

# Australia's 'No Jab No Play' policies: history, design and rationales

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Governments globally are introducing or tightening childhood vaccine mandates to address parental vaccine refusal.<sup>1</sup> Australia's state-level 'No Jab, No Play' ('NJNPlay') policies limit enrolment in childcare and early learning facilities. While the Federal 'No Jab, No Play' policy has been closely analysed,<sup>2-4</sup> there is less analysis on how state-based vaccine mandates operate, particularly compared to work on American state policies.<sup>5-9</sup>

This article reviews how Australian state policies differ from each other and the political and governance factors underpinning these differences. First, we provide a comparative overview of NJNPlay provisions with regard to: i) exemptions, ii) grace periods, iii) duties and responsibilities of childcare providers, and iv) sanctions for non-compliance. We then discuss how key actors or contexts, disciplinary perspectives and (shifting) partisan norms, and policy learning and expectations have shaped the introduction and design of NJNPlay policies.

The Federal 'No Jab, No Pay' ('NJNPay') policy requires families to vaccinate their children in line with the national immunisation schedule to be eligible for certain family support (Centrelink) payments, including childcare subsidies that range from 20–85% of total childcare costs.<sup>10</sup> NJNPay came into effect on 1 January 2016. Previous policies linked Centrelink payments to childhood vaccination, however, families could lodge a conscientious objection (CO) to vaccination and still receive benefits.<sup>2</sup> NJNPay ended

## Abstract

**Objective:** Since 2014, five Australian states have enacted 'No Jab, No Play' policies requiring children to be fully vaccinated to attend childcare and early education services. We review the five policies and their implications for implementers – including healthcare and childcare service providers – and analyse factors that shaped the design of state policies.

**Methods:** We employed documentary analysis and analysed key informant interviews in NVivo 12.

**Results:** Our findings reveal similarities and differences between state provisions regarding exemptions, grace periods, responsibilities of service providers and sanctions for non-compliance. We elaborate on five factors of influence that have shaped No Jab, No Play policies: i) impetus for change; ii) policy normalisation, growing concurrence and stringency; iii) increased co-optation of childcare providers into vaccination governance; iv) policy influence and lessons; and v) partisan politics and the development of party ideologies over time.

**Conclusion:** A range of factors contribute to how and why Australia's NJNPlay policies have taken their current forms.

**Implications for public health:** NJNPlay policies impact families and healthcare providers as part of the broader policy ecosystem concerned with maintaining high immunisation rates in Australia. Increased coercion of parents over time has been tempered by partisan positions on exemptions for disadvantage.

**Key words:** vaccination, vaccination policy, public health policy design, vaccine mandates

COs, meaning to receive payments families now need to vaccinate their children unless they have an approved medical exemption<sup>2</sup> or qualify for an additional narrow set of exemptions.<sup>11</sup> Medical exemptions are recorded through the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR). Approved healthcare providers can grant temporary or permanent exemptions where a child has a contraindication to a vaccine (for example, anaphylaxis reaction to a previous dose or component of a vaccine, or is significantly immunocompromised and unable to receive a live vaccine), or has natural immunity.<sup>12</sup>

State-level 'No Jab, No Play' (NJNPlay) policies focus on enrolment in childcare and early learning facilities. Five Australian states (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, and South Australia) have NJNPlay policies (Figure 1), with provisions varying between them as to how they operate (Table 1).

## Methods

We analysed academic publications, grey literature, policy documents, news reports

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and Hansards for each state policy. Following ethical approval under permit 2019/RA/4/20/5003, thirty-one interviews were carried out by the senior author with current and former politicians, senior health and education bureaucrats, industry stakeholders and academic and technical experts regarding enactment and policy design in the first four Australian states to implement No Jab, No Play policies. This information was gleaned from public documents for South Australia. Interviews were conducted between April and December 2019, transcribed in full, and analysed by the first

author using NVivo 12. Where information was gleaned *only* through an interview, this is indicated in the results.

