

White Paper
Research and Social Policy Team
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High quality early learning deserts

A spatial analysis of supply and enrolment

Uniting

We would like to thank Uniting (NSW.ACT) staff who participated in consultations and made other contributions as part of the preparation of this submission.

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Acknowledgement of country

We acknowledge Australia's First Peoples as the original and ongoing custodians of the lands and waters on which we meet.

We recognise the continuing sovereignty of First Peoples in NSW and the ACT, and their absolute right to self-determination.

We act on our responsibility to co-create a national dialogue of truth that proudly embraces First Peoples' history, culture, and rights, for present and future generations.

We pay our respects to all Elders – past, present, and emerging – and to all First Peoples and communities.

Editorial note:

This edition of the paper corrects an error in calculations in the 2024 edition (which overstated the number of children not attending either pre-school or school). This affects the identification of high quality early learning deserts and of linker opportunity communities (p18 onwards and the appendices).

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Introduction

This report examines the accessibility of high-quality early learning in communities across Australia.

All children should have access to quality early learning, because it helps promote good development and to be school ready. Research shows that high quality early learning is particularly important in helping children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds develop well and prepare school.

In recognition of this, the current Australian national policy goal is that all children should participate in a preschool program for 600 hours in the year before school (i.e. ~15h per week for 40 weeks). Preschools are, in general, a high-quality form of early childhood education and care.

However, Productivity Commission data shows that, nationwide in 2022, one in ten eligible children were not enrolled in a preschool program. Research we published elsewhere shows that more disadvantaged groups within society are even more likely to be missing out. These are precisely the children who stand to benefit most.

This report explores two features of the early learning system which influence families access to high quality early learning: supply, and non-financial barriers. It does this by combining data from the Census, from the Commonwealth Government register of approved early learning providers, and from other sources into a unique dataset on demand and supply of early learning, and community disadvantage.

Key findings

1. Our analysis shows that communities with more high-quality early learning places are in metropolitan rather than regional communities, in more affluent communities, and in communities where fewer children are socially or developmentally vulnerable.
2. We identify 90 “high quality early learning deserts” around Australia: communities where there is no high-quality early learning centre, and where enough children are not attending preschool to make investment in a new centre worthwhile.
3. We also identify 50 communities where there is at least one high quality early learning centre, and where there is also a substantial number of children not attending preschool. These are ideal communities for investing in programs to help families to navigate the complex early learning system, and to overcome the challenges they face beyond the cost of fees (such as transport, out-of-pocket costs, and disability).

Methods

Defining “high quality” early learning

In this report, we define “high quality early learning” to mean “any early childhood education or care service rated as ‘exceeding’ or ‘excellent’ in the National Register of approved education and care services and providers”.

The National Register contains the results of assessments carried out by the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) against the National Quality Standard (NQS).¹ The Standard defines quality in terms of seven domains:

1. Educational program and practice
2. Children’s health and safety
3. Physical environment
4. Staffing arrangements
5. Relationships with children
6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
7. Governance and leadership.

ACECQA assesses quality against each of these domains using a five-point scale. From high to low, the ratings are “Excellent”, “Exceeding”, “Meeting”, “Working Towards” and “Significant Improvement Required”. ACECQA publishes data on all registered providers, giving an overall rating and ratings against each of the domains.²

We deliberately focus on “high quality early learning”, and not just on all services which meet the quality standard, for several reasons. First, we are interested in assessing access to high quality early learning because research shows this has the greatest impact on child development and wellbeing. Domains 1, 3 and 5 seem to be particularly important.³ And second, a broader definition includes over three quarters of all services. It runs the risk of analysing the early childhood education and care system as a whole and saying nothing meaningful about access to high quality.

Analysing the spatial distribution of quality early learning

In this report, we examine the geographic distribution of high-quality early learning across Australia by linking the ACECQA register with data about local communities.

We geolocated each service location using the Geocoded National Address File.⁴ This allowed us to assign each service to its appropriate ABS Statistical Area 2 (SA2). SA2s “generally have a population between 3,000 and 25,000. Their purpose is to represent a community that interacts together socially and economically. SA2s represent suburbs within cities and catchments of rural areas.”⁵

This, in turn, allowed us to create a single dataset with information on characteristics of the early learning service system and from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and other sources. Our main source was the 2021 Census, which provides demographic

¹ <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard>, and particularly <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-07/RevisedNOSHAndoutA4.pdf>

² <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/resources/national-registers>

³ Rankin, P., Staton, S., Jones, A., Potia, A. H., Houen, S., Healey, B., & Thorpe, K. (2024). Linking quality and child development in early childhood education and care: Technical report. Australian Education Research Organisation. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/research/technical-papers/linking-quality-andchild-development-early-childhood-education-and-care>

⁴ <https://www.data.gov.au/dataset/ds-dga-19432f89-dc3a-4ef3-b943-5326ef1dbecc/details>

⁵ <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/guide-census-data/geography/census-geography-glossary#statistical-area-level-2-sa2>

characteristics of the local population, and data on participation in early learning. We also linked with the ABS Socio Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA), the Child Social Exclusion Index,⁶ and the Australian Early Development Census,⁷ all of which are available at the SA2 level.

Using this linked dataset, we calculated several summary statistics about the early learning system in each area. The two most important in this report are:

- The number of high-quality early learning places available. This is a number ranging from zero (in areas with no service that exceeds the quality standards or is rated as “excellent”) to 857 (Elsternwick in Melbourne)
- The ratio of high-quality early learning to children aged 4-5 living in the area. Values between zero and one indicate that there are more children in the area than there are high quality early learning places. Values above one indicates that there are more high-quality early learning places available than there are children. The highest value is 84.7 in Acton, ACT (which is essentially the Australian National University, an area with a small resident population and 254 places across three services rated as “exceeding”).

⁶ <https://unitingcare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2024-Child-Social-Exclusion-Report-FINAL.pdf>

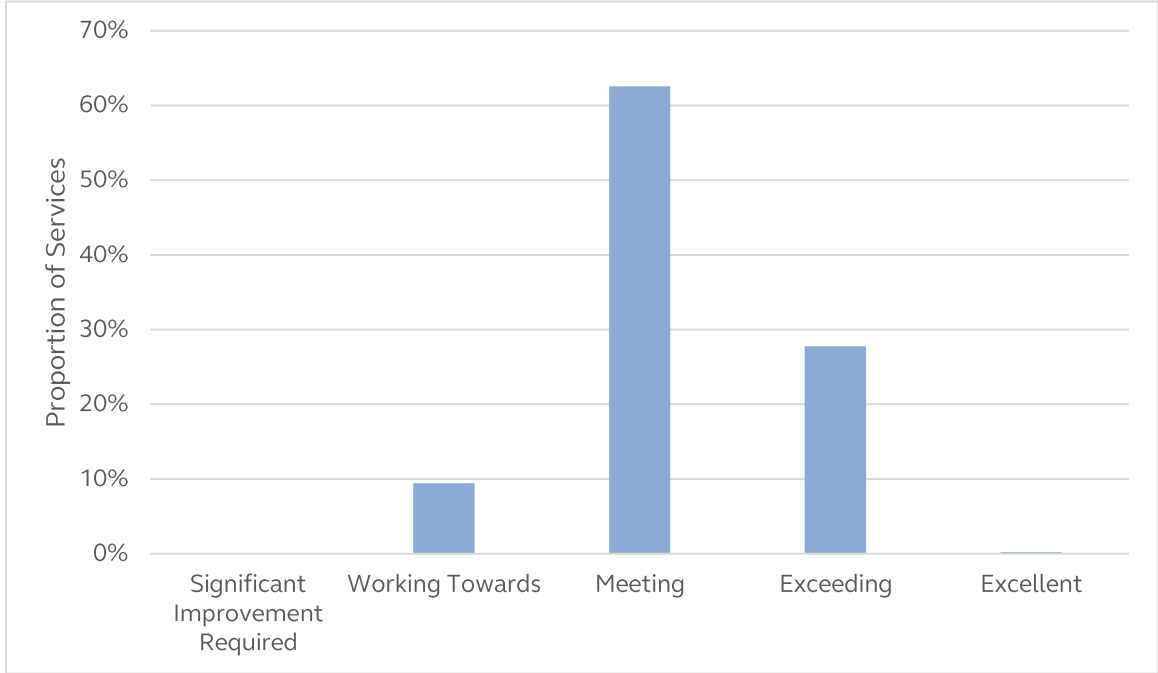
⁷ <https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/early-childhood-data-and-reports/australian-early-development-census-aedc>

The overall quality of the early learning system

As of May 2024, ACECQA’s national quality register contained entries for 12,719 accredited services nationwide which provided some form of early childhood education or care. Of those, 967 did not receive a quality rating. We exclude them from our analysis, along with services which only provided out of school hours care for children in primary school.

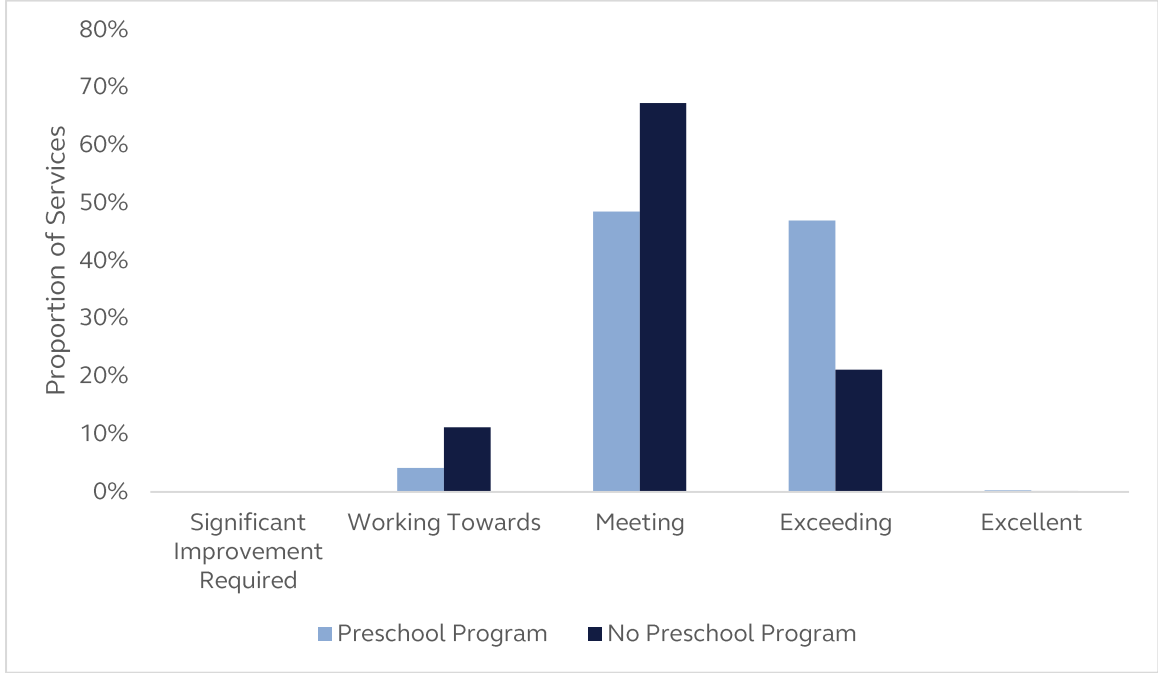
Figure 1 shows that over half of the approximately 12,000 services which received a rating met the quality standards (57%), and a further quarter exceeded them (25%). Most of the remaining one-fifth were working towards the standard. The overall distribution of ratings for each of the seven quality domains did not differ noticeably from this pattern (not shown).

Figure 1 - ECEC Services, by Quality Rating



There is a marked difference between overall quality ratings for the 3,785 services which offer a pre-school program compared with those which do not. As can be seen in Figure 2, a much higher proportion of services offering a pre-school program are rates as exceeding the National Quality Standards (47%) compared with other services (21%). The overall distribution of ratings did not differ noticeably for other characteristics of the service that could be analysed in the registers, such as differences between centre-based care and family day care (not shown).

Figure 2 – Preschools v. Other ECEC Services, by Quality Rating

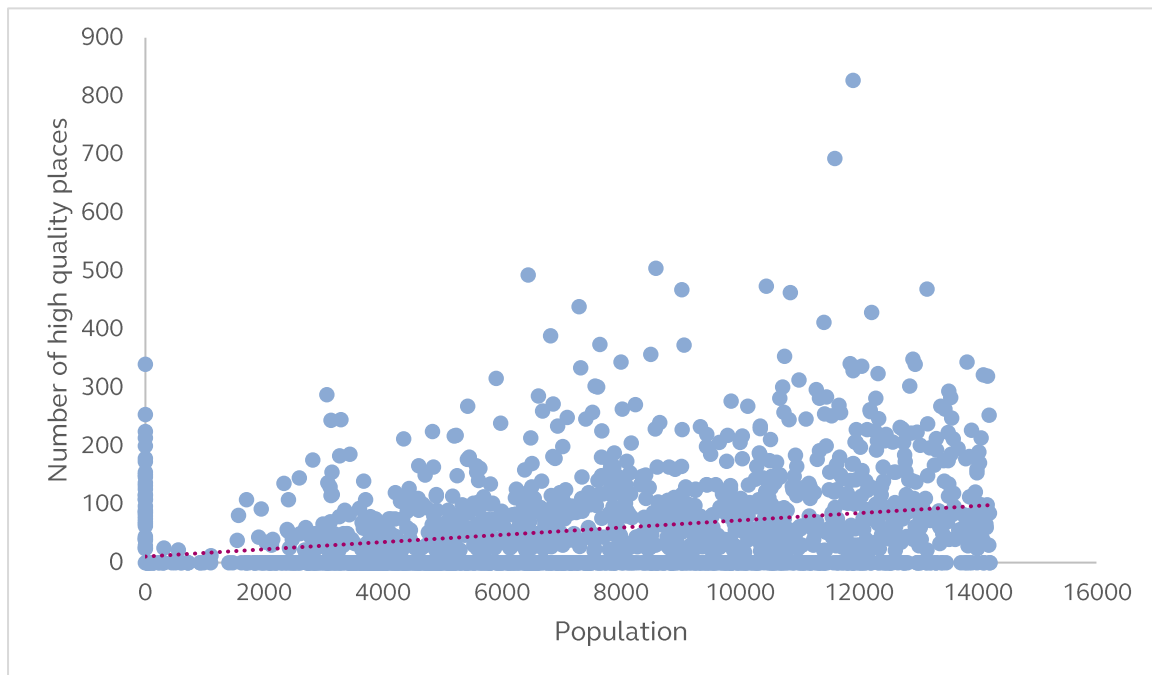


Where are high quality early learning services?

High quality early learning services are not evenly distributed across Australia.

