

# Submission:

## Decadal Plan for Australian Education Research 2025–36

February 2026

### Introduction

The Smith Family thanks the Academy of the Social Sciences (Academy) for the invitation to provide a submission on the Decadal Plan for Australian Education Research (Decadal Plan) as outlined in *Charting Australian Educational Research Priorities and Future Directions: A consultation paper inviting input into a Decadal Plan for Australian Education Research 2025-36* (Consultation Paper).

We note that this Decadal Plan is being developed by the Academy in collaboration with a range of partners. We also note that there are other key organisations and entities that support research and thinking into educational outcomes in Australia as well as provide value to both educational organisations and aligned sectors such as the charity sector.

### The Smith Family is Australia’s largest educational charity

At The Smith Family, we believe that education is one of the most powerful change agents. Our focus is on helping young Australians to overcome educational inequality caused by poverty. As a national, independent charity, every day we work with children and their families to help them unlock better futures.

Today we support almost 72,000 students across Australia through our holistic flagship program, *Learning for Life*. This wrap-around program helps break the cycle of disadvantage through targeted, long-term educational support for students as they progress on their school journey. *Learning for Life* students are all in low-income families, with many facing multiple barriers to engage in education. One-quarter (26%) identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, 40% have a health or disability issue, 23% have a parent/carer from a non-English speaking background, and half (50%) have a parent/carer who has not completed Year 12.

Other programs at The Smith Family include pre-school focused reading and numeracy training for educators, financial management for families and tertiary students and support for digital inclusion through provision of devices to students. Further, the Smith Family is expanding our careers education programs, providing even more opportunities to help students transition from school into tertiary education, training and into the workforce.

Our programs across Australia aim to achieve outcomes aligned with Commonwealth and State/Territory priorities including school attendance, school completion and post-school engagement in employment and further study. We also aim to strengthen key non-school factors by helping parents and carers build the capability needed for effective engagement in their children’s learning.

### Robust, in-depth research and evidence-based practice underpins our work

The Smith Family’s programs are developed and implemented based on evidence. Our Evidence and Impact group leads policy, research, and analytic work to evaluate program impacts. This work drives continuous improvement in our practice and program delivery, ensuring that we develop and deliver programs that are

innovative, responsive, and relevant for the students and families that we support. Our publications also contribute to the broader evidence supporting improvements in educational outcomes.

Our work also relies on a strong Australian and international education evidence base, including accessible, reliable, and relevant public data resources. For this reason, The Smith Family commends the intention to develop a Decadal Plan for educational research, and in particular supports the intention of the plan to provide *'justice, quality, and equity for all.'*

## Recommendations for the Decadal Plan

The Smith Family offers the following comments and recommendations for the Decadal Plan:

1. **Ensure research on living with disadvantage is prioritised** – The Consultation Paper notes the different sectors for the education system and the growing recognition of the intersectional nature of educational inequities. We recommend that focus is given to the long-term and intergenerational issues of living with disadvantage and intersectionality. Inequality affects educational outcomes at every stage of the learning journey, from early childhood through primary and secondary schooling, and into post-school pathways. Public data shows that socioeconomic gaps across these outcomes have remained stagnant or widened over the past decade. Targeted research that identifies effective strategies to reduce these gaps is urgently needed, along with detailed translation and action plans that ensure high-quality research is embedded into policy.
2. **Support collaboration including sharing data** – The Consultation Paper notes the importance of cross-sector *'genuine'* collaboration to maximise outcomes and minimise duplication. We recommend that the Decadal Plan includes mechanisms to support interdisciplinary and cross-sector collaboration. Acknowledging the current availability of education research funding outlined in the Consultation Paper, appropriate incentives for cross-sector collaboration could include targeted funding for collaborative translational research, seed grants to develop partnerships, streamlined data-sharing arrangements, recognition of collaborative work in research performance frameworks, and structured mechanisms such as co-location (for example, university academics within education departments) and cross-sector research hubs. Access and sharing of data are important considerations in any collaborative research. Enabling and supporting cross-sector collaboration would build trust that may facilitate more effective data sharing.
3. **Ensure that the Decadal Plan includes regular reporting, review and adaptability to align with innovation and contemporary expectations** – Few people ten years ago would have considered the impact of a global pandemic or rise of artificial intelligence (AI) on the Australian educational system. Today we use technology and processes that were not invented ten years ago. The pace of technology development and implementation means that a ten-year plan needs to be responsive and adapted over time. For this reason, any Decadal Plan must include regular reporting, independent review and adaptability to ensure that it stays aligned with contemporary expectations and maintains relevance.

The Smith Family looks forward to the next steps towards a Decadal Plan and if you have any queries regarding this submission, please do not hesitate to contact:

### Suzie Riddell

Head of Evidence and Impact  
The Smith Family