### Results

#### No Jab No Play policies across Australia

##### New South Wales

NJNPlay in New South Wales preceded the Federal No Jab, No Pay policy, although its original iteration imposed no consequences for vaccine refusal. The policy was prompted

by a *Telegraph* newspaper campaign in early May 2013 calling upon the State Government to permit childcare centres to deny access to unvaccinated children; indeed, they first coined the term 'No Jab, No Play'. Our interviews and media analysis revealed journalist Claire Harvey initiated the campaign after investigating childcare centres for her own children and having concerns as to vaccination coverage in those settings.<sup>13</sup>

Initially, the New South Wales Minister for Health, Jillian Skinner, responded that the State Government had no plan to amend

Figure 1: Timeline of 'No Jab' policies in Australia.

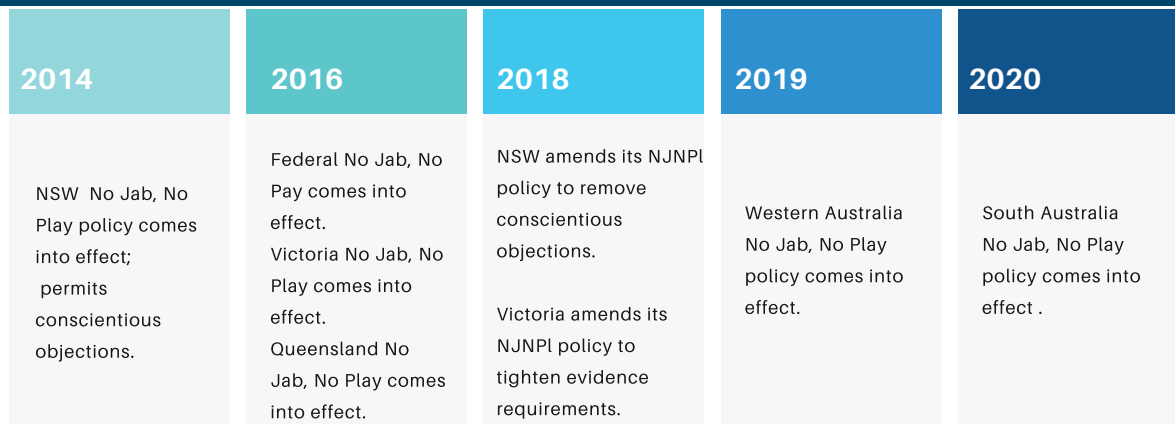


Table 1: Australian states' 'No Jab, No Play' policies indicator table.

Indicator	New South Wales	Victoria	Queensland	Western Australia	South Australia
Date policy came into force	01 January 2014	01 January 2016	01 January 2016	22 July 2019	07 August 2020
Political party in power at enactment of policy	Liberal	Labor	Labor	Labor	Liberal
Exemptions permitted	Medical + 4 exceptional grounds	Medical + 6 exceptional grounds	Medical	Medical + 7 exceptional grounds	Medical + 5 exceptions granted by state Chief Medical Officer (not legislated)
Grace period for vaccination catch up and provision of certificate	12 weeks	16 weeks	None	None	None
Duties of childcare providers	Must not enrol a child unless evidence of age-appropriate immunisation (unless exempt) is provided. Maintain a register of immunisation records of each child enrolled. Request up-to-date immunisation certificate whenever the child concerned reaches milestone ages for further immunisations.	Must not enrol a child unless evidence of age-appropriate immunisation (unless exempt) is provided. Maintain a register of immunisation status/records of each child enrolled. Request updated certificates within 2 months of the child reaching prescribed age for scheduled vaccination, or at intervals not exceeding 7 months.	Discretionary authority to refuse enrolment or allow access to service if records of vaccination status are requested and not provided.	Must not enrol a child unless evidence of age-appropriate immunisation (unless exempt) is provided. Maintain a register of immunisation status/records of each child enrolled.	Must not enrol a child unless evidence of age-appropriate immunisation (unless exempt) is provided. Maintain a register of immunisation status/records of each child enrolled.
Sanctions for non-compliance by CC providers	Fine of \$5,500	Fines of up to \$20,000, and suspension of a service's approval to operate.	N/A as provider's authority is discretionary	Fine of \$10,000	Fine of up to \$30,000
Key actors or motivators	Campaign run by <i>Telegraph</i> newspaper.	Labor government elected and gave effect to a campaign promise.	Policy initiated and designed by a bureaucrat who was a public health academic.	Combination of Labor government elected, party politics, and calls by the then Prime Minister for states to enact NJNPlay.	Newly elected Liberal government had a shift in attitude and outlook.