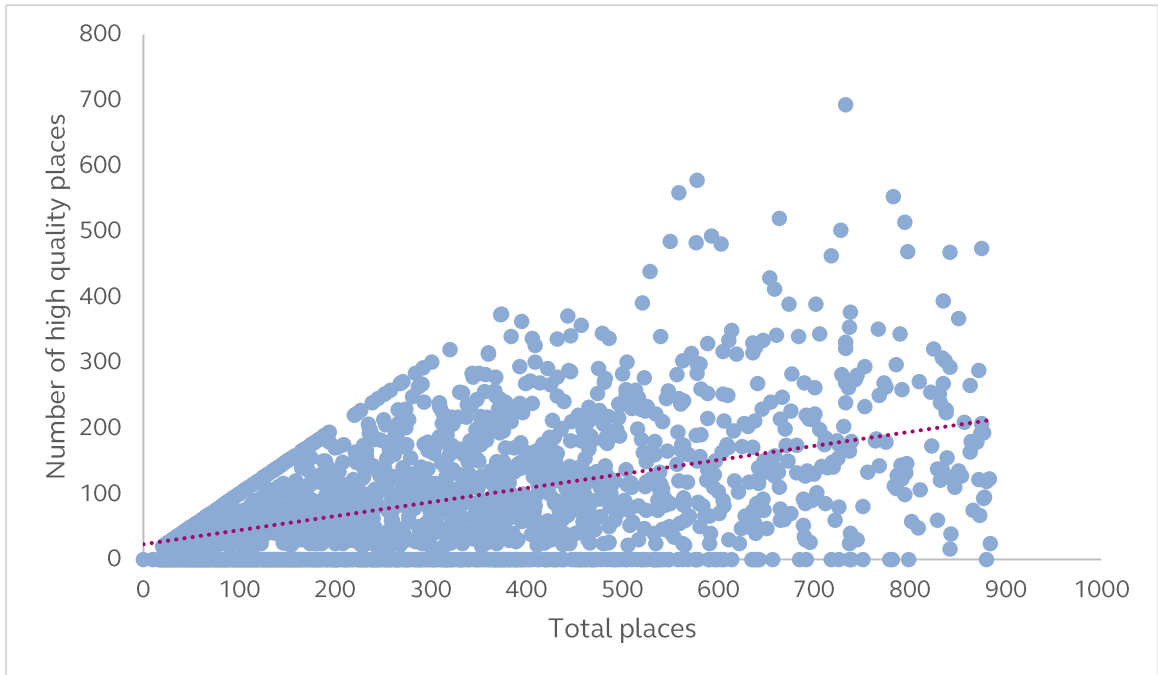
The availability of high-quality early learning is partly related to population density. This can be seen in Figure 3, which shows there are more high-quality places in areas where more people live. However, there is a great deal of variation in the number of high-quality places available in communities with similar populations; population alone explains less than one fifth of the observed variation ($R^2=0.1934$).

Figure 3 – Number of high-quality places by population



The availability of high-quality early learning is also partly related to the availability of early childhood education and care services in general. This can be seen in Figure 4, which shows there are more high-quality places in areas where there are more ECEC places of any level of quality. However, there is a great deal of variation in the number of high-quality places available in communities with similar numbers of ECEC places; the size of the ECEC service system alone explains a little over a third of the observed variation ($R^2=0.3579$).

Figure 4 – Number of high-quality places by number of places



Community-level disadvantage

The distribution of high-quality early learning across Australia varies with community-level disadvantage, as measured by the SEIFA index of relative socioeconomic disadvantage. This can clearly be seen in Figure 5 and Figure 6, which shows that both the absolute number of high quality places and the ratio of high quality places to children aged 4-5, is higher in more affluent communities. On average, communities at any given SEIFA decile have an additional over three high quality places per 100 children than communities in the decile immediately below.

Figure 5 – Number of high-quality places by community advantage

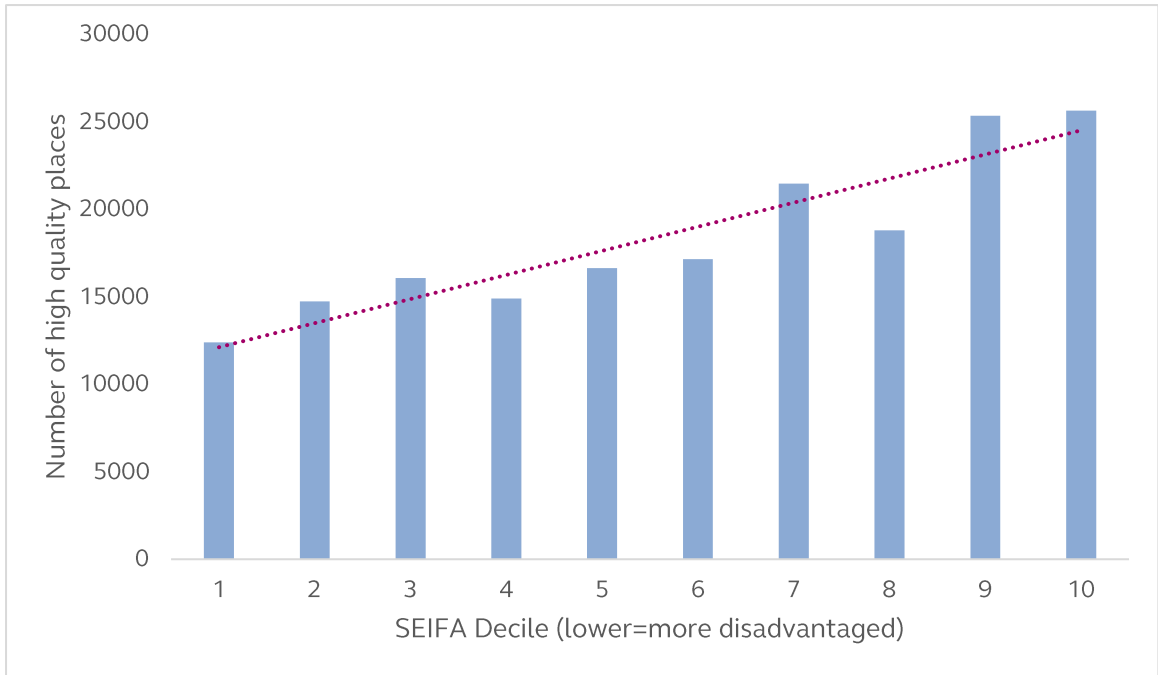
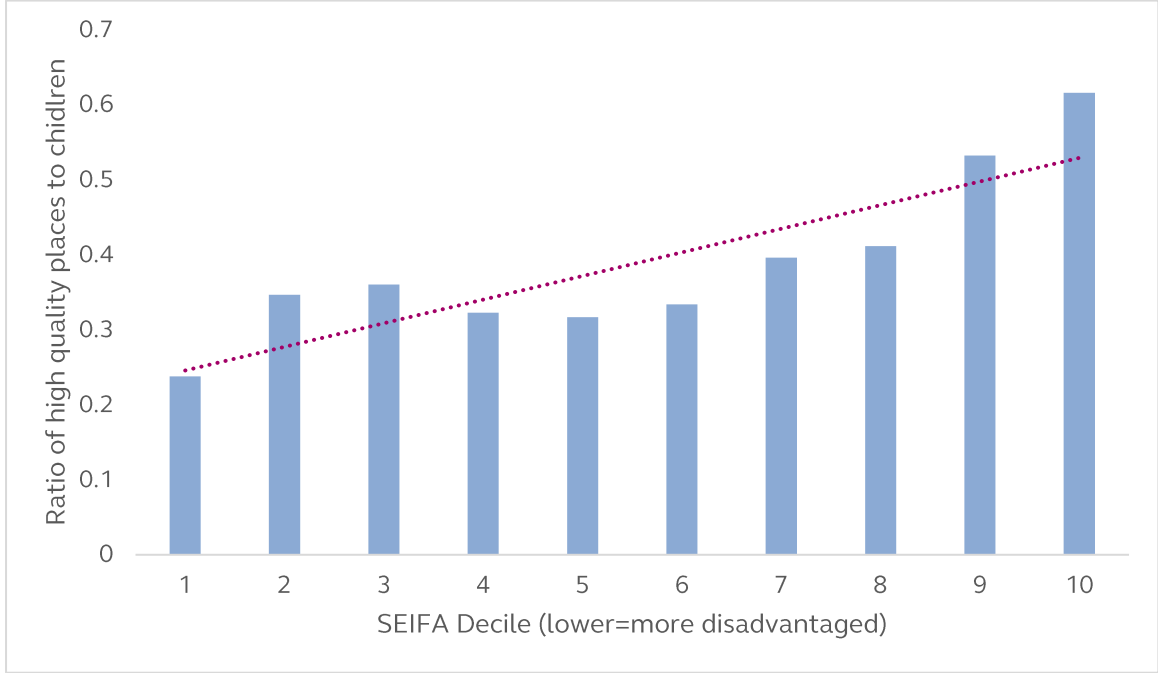


Figure 6 – Relative availability of high-quality places by community advantage



Child social exclusion

The distribution of high-quality early learning services across Australia also varies clearly with child social exclusion, as measured by the Child Social Exclusion Index. This can clearly be seen in Figure 7 and Figure 8, which shows that both the absolute number of high quality places and the ratio of high quality places to children aged 4-5, is lower in areas experiencing higher rates of child social exclusion. On average, communities at any given Child Social Exclusion Index quintile six fewer high-quality places per 100 children than communities in the decile immediately below.

Figure 7 – Number of high-quality places by child social exclusion

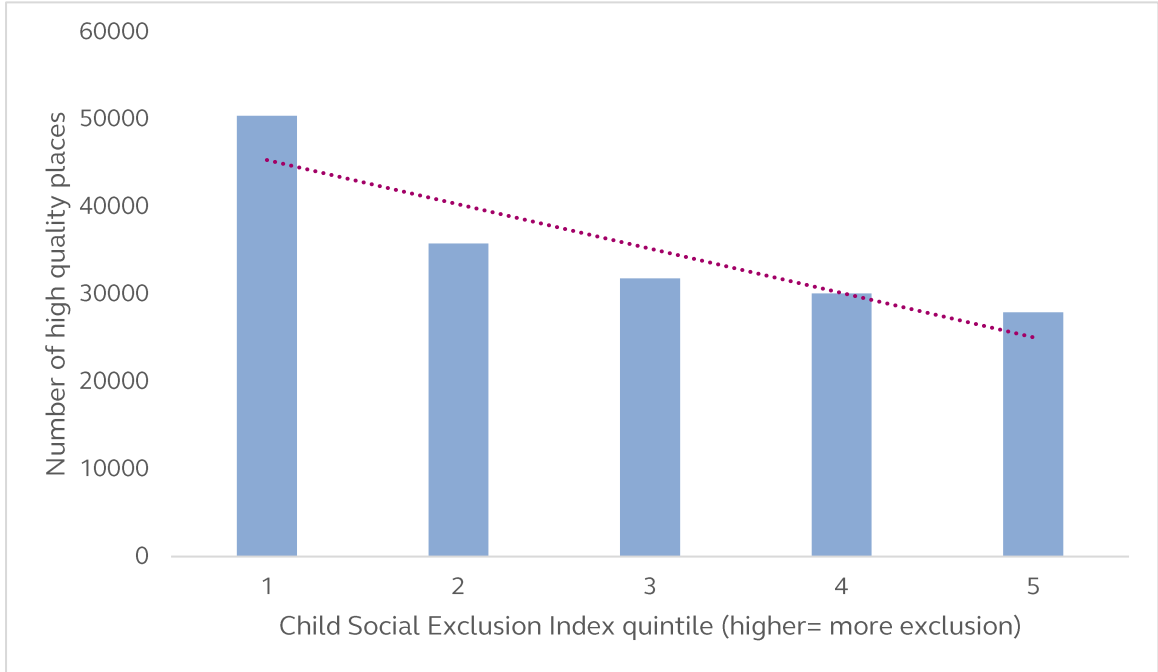
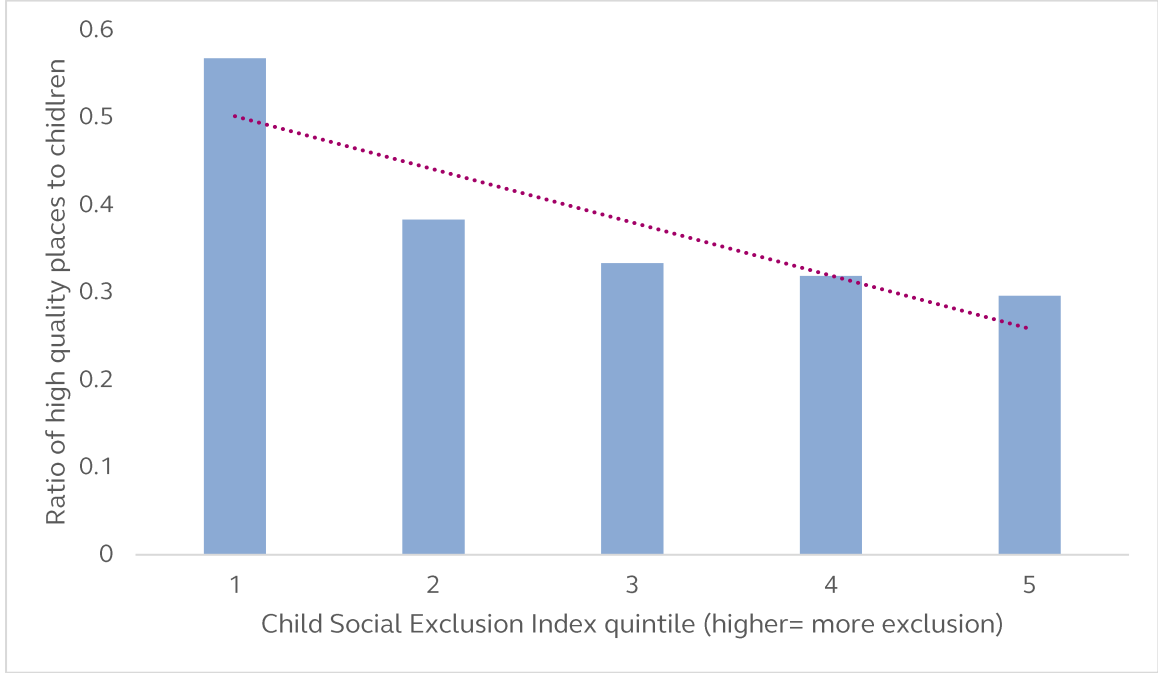


Figure 8 – Relative availability of high-quality places by child social exclusion



Remoteness

The distribution of high-quality early learning services across Australia varies very clearly with the remoteness of the region in which the community sits. Figure 9 and Figure 10 show the absolute number of high-quality places and the ratio of high-quality places to children aged 4-5, by the ABS classification of remoteness of the community. The very high absolute numbers of high-quality places in major cities is not surprising, given most of the Australian population lives in these areas. However, Figure 10 shows that there is still a clear regional inequity, even when we adjust for population. On average, communities at any given remoteness classification six fewer high-quality places per 100 children than communities in the classification immediately below.

