digby. It draws on the key findings of the South African Child Gauge 2024 which was published by the Children's Institute, University of Cape Town. For more information about child and adolescent mental health, see Sharming W. Barrakler & Loni Lake, 'South African Child Gauge 2024', Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town, 2024.