requirements.<sup>14</sup> However, other political actors were supportive, including the then leader of the Federal Government opposition, Tony Abbott,<sup>15</sup> and the New South Wales Labor opposition at state level,<sup>16</sup> who promised their own bill. The media campaign also rallied community support.<sup>14,17,18</sup>

By the end of May 2013, the State Government introduced legislation<sup>19,20</sup> “as part of a multifaceted approach to lifting the vaccination rate”, stating that NJNPlay would prompt parents to vaccinate their children as per the schedule.<sup>21</sup> The legislation came into effect on 1 January 2014.<sup>22</sup> Childcare facilities could only enrol a child with a certificate confirming the child was age-appropriately vaccinated or following an approved catch-up schedule. However, the policy permitted COs, as per the federal policy at the time,

which required the parent/guardian to receive advice from an authorised healthcare practitioner about the risks and benefits of vaccination and obtain a certificate of objection.<sup>23,24</sup> During parliamentary readings of the bill, some politicians raised concerns that COs created a loophole;<sup>25</sup> however, the government argued that the process of obtaining one would assist in countering “myths, misinformation and outright lies” (2013; 21172)<sup>23</sup> about vaccination in the community.

Three further ‘exceptional circumstances’ exemption grounds were specified in the legislation (Table 2),<sup>26</sup> subject to a ‘grace period’ of 12 weeks allowing families to catch up on their child’s vaccinations. At the end of the 12 weeks, the principal of a childcare facility was expected to take ‘all reasonable

steps’ to obtain an updated certification of vaccination.<sup>26</sup> However, there has never been a legislative or regulatory provision to exclude unvaccinated children following the grace period.

In 2017, New South Wales removed COs; the changes came into effect in 2018. By this time, the Federal NJNPlay policy had abolished COs federally. The New South Wales Minister for Health, Brad Hazzard, cited ongoing objectives to increase childhood vaccination rates and said the move reflected views in the community as well as calls from then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.<sup>27</sup>

The 2017 amendments also added some additional exemption grounds for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children and children in out-of-home care.<sup>27</sup> All current exemption grounds are listed in Table 2.