Figure 9 – Number of high-quality places by remoteness

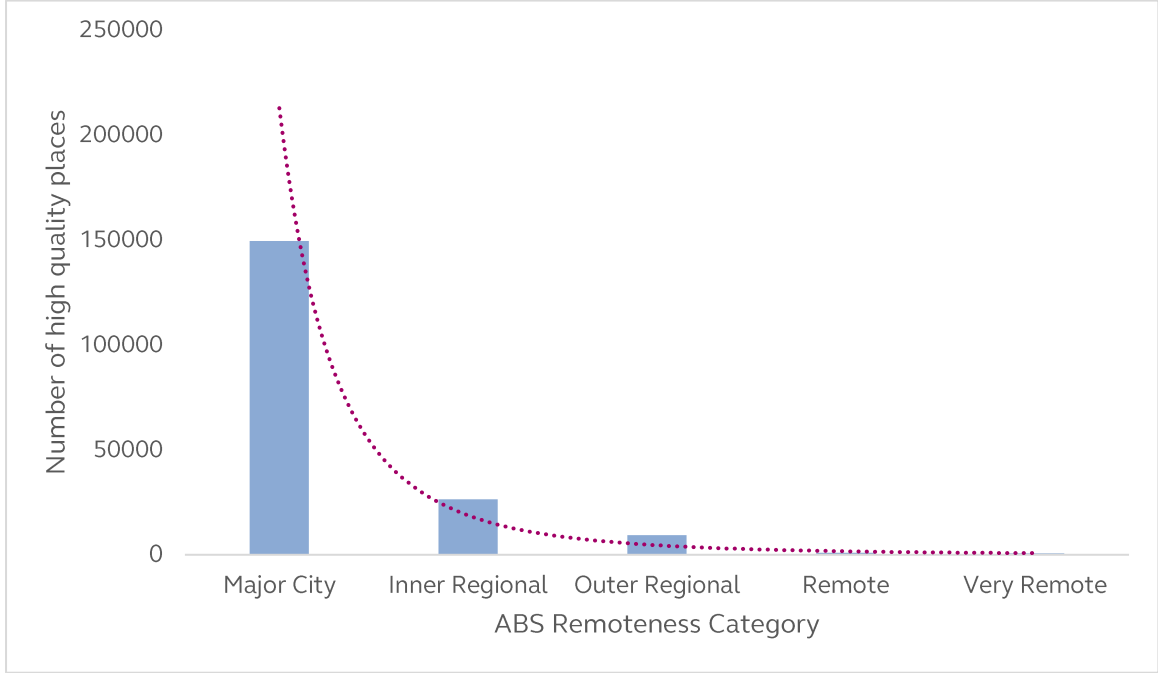
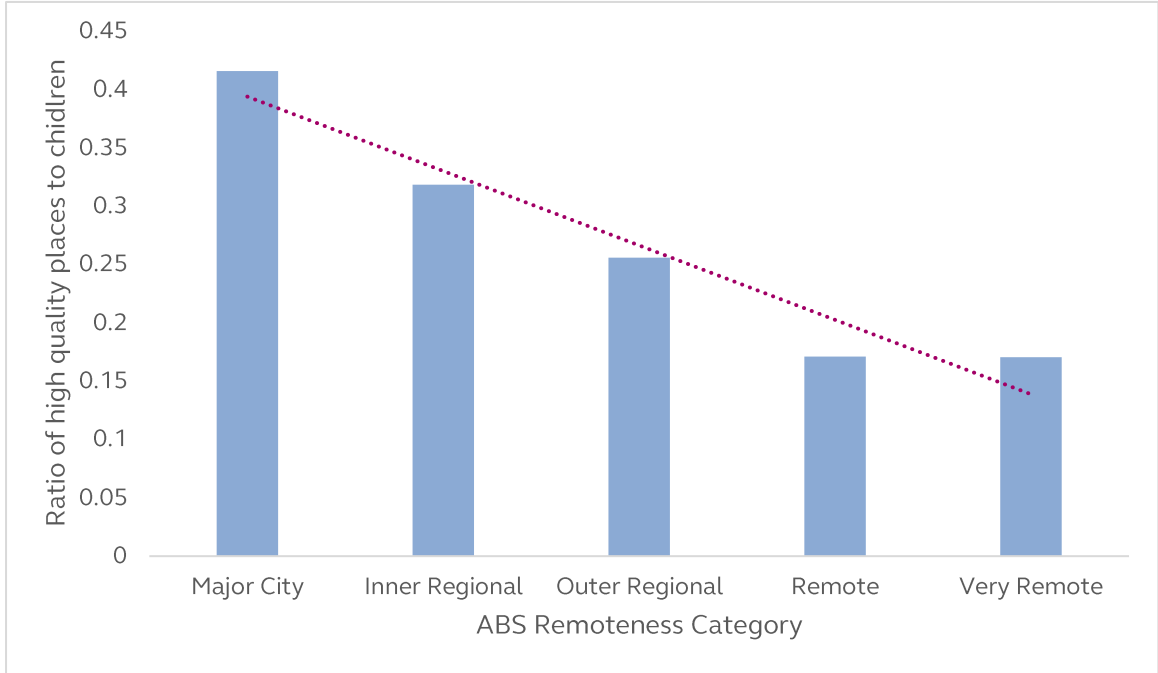


Figure 10 – Relative availability of high-quality places by remoteness



Developmental vulnerability

The distribution of high-quality early learning services across Australia varies very clearly with the proportion of children in the community assessed by the Australian Early Development Census as vulnerable on two or more developmental domains. Figure 11 and Figure 12 show the absolute number of high-quality places and the ratio of high-quality places to children aged 4-5, by the AEDC vulnerability measure. On average, a ten percent increase in the proportion of children who are developmentally vulnerable in a community is associated with seven fewer high-quality places per 100 children.

Figure 11 – Number of high-quality places by proportion of children vulnerable on 2+ AEDC domains

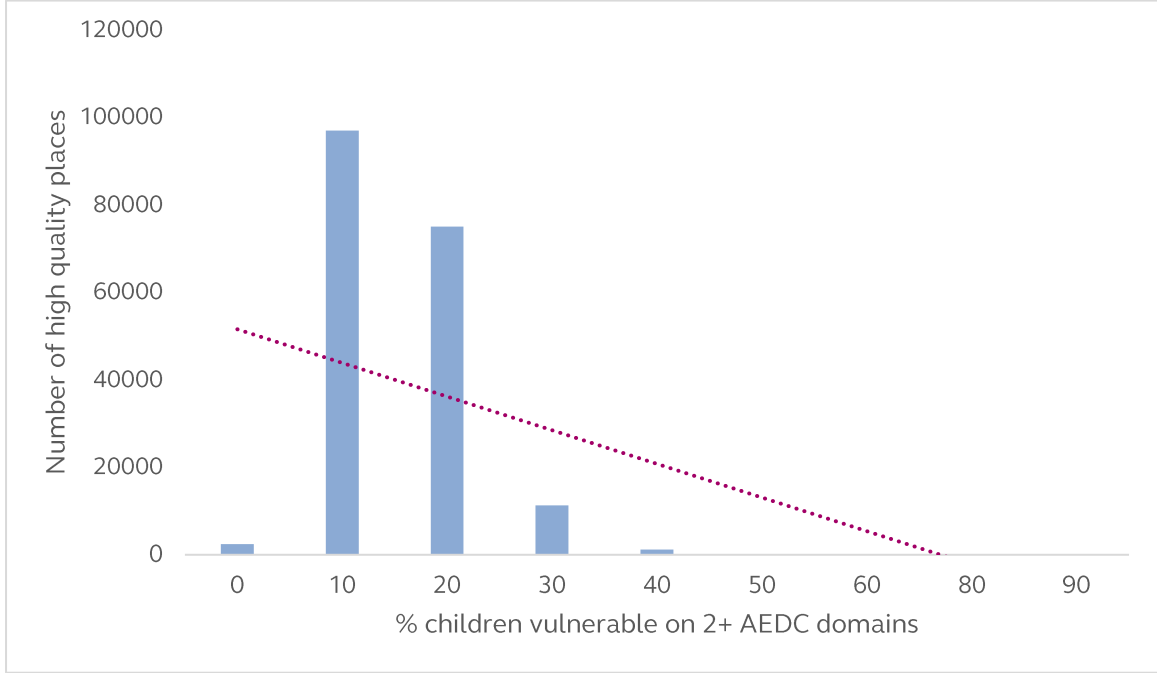
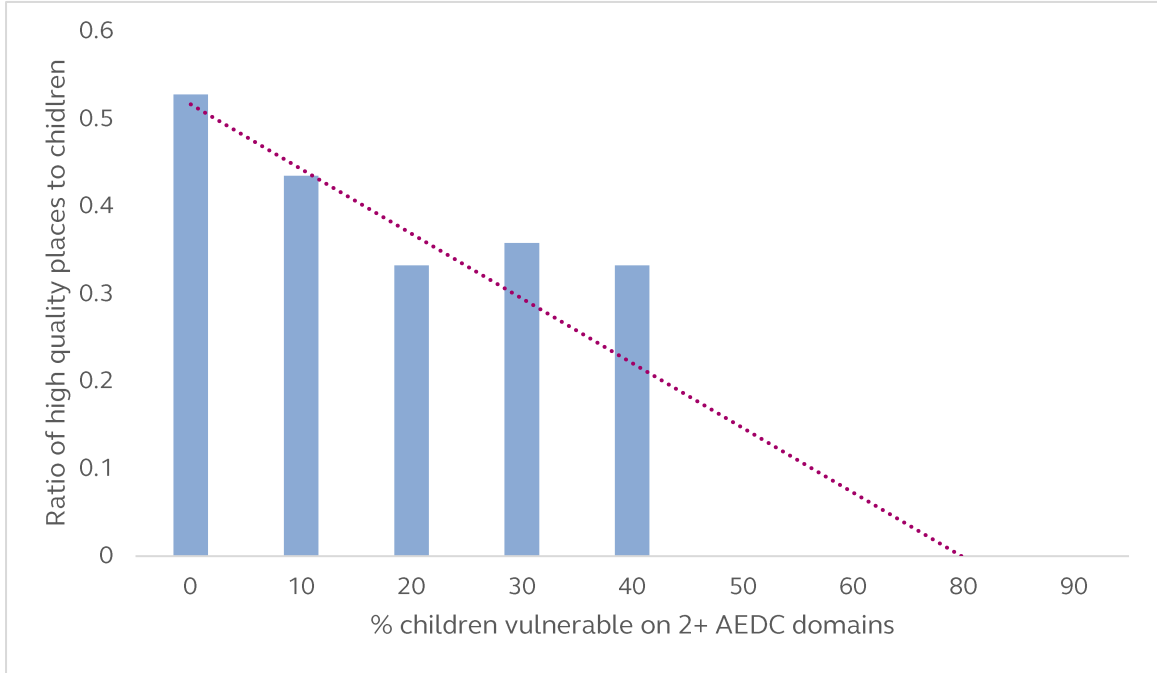


Figure 12 – Relative availability of quality by proportion of children vulnerable on 2+ AEDC domains



Note: Data removed for one remote Queensland community in the 80-90% decile with a small number of children and a strong service system. The ratio for this community is 3.02

Cultural diversity

Finally, we examine spatial patterns in the distribution of high-quality early learning across communities with varying proportions of people identifying as First Nations, and of people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Proportion of people identifying as First Nations

The proportion of people who identify as First Nations varies by community across Australia, from zero to 95%. The distribution of high-quality early learning decreases with

the proportion of First Nations people living in the community, as can clearly be seen in Figure 13 and Figure 14. Both the absolute number of high-quality places and the ratio of high-quality places to children aged 4-5, is lower communities with more First Nations people. This is a significant social justice issue, but not a surprising research finding given the strong relationships with regionality and community disadvantage identified above. The communities with the highest First Nations populations tend to be regional or remote, and the over-representation of First Nations on almost every measure of disadvantage is well-known.

Figure 13 – Number of high-quality places by proportion identifying as First Nations

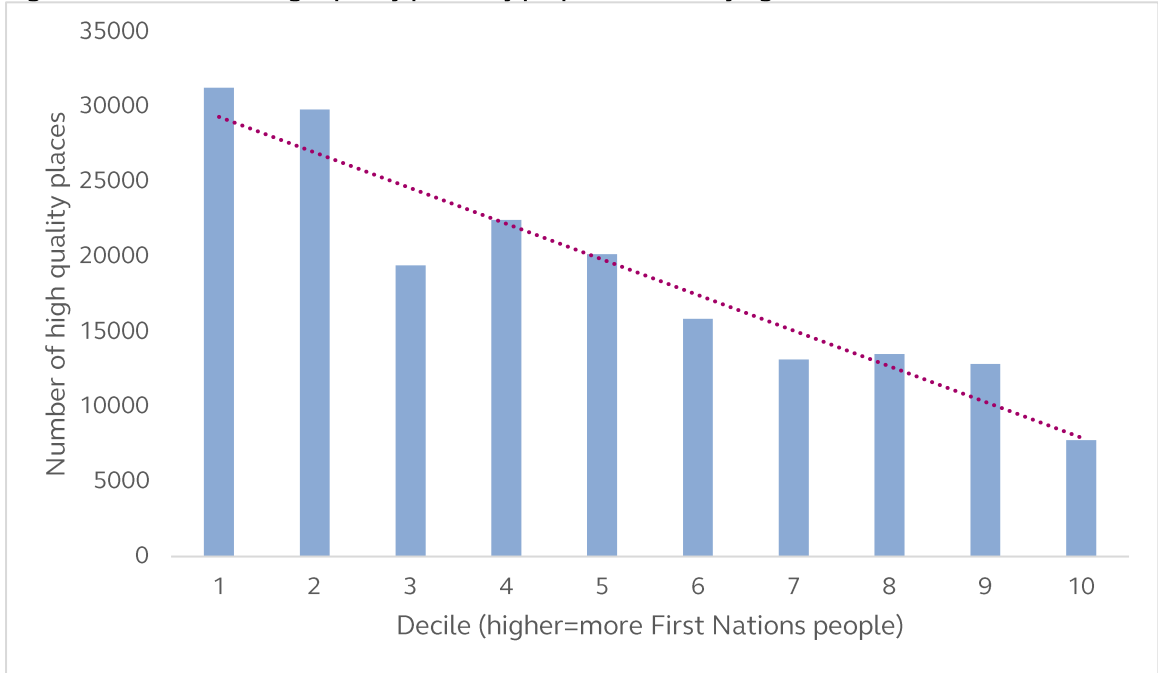
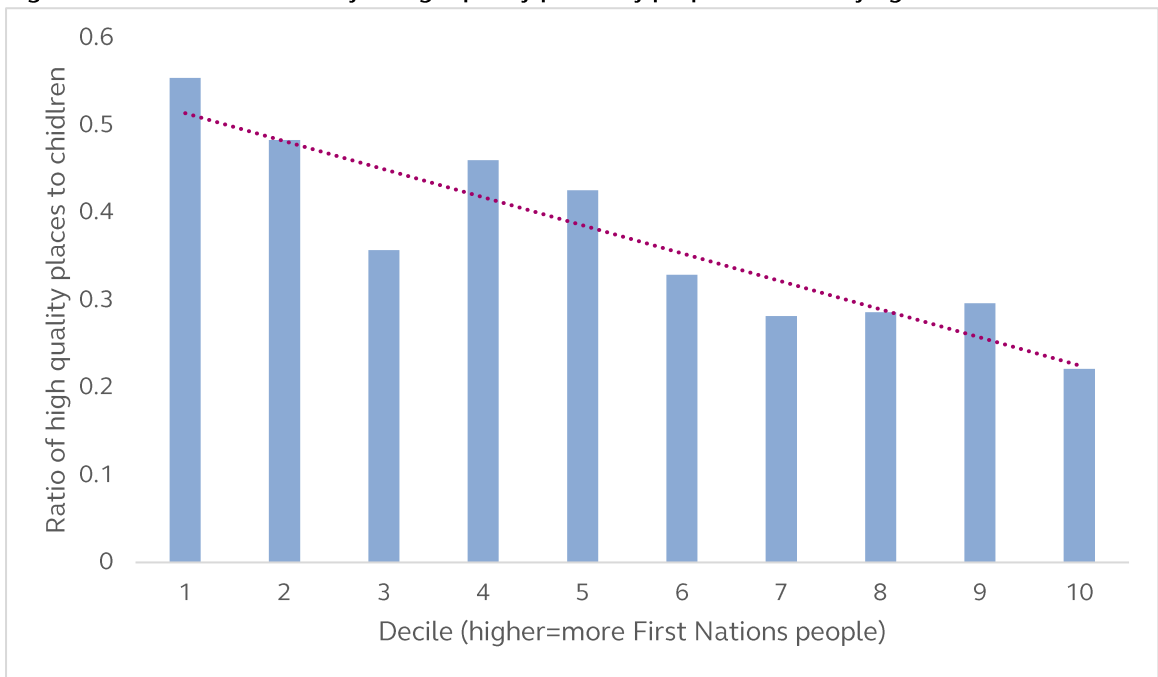


Figure 14 – Relative availability of high-quality places by proportion identifying as First Nations



Proportion of people who do not speak English well

Cultural background can influence engagement with and experience of early learning in many ways. For example, people in Australia on certain visas do not have the right to access government payments to subsidise centre fees; while in some cultural communities there are strong traditions of parents caring for children until school. Here, we use command of English as the basis for our analysis, because our experience as a service provider suggests being able to speak and write English makes it much easier for parents to find a suitable early learning centre, and to access the entitlements that help make it affordable. Here, we define Non-English Speakers as people who indicated on the census they speak a language other than English, and that they either do not speak English or do not speak it well.

The proportion of non-English speakers varies by community across Australia, from zero to one third. The distribution of high-quality early learning generally increases with the proportion of non-English speakers living in the community, as can clearly be seen in Figure 15 and Figure 16. Both the absolute number of high-quality places and the ratio of high-quality places to children aged 4-5, is generally higher in communities with more non-English speaking people. This is not a terribly surprising research finding, given the strong relationships with regionality and community disadvantage identified above. Cultural and linguistic diversity tends to be concentrated in metropolitan areas rather than regional areas. And while poor command of English is generally associated with a recent migrant experience, it does not necessarily imply socioeconomic disadvantage. The figures below clearly show that many non-English speakers are able to afford to live in communities with high-quality early learning (even if they may struggle to access it).

Figure 15 – Number of high-quality places by proportion of non-English speakers

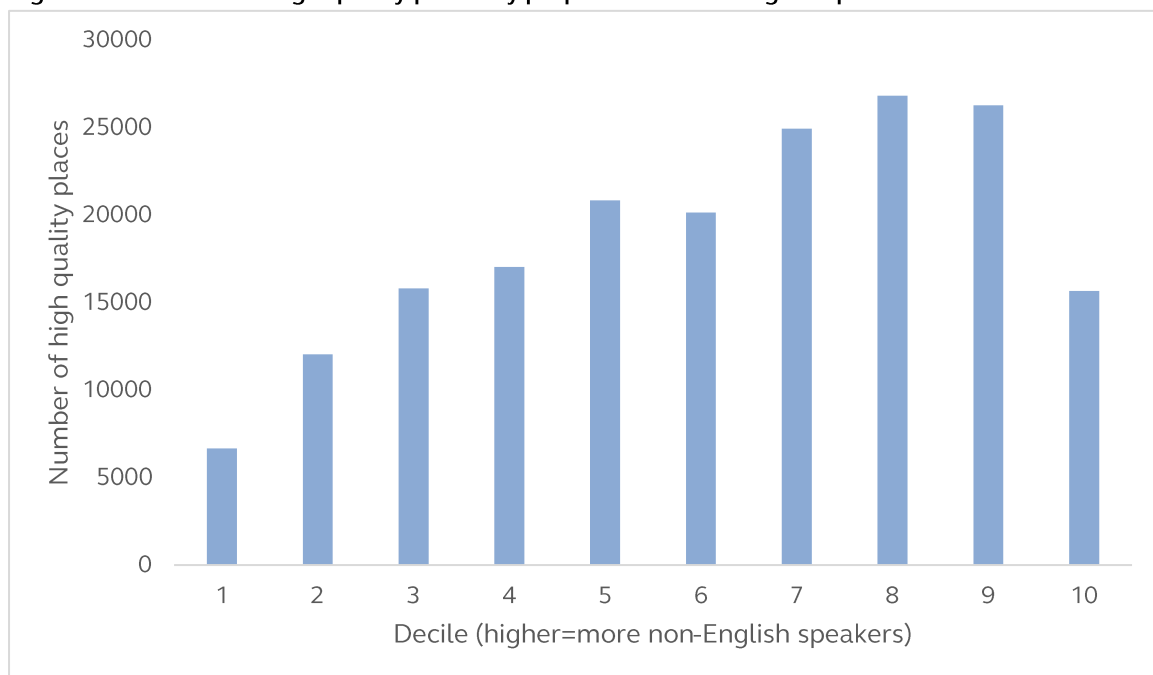
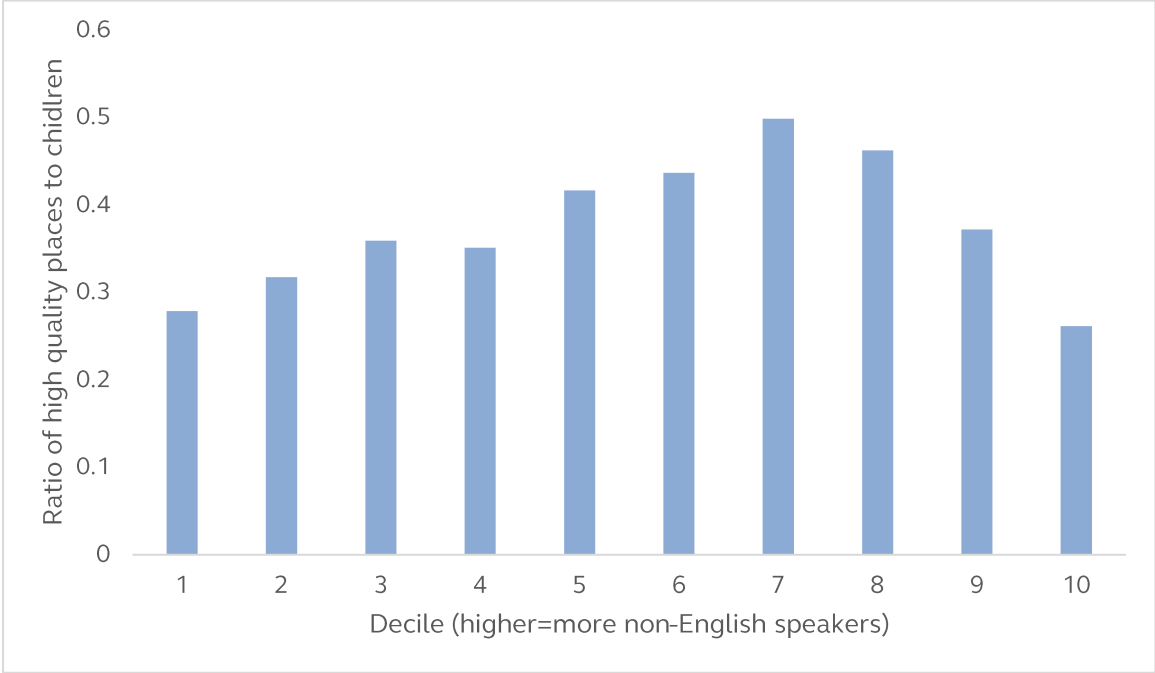


Figure 16 – Relative availability of high-quality places by proportion of non-English speakers



How might we improve access to high quality early learning?

This section of the report explores two of the most important reasons why families are unable to access high quality early learning: supply, and non-financial barriers.

Supply is a straightforward issue. Some communities have no high-quality early learning services. In these cases, families generally have one of two options. They can use a lower-quality service, or they can take their children to a high-quality service in another area. Taking children to a service in another area is easier in more advantaged areas because the centres with a relative oversupply of high-quality early learning tend to be in those areas. We explore some of the more complex spatial aspects of the supply of early learning in the appendices, on page 26. It is also easier for more advantaged families, who are in a better position to pay the additional transport and other costs. The lack of high-quality early learning services in a community is therefore a question of social justice because it disproportionately affects families who are already less advantaged. In this section of the report, we seek to identify where those communities are.

Non-financial barriers are more complex. Based on our experience a provider of social supports for vulnerable families, many struggle to access early learning of any kind, even in communities where a suitable high-quality service exists. There are many reasons for this, including social isolation, language barriers, unsuitable transport, the complexity of the early learning system and government subsidies, and out-of-pocket costs. We have found that many of these families need support to find a suitable centre, to engage with it, and to keep attending. Services such as our “Links to Early Learning” can be very effective in overcoming these barriers. In this section of the report, we also seek to identify communities which might benefit from this kind of intervention.

High quality early learning deserts

High quality early learning deserts are communities with no access to high quality early learning, and where there is sufficient demand and social disadvantage to make investing in establishing a high-quality early learning service worthwhile.

For the purpose of this analysis, we define a high quality early learning desert as an SA2 with no high quality early learning service, which is in either in the most disadvantaged half of the SEIFA scale or the most excluded half of the Child Social Exclusion Index or both, and where there were at least 40 children aged 4 reported at the 2021 census as not attending any form of early learning or school. We rank these communities into deciles based on the proportion of children who are not attending early learning.

There are 603 communities across Australia which meet this definition of high-quality early learning deserts. They were home to 25,625 children aged 4 and 5 who were not attending either early learning or school on Census Night in 2021. As can be seen in Table 1, there were deserts in both regional and metropolitan areas, with the largest total number of children by jurisdiction in Queensland, followed by New South Wales, Western Australia, and then Victoria.

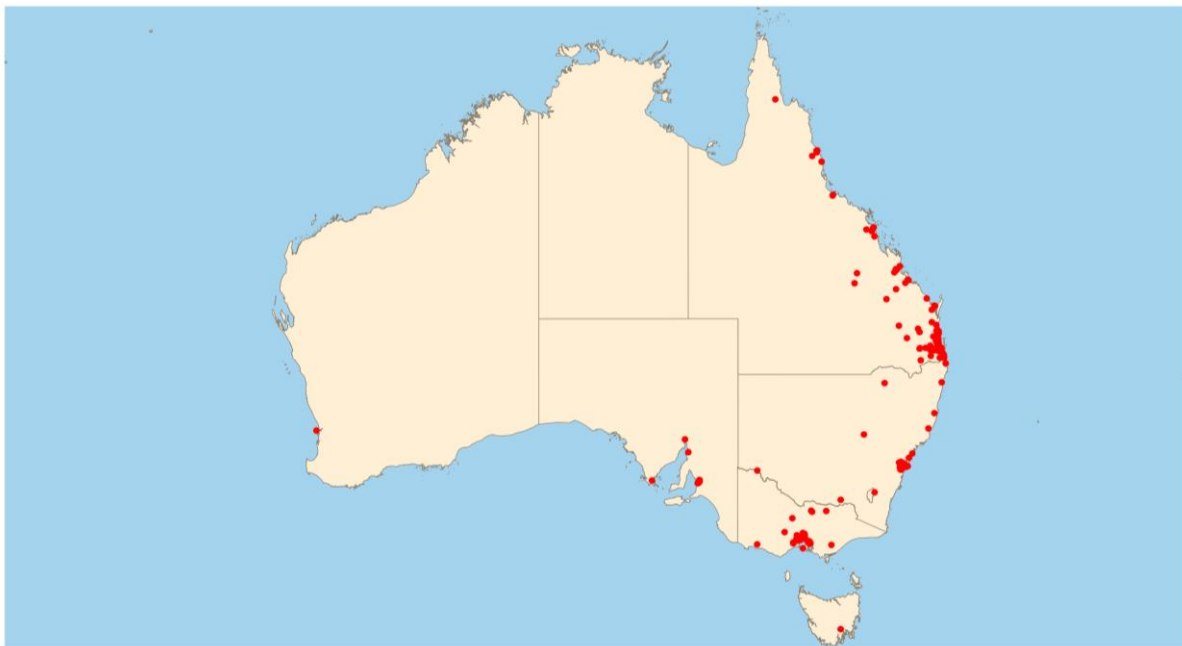
Table 1 - Size of early learning deserts

Region	Children
Rest of Qld	4720
Greater Sydney	4434
Greater Brisbane	3079
Greater Perth	3065

Rest of NSW	2775
Greater Melbourne	2118
Rest of WA	1690
Rest of Vic.	1249
Rest of Tas.	920
Rest of NT	417
Greater Hobart	407
Greater Darwin	247
Rest of SA	233
Greater Adelaide	139
Australian Capital Territory	109

The location of the top 55 communities is shown in Figure 17. More information on each of these communities is in the appendices on page 22. Detailed maps of the metropolitan and regional areas of each State and Territory are in the appendices on page 28.

Figure 17 – Locations of high-quality early learning deserts across Australia



Linker opportunity communities

Linker opportunity communities are those where there is at least one high quality early learning service, and relatively high numbers of children who are not participating in either pre-school or school. These are areas where, in our experience, families are likely to be struggling to navigate the early learning system, or to overcome non-financial barriers to access. They are likely to benefit from additional support to find and engage with a suitable service.

For this analysis, we define a linker opportunity community as an SA2 with at least one high quality early learning service, and where there were at least 40 children aged 4 reported at the 2021 census as not attending any form of early learning or school. We

rank these communities into deciles based on the proportion of children who are not attending early learning.

There are 386 communities across Australia which meet this definition of linker opportunities, which were home to 48,639 children aged 4 and 5 who were not attending either early learning or school on Census Night in 2021. As can be seen in Table 2, the greatest opportunity lies in Queensland (spread across metropolitan Brisbane and regional parts of the state), metropolitan Sydney, and metropolitan Melbourne.

Table 2 - Locations where linkers might have greatest impact

Region	Children
Greater Sydney	12649
Greater Melbourne	10233
Greater Brisbane	7499
Rest of Qld	7395
Rest of NSW	2733
Greater Perth	2259
Greater Adelaide	2194
Rest of Vic.	2060
Rest of WA	664
Rest of SA	383
Greater Hobart	260
Australian Capital Territory	167
Rest of Tas.	143

The location of the top 38 communities is shown in Figure 18. More information on each of these communities is in the appendices on page 24. Detailed maps of the metropolitan and regional areas of each State and Territory are in the appendices on page 28.

Figure 18 – Locations of linker opportunity communities across Australia



Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that high quality early learning is not available equitably across all Australian communities. Children living in affluent communities, especially in metropolitan areas, are much more likely to have access to a place. Conversely, children living in communities with higher levels of socioeconomic disadvantage, or higher levels of child social exclusion, or higher rates of child developmental vulnerability, are much less likely to have access. The geography of supply benefits those who are already well-off, and disadvantages those who need high quality early learning most. These findings complement other analysis we have done, showing that access to early learning varies with demographic characteristics, in ways that are also likely to entrench disadvantage.

The findings of this study have implications for policymakers, funders, and providers of early learning. We provide a method of clearly identifying those communities where children stand to benefit most from investment in more high-quality early learning places, and in supports to help families who are struggling to access the early learning that is already available.