**Table 2: Exemptions from Vaccination Requirements and Associated Grace Periods by Australian State.**

State	Exemptions permitted	Grace period
New South Wales	i) The child is subject to a guardianship order approved by the Children’s Court or has been placed in out of home care* ii) The child is being cared for by an adult who is not the child’s parent due to exceptional circumstances, such as illness or incapacity. iii) The child has been evacuated from their place of residence because of a declared state of emergency. iv) The child is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. *under original provisions the child had to be on out of home care as a matter of emergency; legislative amendment in 2017 varied this to out of home care generally, as per the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998	12 weeks - The principal of a childcare facility must take all reasonable steps to ensure that a vaccination certificate is received within 12 weeks of the date on which the child is enrolled in the facility.
Victoria	i) The child and the child’s parent(s) are evacuated from their place of residence due to an emergency (as defined by law). ii) The child is in emergency care within the meaning of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005. iii) The child is in the care of an adult who is not the child’s parent due to exceptional circumstances, such as illness or incapacity. iv) The child is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. v) The child is in the care of a parent who holds: a) health care card; or b) pensioner concession card; c) Veteran’s Affairs Gold Card; or d) Veteran’s Affairs White Card. vi) The child’s birth was a multiple birth, (the birth of triplets or more).	16 weeks - Person in charge of the childcare service must take reasonable steps to ensure an immunisation status certificate is provided within 16 weeks of the child first attending the service.
Queensland	Not relevant, owing to the discretionary nature of the provisions.	Not applicable.
Western Australia	i) The child is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. ii) The child is in need of protection under the Children and Community Services Act 2004. iii) The child is living in crisis or emergency accommodation because of homelessness, family violence, or risk of family violence. iv) The child has been evacuated from their residence as a result of a declared natural disaster. v) The child is in the care of adults who are not the children’s parents due to exceptional circumstances (such as illness or incapacity). vi) The child is in the care of a parent who is the holder of an income support payment: Health Care Card; Pensioner Concession Card; Veteran’s Affairs White Card; or Veteran’s Affairs Gold Card. vii) The child first entered Australia less than 6 months before the time of enrolment, and the child or his/her parents hold a humanitarian visa.	No provision for grace periods in the legislation. Where exemption enrolments are permitted the state Department of Health takes on the role of support the family to access immunisation services to catch the child up on overdue doses.
South Australia	Exemptions not specified in the legislation. The legislation authorises the Chief Medical Officer to grant exemptions to specified children or classes of children. Current non-legislative exemptions permitted the CMO’s authority are: i) The child is eligible for Commonwealth additional childcare subsidy ACCS (child wellbeing), because of a risk of serious abuse or neglect. ii) The child lives on the following Aboriginal lands or communities: Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands; within the Oak Valley community; or within the Yalata community. iii) The child of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, for a temporary 6 week period only. iv) The child has come into the care of the state under child protection provisions, for a temporary 6 week period only. v) The child is transferred out of the care of the state to another guardian or their parent, for a temporary 6 week period only.	No provision for grace periods in the legislation, as exemptions are not provided for in the policy. The temporary nature of exemption grounds iii, iv, and v authorised by the Chief Medical Officer operate as a grace period.

As part of their NJNPlay responsibilities, childcare providers in New South Wales are required to retain immunisation records on file and obtain updated vaccination certificates for enrolled children as they reach milestone ages for scheduled vaccinations.<sup>28</sup> A penalty of up to \$5,500 applies if a childcare facility enrolls a child without obtaining a vaccination certificate. This penalty also applies to anyone who forges or falsifies a vaccination or medical certificate.<sup>29</sup> Our field research did not indicate any instances in which this has occurred.

### Victoria

In 2015, Victoria's Labor State Government introduced the *Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (No Jab, No Play) Bill 2015*. Labor promoted the policy during the 2014 state election campaign, and upon introducing the bill in state parliament, Health Minister Jill Hennessy explained its purpose was to increase immunisation rates for young children. The legislation came into effect on 1 January 2016.

Victoria's enrolment requirements echoed New South Wales, except with six broader vulnerability exemptions (Table 2). These exceptional cases are subject to a 16-week grace period and the person in charge of the childcare centre must take 'reasonable steps' to attain an immunisation status certificate within that timeframe of the child first attending the service. This does not amount to an outright requirement to obtain records. The explanatory memorandum to the legislation explains that "[r]easonable steps may include providing the parent of the child with information about immunisation and referring the parent of the child to a recognised immunisation provider who can provide information concerning vaccination schedules and administer any necessary vaccines." Minister Hennessy explained that the grace period recognised vulnerable and disadvantaged children in the community and would prompt their vaccination.<sup>30</sup>

The Victorian policy did not permit COs; the government argued in Parliament that this would strengthen the policy and align with federal policy. The Minister for Families and Children also noted that New South Wales had seen an increase in the rate of COs following its own policy.<sup>31</sup>

In 2017, Victoria amended its NJNPlay policy to make immunisation status certificates generated by AIR the only acceptable

evidence.<sup>32</sup> This was to address parents providing fraudulent exemption letters from sympathetic doctors.<sup>33-35</sup>

The government also introduced a new obligation for childcare providers to obtain *updated* records to verify that children remained fully vaccinated throughout their time in early childhood education and care, not just at enrolment. Providers must ask parents to provide current AIR records: i) within two months of the child reaching a prescribed milestone age for scheduled vaccination;<sup>36</sup> or ii) at intervals not exceeding a period of seven months.<sup>37</sup> There is no sanction for parental non-compliance.