Appendices

Highest-priority high quality early learning deserts

SA2	SA3	SA4	Region	State	Population	SEIFA Decile	Remoteness	Child Social Exclusion Quintile	AEDC Vuln2 Percentage	Children Aged 4-5	Non-Attendance Rate	High Quality Places	Total Places
Coonamble	Bourke - Cobar - Coonamble	Far West and Orana	Rest of NSW	New South Wales	3926	1	4	5	30	111	0.33	0	134
Walgett - Lightning Ridge	Bourke - Cobar - Coonamble	Far West and Orana	Rest of NSW	New South Wales	5534	1	4	5	17.2	154	0.39	0	242
Far West	Broken Hill and Far West	Far West and Orana	Rest of NSW	New South Wales	2288	1	5	0	10.3	48	0.33	0	78
Hay	Lower Murray	Murray	Rest of NSW	New South Wales	2897	3	3	4	4.9	55	0.35	0	53
Tamworth - West	Tamworth - Gunnedah	New England and North West	Rest of NSW	New South Wales	5998	1	2	5	25.2	242	0.40	0	271
Fairfield - East	Merrylands - Guildford	Sydney - Parramatta	Greater Sydney	New South Wales	15742	1	1	5	17.6	390	0.35	0	308
Guildford - South Granville	Merrylands - Guildford	Sydney - Parramatta	Greater Sydney	New South Wales	22386	1	1	5	16.4	752	0.35	0	0
Liverpool - East	Liverpool	Sydney - South West	Greater Sydney	New South Wales	17536	1	1	5	21.3	486	0.37	0	136
Yea	Upper Goulburn Valley	Hume	Rest of Vic.	Victoria	4182	5	2	3	8	60	0.43	0	123
Manoora	Cairns - South	Cairns	Rest of Qld	Queensland	6175	1	3	0	22.7	150	0.49	0	74
Manunda	Cairns - South	Cairns	Rest of Qld	Queensland	5191	1	3	5	17	115	0.39	0	350
Westcourt - Bungalow	Cairns - South	Cairns	Rest of Qld	Queensland	6519	1	3	0	17.2	105	0.44	0	298
Daintree	Port Douglas - Daintree	Cairns	Rest of Qld	Queensland	6674	3	3	4	19.8	153	0.34	0	160
Herberton	Tablelands (East) - Kuranda	Cairns	Rest of Qld	Queensland	5522	1	3	5	28.1	103	0.49	0	34
Mareeba	Tablelands (East) - Kuranda	Cairns	Rest of Qld	Queensland	11825	2	3	4	23.2	266	0.36	0	303
Inglewood - Waggamba	Darling Downs (West) - Maranoa	Darling Downs - Maranoa	Rest of Qld	Queensland	4065	2	3	3	12.7	121	0.41	0	116
Tara	Darling Downs (West) - Maranoa	Darling Downs - Maranoa	Rest of Qld	Queensland	3851	1	3	5	19.4	81	0.44	0	70
Jondaryan	Darling Downs - East	Darling Downs - Maranoa	Rest of Qld	Queensland	7662	2	2	4	14.9	186	0.33	0	264
Clifton - Greenmount	Granite Belt	Darling Downs - Maranoa	Rest of Qld	Queensland	5109	4	2	4	18.5	121	0.33	0	51
Southern Downs - East	Granite Belt	Darling Downs - Maranoa	Rest of Qld	Queensland	4360	4	2	2	28.1	72	0.33	0	29
Stanthorpe Surrounds	Granite Belt	Darling Downs - Maranoa	Rest of Qld	Queensland	6247	3	3	3	20	117	0.33	0	65
Mount Morgan	Rockhampton	Central Queensland	Rest of Qld	Queensland	2945	1	2	5	27.3	40	0.58	0	45
Rockhampton Surrounds - East	Rockhampton	Central Queensland	Rest of Qld	Queensland	3507	5	2	2	2.1	87	0.33	0	0
Agnes Water - Miriam Vale	Gladstone	Central Queensland	Rest of Qld	Queensland	6807	2	3	4	12.3	122	0.36	0	173

SA2	SA3	SA4	Region	State	Population	SEIFA Decile	Remoteness	Child Social Exclusion Quintile	AEDC Vuln2 Percentage	Children Aged 4-5	Non-Attendance Rate	High Quality Places	Total Places
Wacol	Forest Lake - Oxley	Ipswich	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	6220	1	1	5	43.5	86	0.42	0	0
Riverview	Ipswich Inner	Ipswich	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	3067	1	1	5	13.6	82	0.43	0	107
Beenleigh	Beenleigh	Logan - Beaudesert	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	8425	1	1	5	19.2	182	0.35	0	491
Marsden	Browns Plains	Logan - Beaudesert	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	15988	1	1	5	23.2	599	0.34	0	558
Loganlea	Loganlea - Carbrook	Logan - Beaudesert	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	11776	1	1	0	12.5	358	0.37	0	338
Logan Central	Springwood - Kingston	Logan - Beaudesert	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	6356	1	1	5	18.6	206	0.35	0	0
Woodridge	Springwood - Kingston	Logan - Beaudesert	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	12982	1	1	5	18.3	394	0.40	0	396
Broadsound - Nebo	Bowen Basin - North	Mackay - Isaac - Whitsunday	Rest of Qld	Queensland	8730	4	3	2	7	219	0.34	0	284
Collinsville	Bowen Basin - North	Mackay - Isaac - Whitsunday	Rest of Qld	Queensland	3898	2	4	3	8.7	72	0.33	0	84
Mackay	Mackay	Mackay - Isaac - Whitsunday	Rest of Qld	Queensland	4026	2	2	4	28.9	63	0.44	0	381
Kilcoy	Caboolture Hinterland	Moreton Bay - North	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	5799	3	2	4	13.2	107	0.37	0	80
Tablelands	Far North	Queensland - Outback	Rest of Qld	Queensland	6204	2	3	2	15.7	92	0.38	0	20
Newtown (Qld)	Toowoomba	Toowoomba	Rest of Qld	Queensland	10039	1	2	5	21.1	211	0.37	0	223
Heatley	Townsville	Townsville	Rest of Qld	Queensland	3907	1	3	5	32.7	76	0.36	0	179
Magnetic Island	Townsville	Townsville	Rest of Qld	Queensland	2475	4	3	3	10.3	23	0.35	0	0
Mundingburra	Townsville	Townsville	Rest of Qld	Queensland	3594	4	3	3	12.5	61	0.36	0	0
Cooloola	Gympie - Cooloola	Wide Bay	Rest of Qld	Queensland	6568	1	2	5	5.9	76	0.38	0	64
Lonsdale	Onkaparinga	Adelaide - South	Greater Adelaide	South Australia	0	0	1	0	7.5	3	1.00	0	0
Kambalda - Coolgardie - Norseman	Goldfields	Western Australia - Outback (South)	Rest of WA	Western Australia	4389	1	4	4	7	91	0.38	0	24
Meekatharra	Mid West	Western Australia - Outback (South)	Rest of WA	Western Australia	3153	1	5	0	44.1	60	0.35	0	0
New Norfolk	Hobart - North West	Hobart	Greater Hobart	Tasmania	7293	1	2	5	17.3	184	0.34	0	119
George Town	North East	Launceston and North East	Rest of Tas.	Tasmania	7118	1	3	5	14.1	151	0.33	0	30
Cygnets	Huon - Bruny Island	South East	Rest of Tas.	Tasmania	4802	3	3	4	6.1	97	0.38	0	48
Forestier - Tasman	South East Coast	South East	Rest of Tas.	Tasmania	2593	2	3	5	20.9	36	0.47	0	0
Somerset	Burnie - Ulverstone	West and North West	Rest of Tas.	Tasmania	4067	2	3	4	0	60	0.35	0	75
Sheffield - Railton	Devonport	West and North West	Rest of Tas.	Tasmania	6619	3	3	4	13.6	112	0.35	0	17

SA2	SA3	SA4	Region	State	Population	SEIFA Decile	Remoteness	Child Social Exclusion Quintile	AEDC Vuln2 Percentage	Children Aged 4-5	Non-Attendance Rate	High Quality Places	Total Places
Berrimah	Darwin Suburbs	Darwin	Greater Darwin	Northern Territory	1712	4	3	3	29.4	45	0.33	0	105
Yuendumu - Anmatjere	Alice Springs	Northern Territory - Outback	Rest of NT	Northern Territory	1851	1	5	0	0	68	0.37	0	93
Canberra East	Canberra East	Australian Capital Territory	Australian Capital Territory	Australian Capital Territory	1097	1	1	0	0	15	0.53	0	180
Christmas Island	Christmas Island	Other Territories	Other Territories	Other Territories	1692	3	5	0	7.7	36	0.44	0	0

Highest-priority linker opportunity communities

SA2	SA3	SA4	Region	State	Population	SEIFA Decile	Remoteness	Child Social Exclusion Quintile	AEDC Vuln2 Percentage	Children Aged 4-5	Non-Attendance Rate	High Quality Places	Total Places
Warwick Farm	Liverpool	Sydney - South West	Greater Sydney	New South Wales	5937	1	1	5	24.6	167	0.41	40	40
Cairns City	Cairns - South	Cairns	Rest of Qld	Queensland	12567	3	3	4	20.3	152	0.41	97	243
Inala - Richlands	Forest Lake - Oxley	Ipswich	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	19891	1	1	5	26.6	664	0.40	135	135
Cape York	Far North	Queensland - Outback	Rest of Qld	Queensland	7803	1	4	5	37.1	246	0.39	23	227
Nanango	Burnett	Wide Bay	Rest of Qld	Queensland	10003	1	2	5	11.9	151	0.39	25	146
Innisfail	Innisfail - Cassowary Coast	Cairns	Rest of Qld	Queensland	9257	1	3	5	22	232	0.38	25	236
Kingston (Qld)	Springwood - Kingston	Logan - Beaudesert	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	10371	1	1	5	22.2	298	0.38	48	433
Waterford West	Loganlea - Carbrook	Logan - Beaudesert	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	7815	1	1	5	13	217	0.37	173	823
Leichhardt - One Mile	Ipswich Inner	Ipswich	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	8268	1	1	5	25.2	254	0.37	44	192
Browns Plains	Browns Plains	Logan - Beaudesert	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	8161	2	1	5	24	247	0.36	118	568
Sarina	Mackay	Mackay - Isaac - Whitsunday	Rest of Qld	Queensland	11822	4	3	3	14.7	292	0.36	102	200
Berserker	Rockhampton	Central Queensland	Rest of Qld	Queensland	7024	1	2	5	28.9	173	0.35	30	249
Dandenong - North	Dandenong	Melbourne - South East	Greater Melbourne	Victoria	21487	1	1	5	24.4	538	0.35	111	273

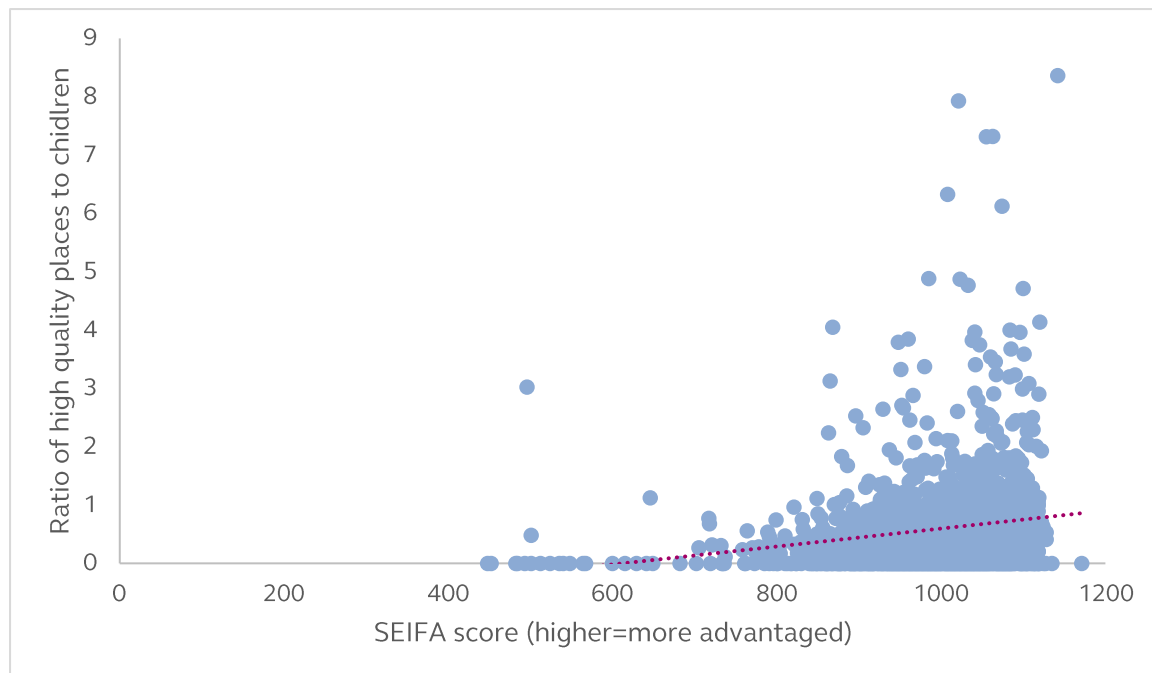
SA2	SA3	SA4	Region	State	Population	SEIFA Decile	Remoteness	Child Social Exclusion Quintile	AEDC Vuln2 Percentage	Children Aged 4-5	Non-Attendance Rate	High Quality Places	Total Places
Durack	Forest Lake - Oxley	Ipswich	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	8254	2	1	5	13.3	189	0.34	44	114
Central Highlands - West	Central Highlands (Qld)	Central Queensland	Rest of Qld	Queensland	7616	4	4	2	10.1	221	0.34	141	315
Bidwill - Hebersham - Emerton	Mount Druitt	Sydney - Blacktown	Greater Sydney	New South Wales	18536	1	1	5	19.5	620	0.34	140	271
Goodna	Springfield - Redbank	Ipswich	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	10885	1	1	5	12.4	378	0.33	131	656
Banana	Biloela	Central Queensland	Rest of Qld	Queensland	8817	5	3	2	10.2	262	0.33	25	103
Condon - Rasmussen	Townsville	Townsville	Rest of Qld	Queensland	10799	2	3	5	28.3	297	0.33	90	408
Biloela	Biloela	Central Queensland	Rest of Qld	Queensland	5694	4	3	2	5.7	147	0.33	69	186
Atherton	Tablelands (East) - Kuranda	Cairns	Rest of Qld	Queensland	11625	3	3	3	19.5	254	0.32	168	333
Kings Park (Vic.)	Brimbank	Melbourne - West	Greater Melbourne	Victoria	13983	1	1	5	13.1	345	0.32	30	96
Kingaroy	Burnett	Wide Bay	Rest of Qld	Queensland	10545	2	2	5	22	283	0.32	22	411
Ashcroft - Busby - Miller	Bringelly - Green Valley	Sydney - South West	Greater Sydney	New South Wales	17962	1	1	5	13.2	584	0.32	120	559
Eagleby	Beenleigh	Logan - Beaudesert	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	13594	1	1	5	19.2	395	0.32	119	465
Noosa Hinterland	Noosa Hinterland	Sunshine Coast	Rest of Qld	Queensland	24207	6	2	2	10	463	0.32	174	174
Redbank Plains	Springfield - Redbank	Ipswich	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	24349	1	1	5	15.2	999	0.32	20	925
Crestmead	Browns Plains	Logan - Beaudesert	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	12158	1	1	5	15.9	443	0.31	24	445
Edmonton	Cairns - South	Cairns	Rest of Qld	Queensland	11409	3	3	4	18.5	340	0.31	21	314
Fairfield - West	Fairfield	Sydney - South West	Greater Sydney	New South Wales	21249	1	1	5	13.5	533	0.31	40	193
Walkerston - Eton	Mackay	Mackay - Isaac - Whitsunday	Rest of Qld	Queensland	8457	6	2	2	13.8	247	0.31	25	268
Woodford - D'Aguilar	Caboolture Hinterland	Moreton Bay - North	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	9100	4	2	4	3.4	184	0.30	24	200
St Albans - South	Brimbank	Melbourne - West	Greater Melbourne	Victoria	17454	1	1	5	16.9	361	0.30	284	350
Merrylands - Holroyd	Merrylands - Guildford	Sydney - Parramatta	Greater Sydney	New South Wales	23806	1	1	5	11.7	684	0.30	104	168
Mount Druitt - Whalan	Mount Druitt	Sydney - Blacktown	Greater Sydney	New South Wales	22918	1	1	5	17.7	743	0.29	128	787
Boonah	Ipswich Hinterland	Ipswich	Greater Brisbane	Queensland	12617	5	2	4	10.6	248	0.29	21	21
Gatton	Toowoomba	Toowoomba	Rest of Qld	Queensland	7951	1	2	5	6.7	184	0.29	59	395
Cabramatta - Lansvale	Fairfield	Sydney - South West	Greater Sydney	New South Wales	24101	1	1	5	18.8	447	0.29	40	377

Regression analysis

Community-level disadvantage

The association between socioeconomic advantage and high quality is partly driven by more affluent areas having an oversupply of high-quality early learning places. An examination of the outliers, where there are more than 3x more places than resident children, suggests most are major employment centres such as central business districts. These rates likely reflect services providing education and care to children from other areas, chosen for proximity to their parents' place of work. Because the data are highly skewed at the more affluent end of the scale, SEIFA only explains around two percent of the overall variation in quality availability ($R^2=0.0255$).