Sanctions faced by providers include fines of up to \$20,000, and the suspension of a service's approval to operate.<sup>30,38</sup> However, our field research indicated that breaches with regard to follow-ups or enrolment errors would incur a 'responsive regulation'<sup>39</sup> approach to help providers become compliant; penalties would be applied only to flagrant disregard for admittance requirements, and our informants advised this had not happened in Victoria.

### Queensland

In February 2015, a Labor State Government was elected after a lengthy period in opposition. Labor had attempted to introduce vaccine requirements for enrolment in childcare at the discretion of the provider in 2013 but the incumbent Liberal National Party Government voted the bill down on the grounds that it did not include COs, and a lack of evidence that such policies made a significant difference to vaccination rates.<sup>40</sup> Then Minister for Health, Lawrence Springborg, advocated in Parliament that Queensland "should watch New South Wales, which has introduced this type of legislation ... and review its success over the next 12 months to two years" (2014: 179).<sup>40</sup>

Subsequently, in July 2015, the incoming Minister for Health, Cameron Dick, introduced legislation<sup>41</sup> to the state's unicameral parliament,<sup>42,43</sup> which came into force on 1 January 2016.<sup>44</sup> Queensland's legislation affords childcare providers the authority to request an immunisation history statement prior to enrolling a child or to request records be provided within four weeks for enrolled children. If a parent/guardian does not comply, the person in charge can refuse or cancel enrolments. However, this is entirely discretionary.

The government stated its intention was to empower providers in their decisions, yet to allow flexibility by not prohibiting unvaccinated children. They encouraged childcare providers to take account of a child's circumstances, stating: "If the centre reasonably believes the child is a vulnerable child, and refusing enrolment or attendance would not be in the best interests of the child, they may choose to enrol or accept their attendance" (2015: 1350).<sup>42,45</sup>

Owing to its discretionary nature, Queensland's NJNPlay does not include exemption grounds, grace periods or provider sanctions. It places the burden of decision making on service providers to determine and communicate their ethos on accepting unvaccinated children, instead of relying upon unequivocal government provisions.

### Western Australia

The Western Australian Government introduced the *Public Health Amendment (Immunisation Requirements for Enrolment) Bill* in May 2019, and the state's NJNPlay policy came into effect on 22 July 2019.<sup>46</sup> The State Government had previously flagged its intention to enact a policy.<sup>47-49</sup> Our informants also linked the move to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull urging states to enact NJNPlay policies in March 2017 as mainstream parties sought to distance themselves from far-right politician Pauline Hanson's linkage of vaccination to autism.<sup>50</sup>

Phase 1 of the policy, effective from 1 January 2019, introduced mandatory proof of vaccination at enrolment check; however, unvaccinated children were not excluded. From 22 July 2019, Phase 2 prohibited childcare providers or kindergarten programs from enrolling a child without certification that they were age-appropriately vaccinated, unless a specified exemption applied.<sup>46</sup> Failure to comply is subject to a \$10,000 fine, but we could not uncover any instances of this penalty being applied. The legislation provided seven exemption grounds (Table 2).

The Minister for Education and Training, Sue Ellery, told Parliament that children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage may be disproportionately negatively affected by a blanket application of the immunisation enrolment requirements. She clarified that the "purpose of ... exemptions is not for these children to remain unvaccinated"; rather, exemptions would enable services to identify unvaccinated children, and to manage this the Department of



Health had allocated resources “to ensure that these families will receive additional support to catch up these children on missed vaccinations.” (2019: 2894).<sup>51</sup>

Unlike New South Wales and Victoria, the Western Australian policy does not include grace periods. The government argued that this would place an additional administrative burden on service providers; that revoking an enrolment because of non-compliance by the time of grace period expiry would disrupt the child (although the other states’ ‘grace periods’ never provided for expulsion); and that the Department of Health was poised to follow up and work extensively with families of unvaccinated children attending services.<sup>52,53</sup> These points were re-affirmed by our informants. As the Federal NJNPlay policy was well established by 2019, Western Australia did not include COs.

### South Australia

South Australia is the most recent state to enact an NJNPlay policy in 2020, under a short-lived Liberal government. Labor had made two previous but unsuccessful attempts; one in 2017 while in government and the second in 2018 while in opposition. In both instances, the Liberal party delayed the bills’ progression by prorogation.

Echoing Western Australia’s phased process, South Australia introduced mandatory proof of vaccination requirements from 1 January 2020. These apply to newly enrolling children as well as to children already enrolled; however, unvaccinated children were not yet excluded.<sup>54</sup> A provider’s failure to ‘take reasonable steps’ to obtain records or to keep them on file could result in a penalty fine of up to \$2,500.

In February 2020, a bill for the second phase of the scheme was introduced,<sup>55</sup> which came into effect on 7 August 2020. Childcare or early childhood education providers could no longer: i) enrol a child not up-to-date with vaccinations, and ii) continue to provide services to a child who does not remain up-to-date with the national vaccination schedule as per age requirements. The legislation includes a maximum penalty of \$30,000 for non-compliance, with the same penalty also applying to parents or guardians if they forge an immunisation history statement.<sup>56</sup> Our desk research has found no evidence of these penalties being applied in South Australia.

Unlike in other states, a ‘grandfather’ clause was not built into South Australia’s policy;

it applied to children already attending childcare, and not just those enrolled after its enactment. Consequently, unvaccinated children enrolled in services were subject to exclusion in Phase 2.<sup>56</sup> The gap between the phases, along with a communication campaign, gave parents time to ‘catch up’ on their child’s vaccinations if desired.<sup>57</sup>

Unlike other Australian states, South Australia did not prescribe grounds for exemptions in the legislation, although it did allow for the state’s Chief Public Health Officer to authorise exemption grounds (lasting either for a specified period or indefinitely) for specified classes of children. Five such exemption grounds are currently permitted in South Australia (Table 2). As with other recent policies, South Australia did not provide COs.

### Key observations

#### *Impetus for change*

Although the rationales underpinning No Jab, No Play policies align across states – namely public health goals to sustain high rates of childhood vaccination in the community and to prevent the spread of infection in early education settings – our review has revealed different drivers for state policies.

A commonality across Queensland, Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia was a change of government creating a window of opportunity. In Queensland, the Labor party finally had the numbers to deliver on its failed 2013 attempt.<sup>40</sup> In Victoria and Western Australia, Labor parties promised NJNPlay policy during election campaigns. South Australia’s new Liberal State Government had a change of heart after blocking two previous ALP efforts.

In New South Wales and Queensland, specific actors were influential on policy design: in New South Wales, media actors, while our fieldwork revealed that the chief architect of Queensland’s 2013 policy was a Labor party official and public health academic whose disciplinary norms influenced the policy’s proportional and non-coercive features.

#### *Normalisation, growing concurrence, and stringency*

NJNPlay policies have become increasingly normalised; five of Australia’s eight states and territories now have them. Following the Federal NJNPlay policy, policies have become more stringent, without COs. Recent policies have included more onerous sanctions for non-compliance by childcare providers;

South Australia’s maximum fine of \$30,000 is five times that of New South Wales. The South Australia legislation was also more immediately consequential for parents by not including a ‘grandfather clause’. Parents could either ‘shape up’ their child’s vaccinations or ‘ship out’ from childcare.<sup>56</sup>

#### *Increased co-optation of childcare providers into vaccination governance*

Although childcare providers in most states were already required to obtain vaccination records, NJNPlay policies have imposed further responsibilities, including some designed to prompt parents to keep their children’s vaccinations up to date after enrolment. With the exception of Queensland, childcare providers are the frontline enforcers refusing enrolment for non-exempt unvaccinated children. (Relatedly, providers must assess whether an unvaccinated child meets state exemption criteria.) Further burdens were added by amendment in New South Wales and Victoria, where providers must take ‘all reasonable steps’ at the end of a grace period to acquire an updated vaccination certificate, and regularly request updated certificates for enrolled children.

Queensland is an outlier in giving childcare providers discretion to exclude an unvaccinated child. However, this arguably makes it more difficult for providers to adopt a ‘No Jab’ position without legislation to fall back on. Shortly after the legislation came into effect, media reported that major childcare service providers were not excluding children;<sup>58,59</sup> our field research found that some providers do indeed impose requirements, but also that health authorities do not regard exclusions as the point: the policy is intended to promote conversations between providers and parents that prompt vaccination.