Figure 19 – Relative availability of quality by community disadvantage, per-community

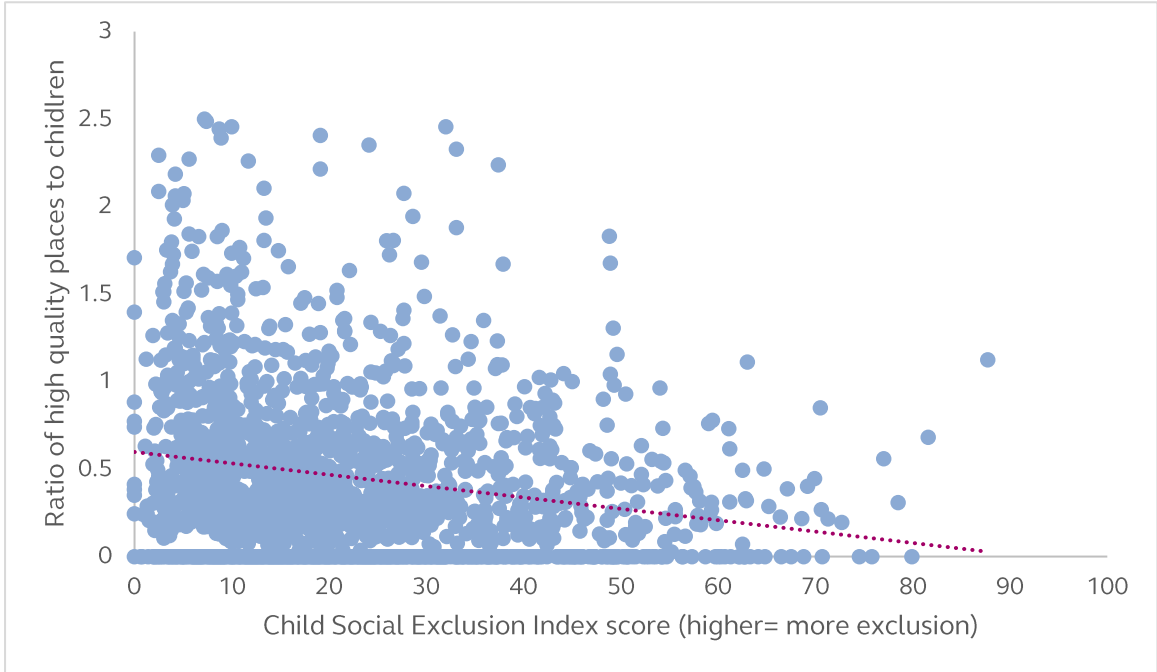


Note: Removed one outlier in central Canberra with a very high rate of advantage and a ratio of 84.6.

Child social exclusion

The association between child social exclusion and high quality is partly driven by the same issue of oversupply centres of employment. However, the distribution of oversupply is less skewed than for overall socioeconomic disadvantage, suggesting that the high-quality early learning system is somewhat less inequitably distributed when measured against child-specific disadvantage. However, the data are still highly skewed at the less disadvantaged end of the scale, and child social exclusion alone only explains around three and a half percent of overall variation in quality availability ($R^2=0.0341$).

Figure 20 – Relative availability of quality by child social exclusion, per-community

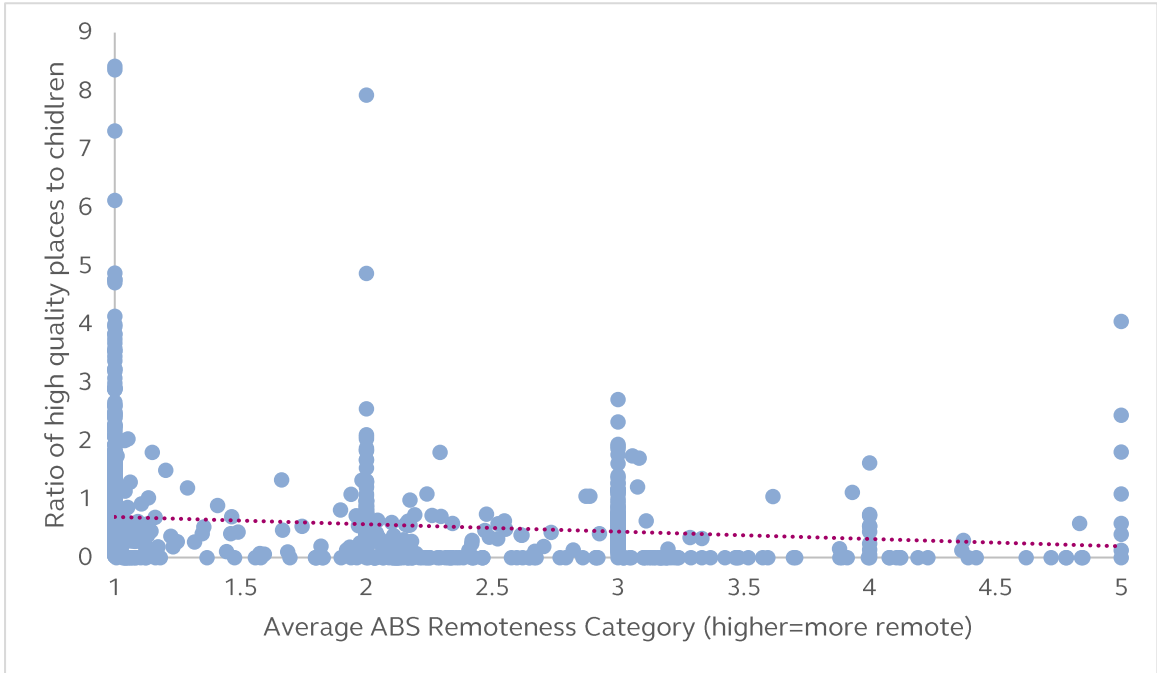


Note: Removed one outlier in central Canberra with a very low rate of child social exclusion and a ratio of 84.6.

Remoteness

There is a similar association between remoteness and oversupply of high quality, but the effect is less pronounced than for socioeconomic disadvantage and child social exclusion. Remoteness explains just under two percent of overall variation in quality availability ($R^2=0.0195$).

Figure 21 – Relative availability of quality by remoteness, per-community



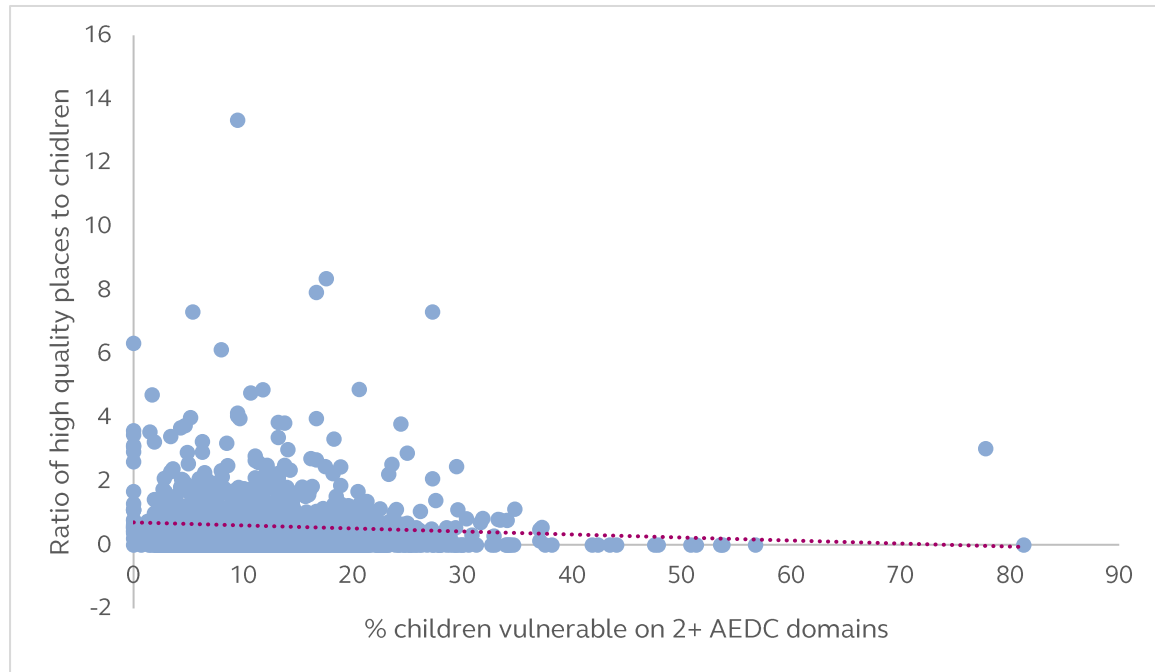
Note: To help identify trends, this chart uses an “average” remoteness category by assigning SA2s that cross remoteness categories to an intermediate value based on the average population falling in each category. The

integer values on the scale correspond with the categories on Figure 9 and Figure 10 (1=major cities...5=very remote). Removed one outlier in central Canberra with a ratio of x80.

Developmental vulnerability

There is a similar association between developmental vulnerability and oversupply of high quality, but the effect is less pronounced than for socioeconomic disadvantage and child social exclusion. Developmental vulnerability explains less than one percent of overall variation in quality availability ($R^2=0.0077$).

Figure 22 – Relative availability of quality by proportion of children vulnerable on 2+ AEDC domains, per-community



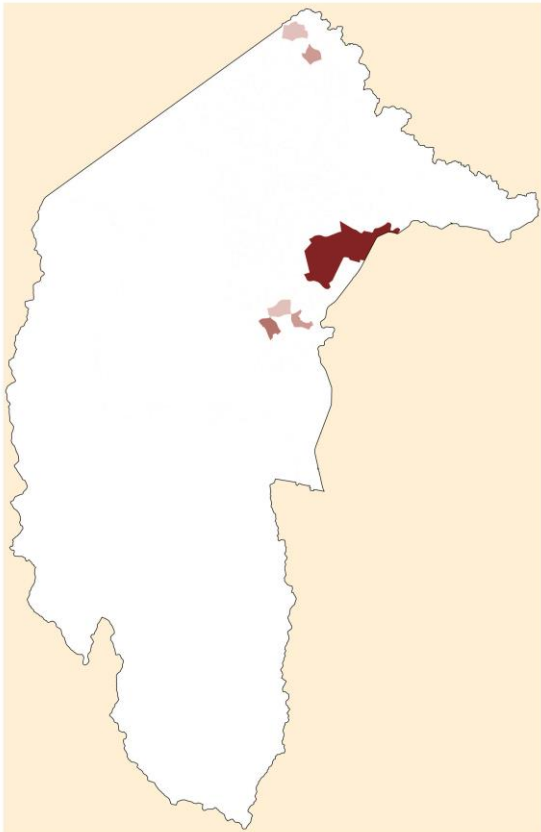
Note: Removed one outlier in central Canberra with a very low proportion of vulnerability and a ratio of 84.6.

Maps

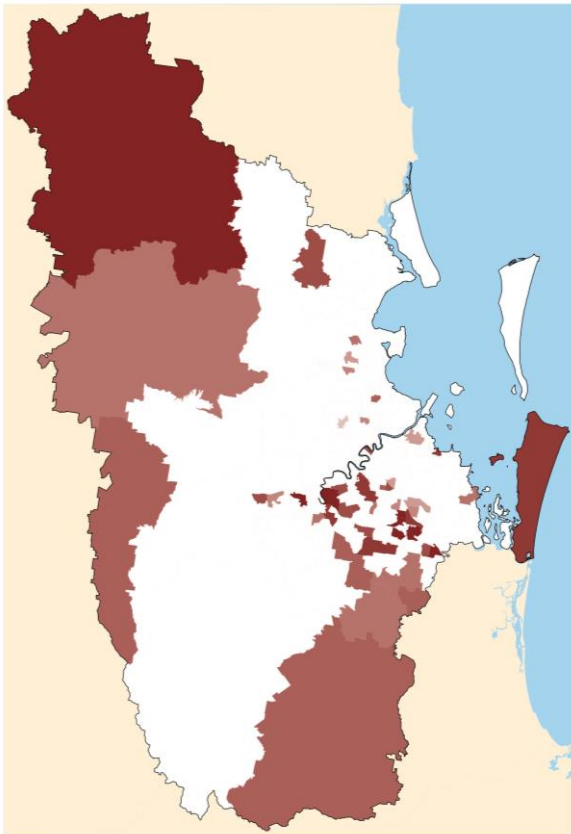
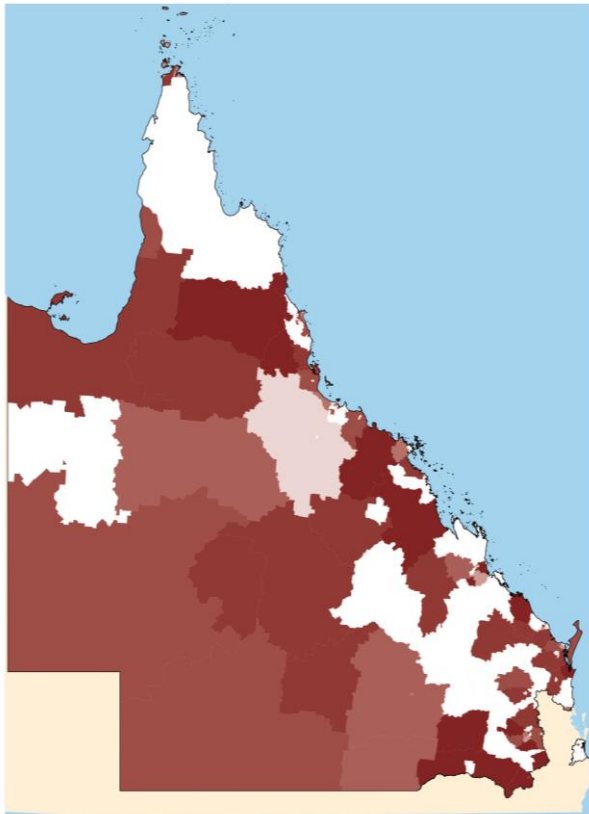
High quality early learning deserts

The maps in this section show high quality early learning deserts (SA2s, where there is no high-quality early learning service, and where there were at least 40 children aged 4 reported at the 2021 census as not attending any form of preschool or school, and which are in either in the most disadvantaged half of the SEIFA scale or the most excluded half of the Child Social Exclusion Index or both). Maps are coloured on a nationally-consistent basis by the proportion of children who are not attending early learning (deeper red=higher proportion).