#### *Policy influence and lessons*

Our review highlights how states take account of their counterparts’ policy experiences, employing or avoiding strategies based on assessments of their benefits or detriments.

New South Wales’ removal of COs directly aligned with federal policy changes and the lack of COs in Victoria. Victoria’s move to accepting only Australian Immunisation Register (AIR)-recorded exemptions reflected a streamlined approach to using the register as a single source of truth.

Western Australia's Government, having observed that 'grace periods' were not applied meaningfully in New South Wales and Victoria and that follow-up work fell on childcare providers, considered it:

... more appropriate for the Department of Health to have the resources to provide intensive follow-up with the families of children enrolled under an exemption to ensure that those children receive their missing vaccinations. (2019: 4179)<sup>52</sup>

Western Australia and South Australia had not previously required vaccination records for enrolment in childcare; South Australia replicated Western Australia's phased approach by bringing in record checks, then mandates.

#### *Differences between partisan policies and changes over time*

A clear shift in the (conservative) Liberal-National Coalition's partisan approach can be observed over time, as well as a pattern in how both major political parties approach mandatory vaccination policies and exemptions.

Early in the NJNPlay policies' history, conservative political actors in New South Wales and Queensland were wary of coercing families and protective of COs, emphasising individual choice and access to education and care.

Labor parties in each state sought to initiate NJNplay policies but did not always succeed. However, their policies were either non-coercive (Queensland) or provided for a wide array of exemptions for social disadvantage (Western Australia and Victoria). The latter aligns with the idea that groups can be treated differently in pursuit of substantive equality, and that care and education for disadvantaged children may be more important than their vaccination status.<sup>60</sup>

New South Wales and South Australian policies, introduced and presided over by conservative governments, include fewer exemptions for disadvantage. This aligns with the view of some of our conservative informants that vulnerability exemptions are unfair and counterproductive in treating disadvantaged people differently. Conservative political actors prioritise procedural equality under the law ahead of equality of outcomes.<sup>60</sup>

The most telling change over time is that Australian conservative politics has embraced coercion of parents and providers and

imposed strict consequences on vaccine refusers, significantly deviating from the position articulated by Queensland's Health Minister Springborg in 2014. Federal policy has contributed to this trend, such that South Australia's most recent policy is the strictest in the land.

### **Conclusion**

Australia's NJNPlay policies display similarities, differences, trends and bifurcations. A range of factors contributes to how and why the policies take their current forms, including partisan trends and ideology, policy learning, and in some cases the influence of particular policy actors.

### **Implications for public health**

The design and implementation of NJNPlay policies necessarily impact families, healthcare providers, and childcare providers with respect to the vaccination decisions and status of Australian children. These vaccine mandates are part of broader policy ecosystems concerned with increasing and maintaining high immunisation rates in Australia. For policy designers in Australian states and territories who have yet to enact NJNPlay policies – or indeed those in other jurisdictions – the existing policies provide a framework from which designers could take inspiration or could base similar policies on.

However, further research should identify the factors contributing to successful vaccination coverage increases across different jurisdictions, and the effectiveness and impact of co-opting childcare providers in vaccine governance.

With NJNPlay policies often a cornerstone vaccine governance intervention by a particular state, it will also be useful to trace how the processes outlined here have contributed to the adoption of different state COVID-19 vaccine mandates for adults. For example, in 2020, Queensland introduced a short-lived 'optional' mandate for businesses mirroring its unique NJNPlay; however, this was soon superseded by a more standard requirement.<sup>61</sup>

Whether COVID-19 vaccines for children are incorporated into state NJNPlay policies in the more distant future – and ergo become an additional facet for those affected by NJNPlay policies – will hinge upon further factors including clinical trial outcomes, regulatory

approvals, epidemiological considerations, political and public appetite, and decisions at the federal level about whether to include COVID-19 vaccines within the National Immunisation Plan for children.

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