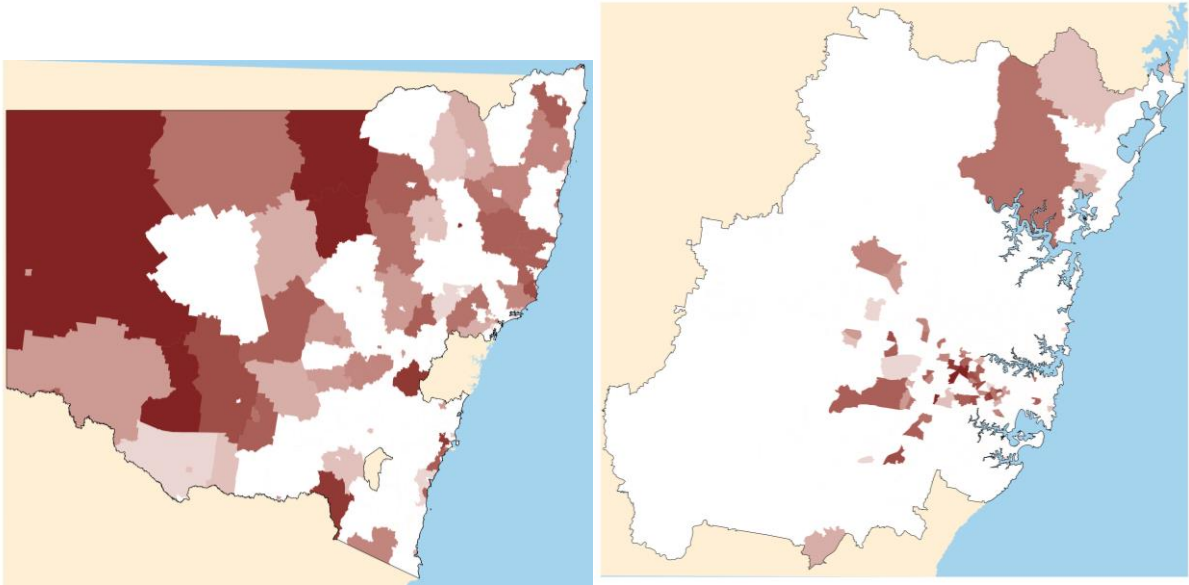
Australian Capital Territory



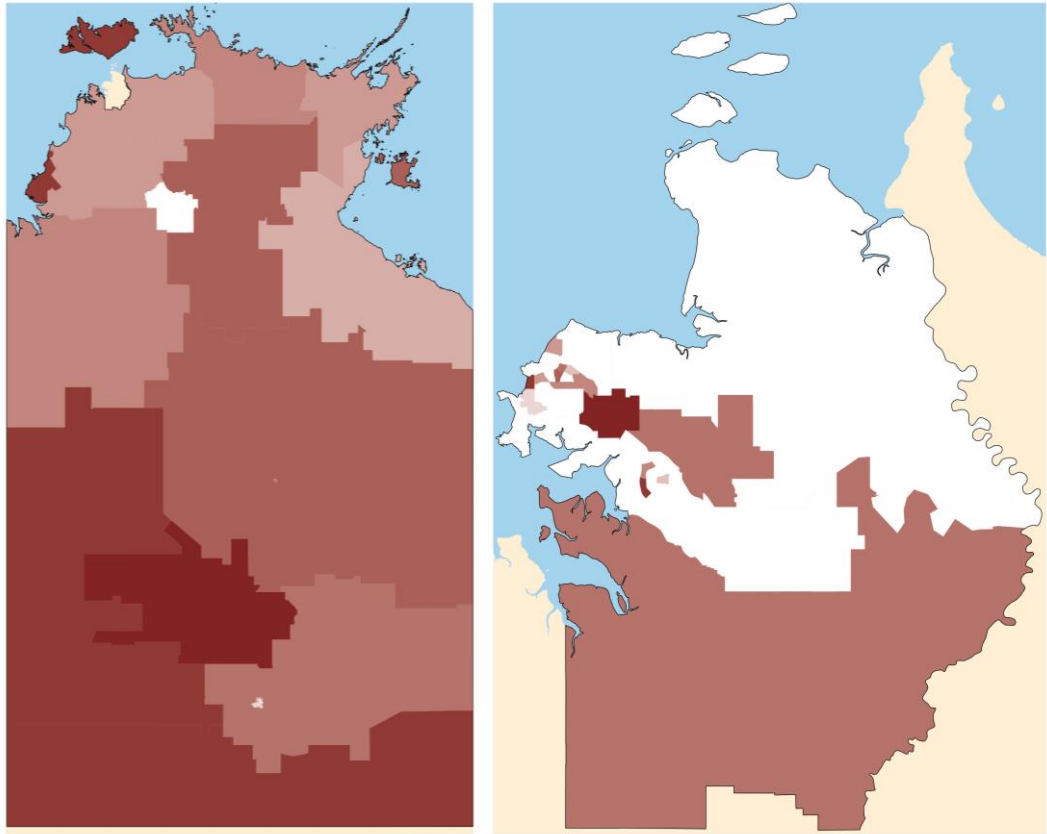
Queensland



New South Wales



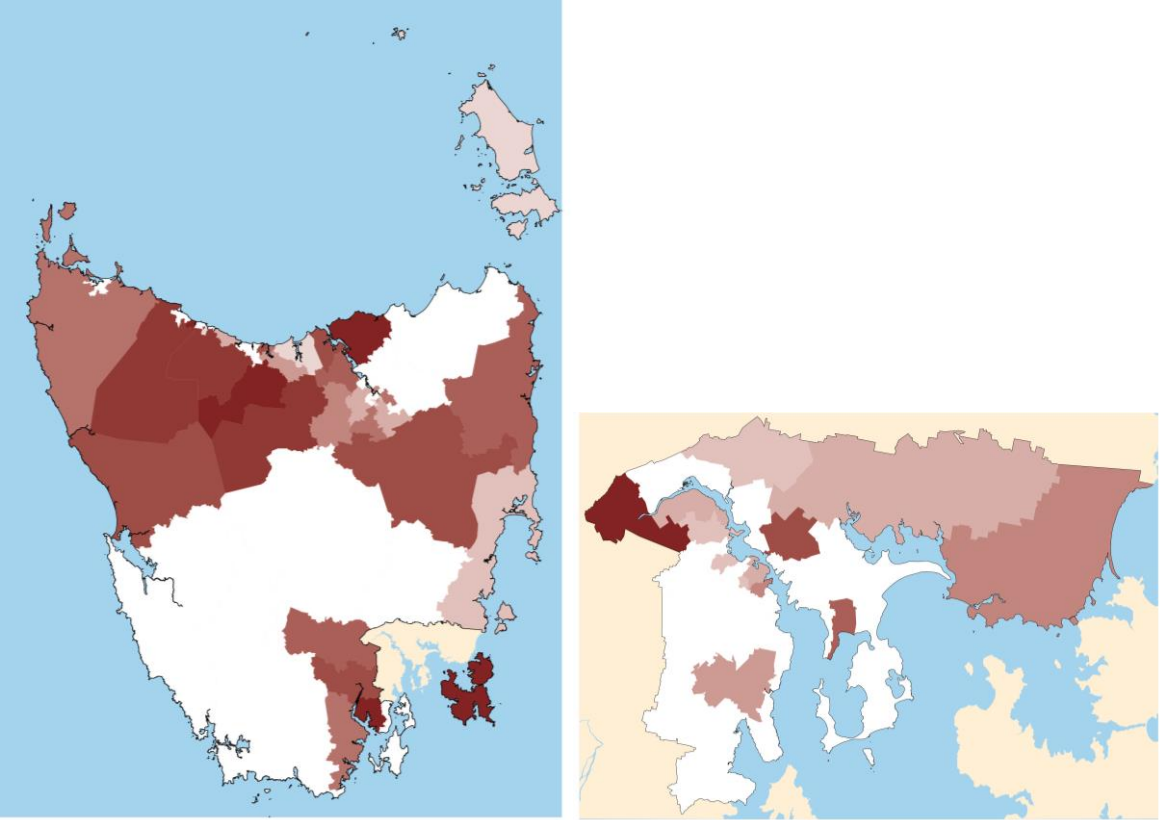
Northern Territory



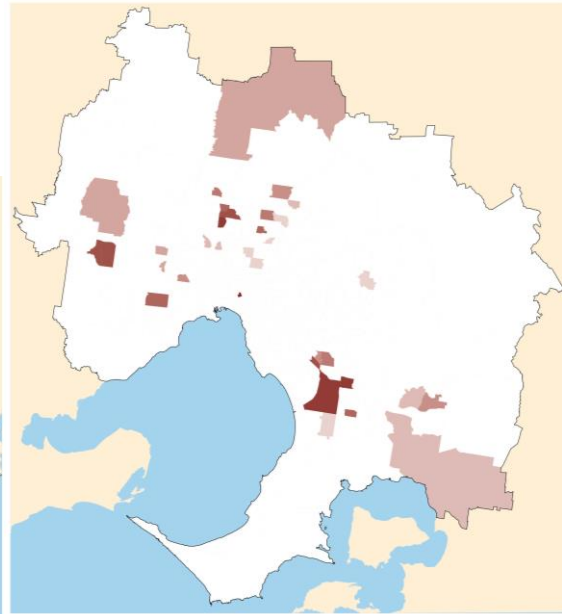
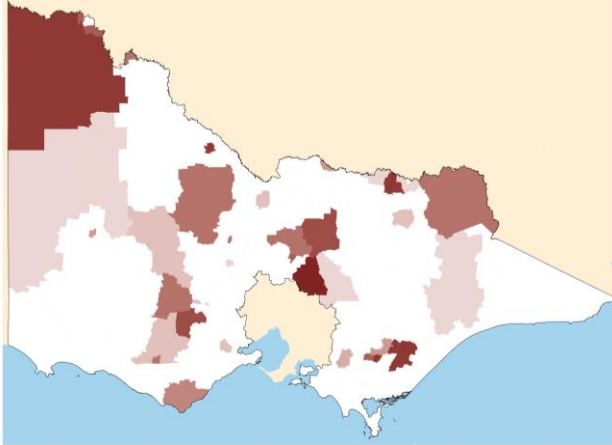
South Australia



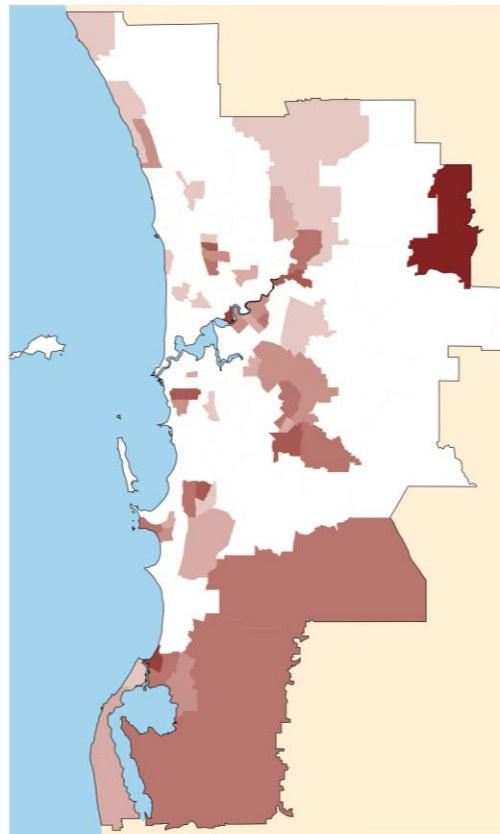
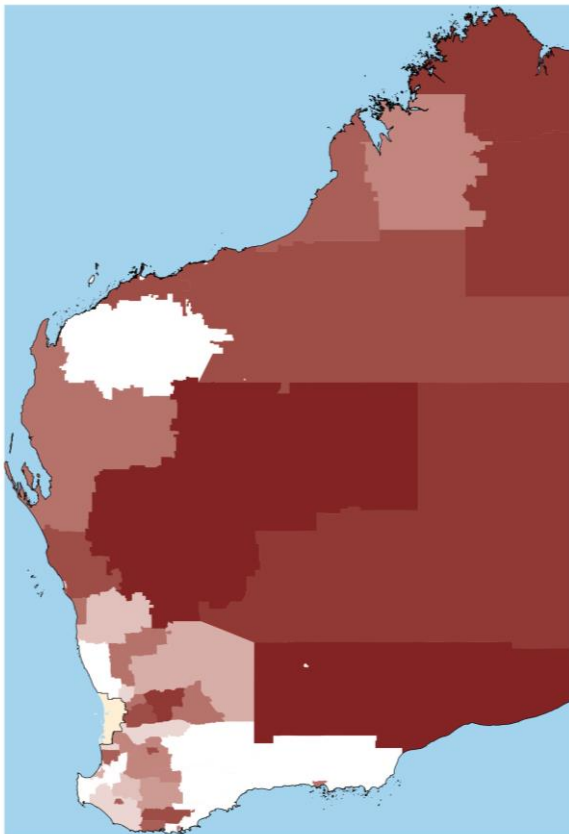
Tasmania



Victoria



Western Australia

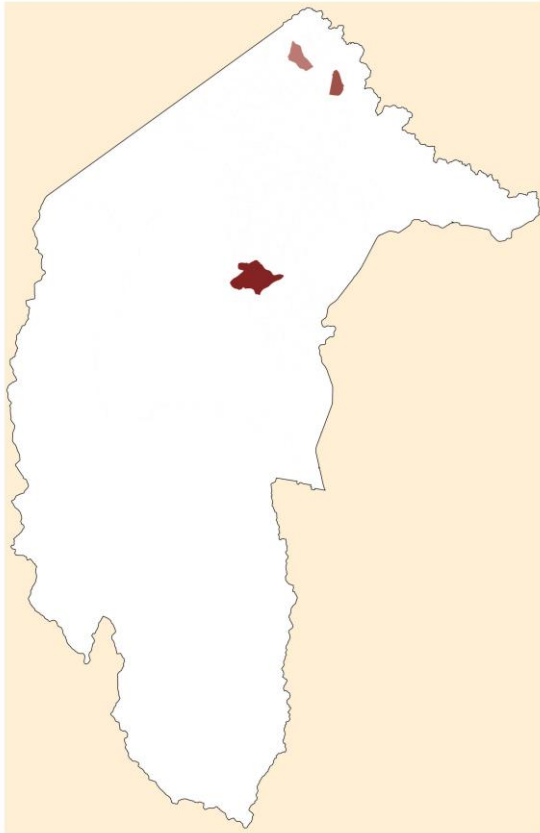


Linker opportunity communities

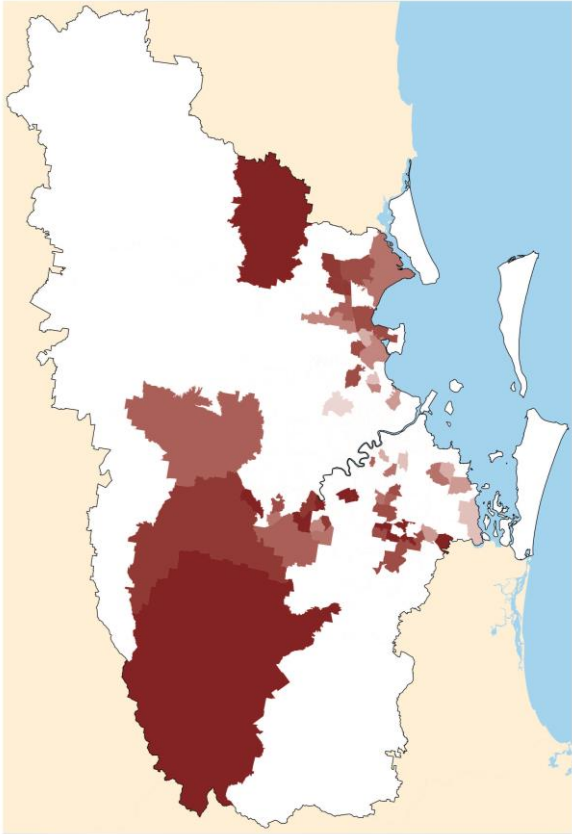
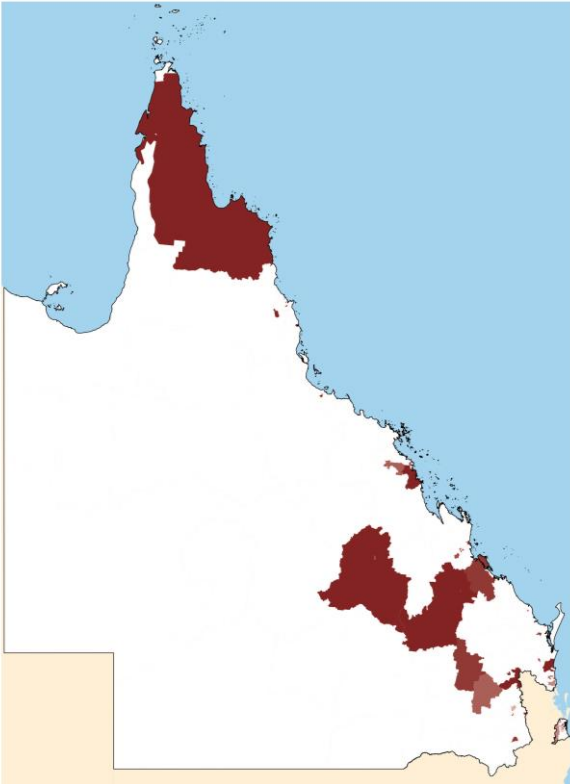
The maps in this section show linker opportunity communities (SA2s, where there is at least one high quality early learning service, and where there were at least 40 children aged 4 reported at the 2021 census as not attending any form of preschool or school).

Maps are coloured on a nationally-consistent basis by the proportion of children who are not attending early learning (deeper red=higher proportion).

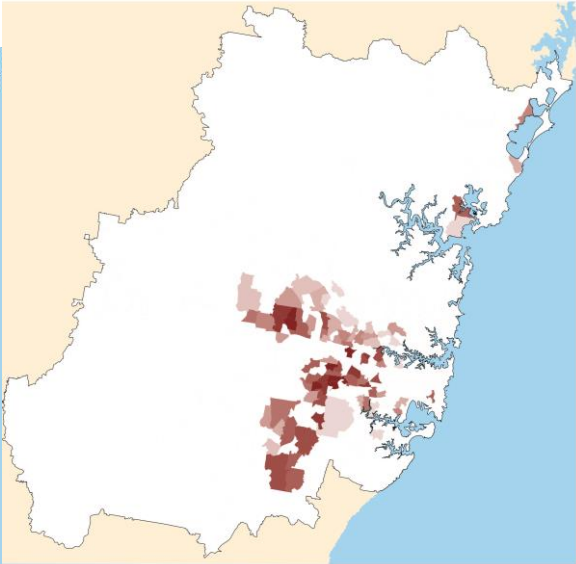
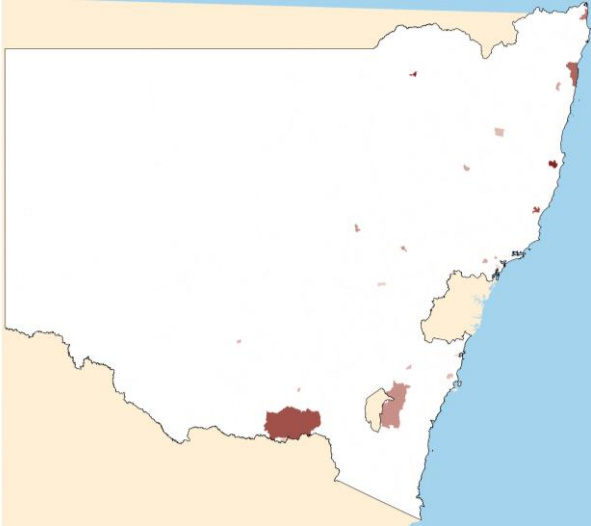
Australian Capital Territory



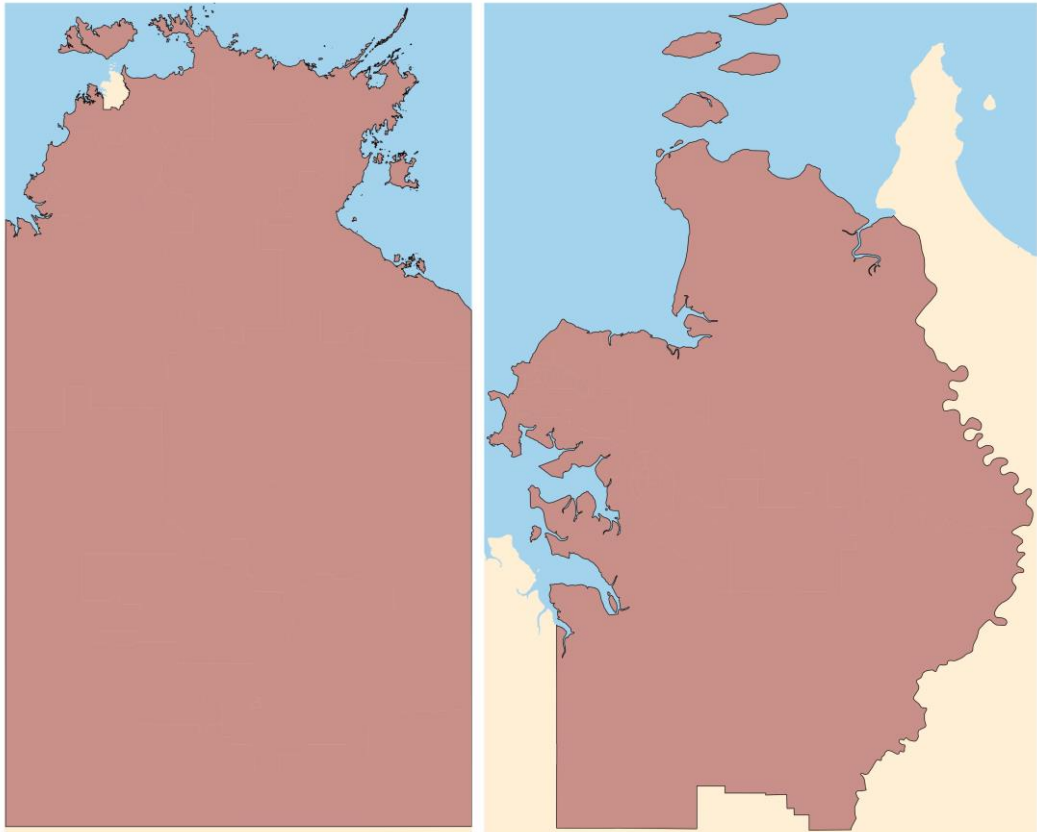
Queensland



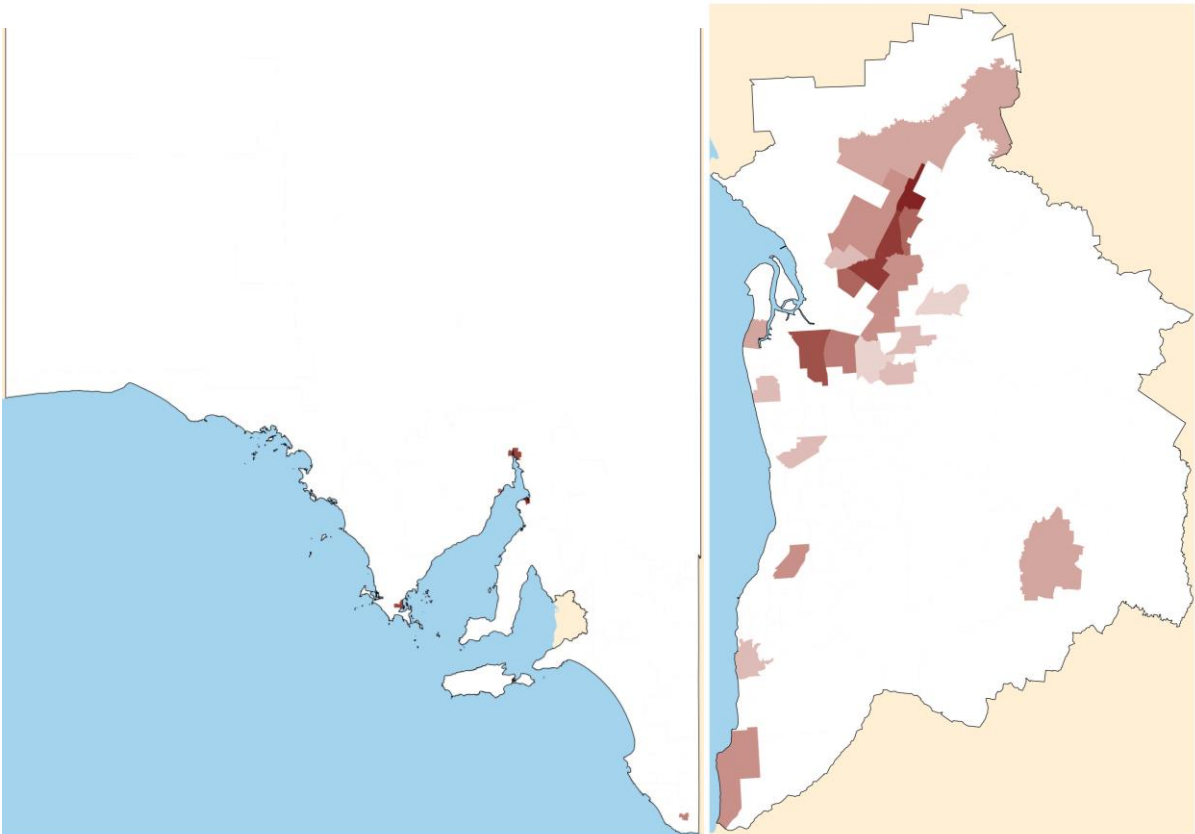
New South Wales



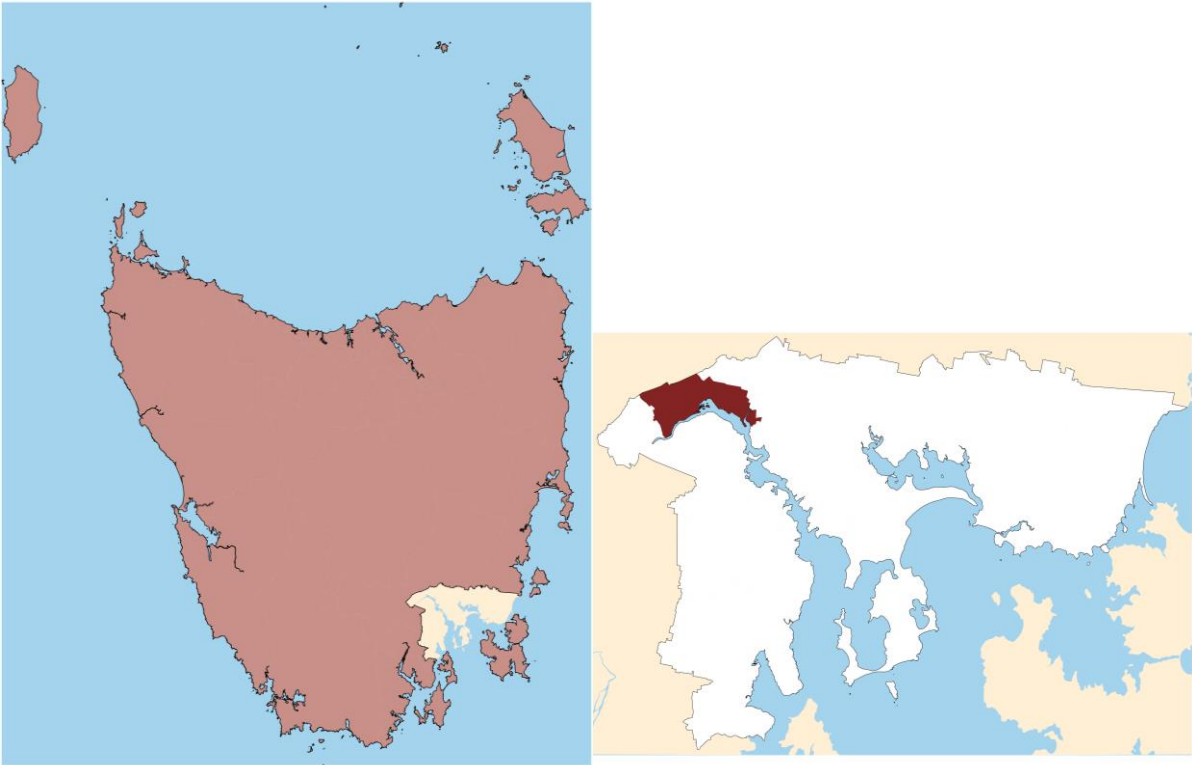
Northern Territory



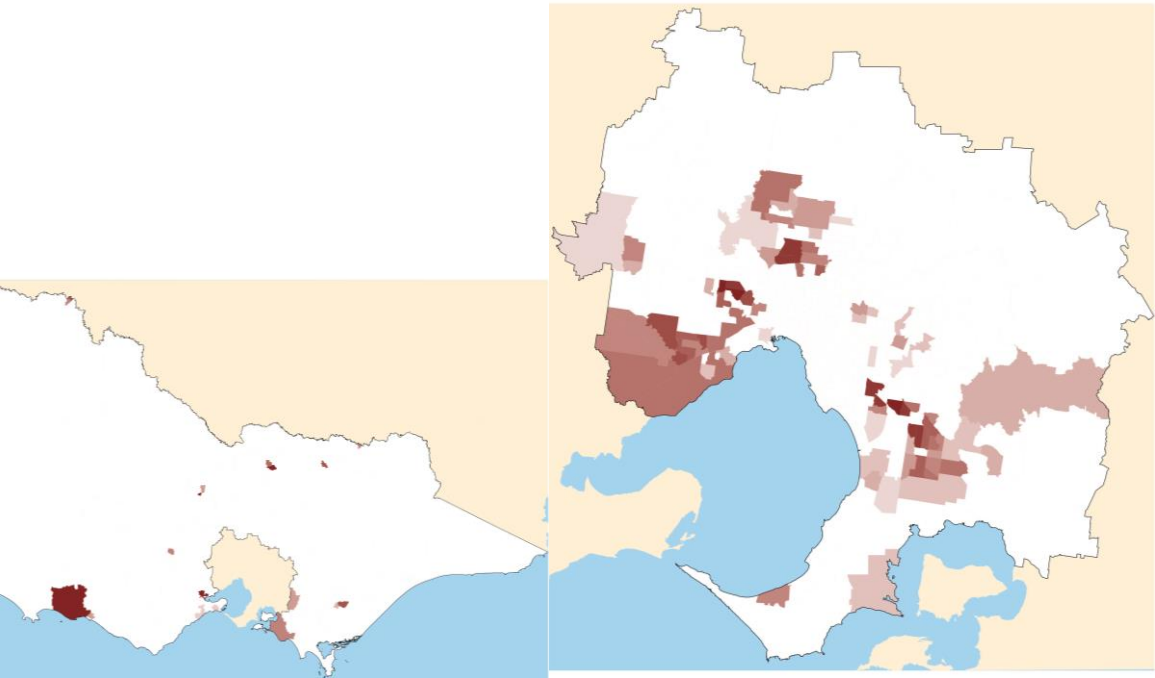
South Australia



Tasmania



Victoria



Western Australia

