



Early Childhood Development Covid-19 Relief Fund



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NEW FUND ESTABLISHED BY TWO LEADING ECD ORGANISATIONS TO SUPPORT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SECTOR DURING COVID-19

Today, the two largest non-governmental stakeholders in the early childhood development sector join forces to address the dire plight experienced in the ECD sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. The **National Early Childhood Development Alliance (NECDA)** in collaboration with the **South African Congress for Early Childhood Development** launched an independent *ECD-support-fund* to provide bridging support that will be disbursed to registered not-for-profit early childhood development programmes that have been affected by the measures undertaken to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. This special fund will solicit financial support from individuals, donors, business and other interested parties, where after it will benefit registered early childhood development programmes based on predetermined criteria.

An important feature of this fund, once it is set up, is that it will operate independently and will be managed and overseen by an *Independent Oversight Committee*. "It is important that the ECD-support-fund be administered in a fair, unbiased and just manner, so as to benefit the targeted beneficiaries in the sector, and be trusted by those who wish to contribute to it", says Rene King, Chairperson of NECDA. The *Founding Document* of the *ECD-support-fund* was carefully constructed to achieve this through a number of mechanisms.

"We recognise that measures in relation to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic are necessary, but also know that they have a significant impact on the sustainability of the early childhood development sector in the country. It is important that we find a way to support the sector during this time so that young children have early childhood development programmes to return to when the restriction levels of the national lockdown are lifted", says Leonard Saul, CEO of the South African Congress for Early Childhood Development.

The *ECD-support-fund's* primary focus is on early childhood development programmes that have been registered or conditionally registered in terms of sections 97 and 98 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 for a period of twelve months or more. Early childhood development programmes that operate on a not-for-profit principle, and that is registered as an NPO under the Non-Profit Organisations Act 71 of 1997 and/or Public Benefit Organisation (PBO), if they meet the requirements of the Income Tax Act 58 of 1962).

The sudden onset of COVID-19 caught the nation by surprise and dramatically changed life, as we know it. We all look to government for support, but it is imperative that those who are recognised leaders in the early childhood development sector also take up the challenge and act! It is important to acknowledge and appreciate the fact the Department of Social Development issued a directive that it will continue to subsidise early childhood development centres during the state of national disaster and that when the new financial year commences there will be no need to submit proposals and business plan. This annual



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subsidy amounts to R1.3 billion, and will help to support those early childhood development programmes that do receive funding from government. The DSD, DBE, UNICEF and the LEGO Foundation also partnered with the National Early Childhood Development Alliance in collaboration with the South African Congress for Early Childhood Development to make playful learning materials available to parents to support the early learning and development of young children at home.

“The National Early Childhood Development Alliance in collaboration with the South African Congress for Early Childhood Development agreed to establish the *ECD-support-fund*, in an attempt to add to the existing efforts. This fund will fill a much needed gap to ensure that we keep the sector ‘going’ beyond Covid-19 so that we can continue to lay the foundations through early learning and development programmes to achieve the goals as set out in the National Development Plan”, says King.

The *Independent Oversight Committee* will be established within the next week with representatives from the National Early Childhood Development Alliance (NECDA) and South African Congress for Early Childhood Development, as well as representatives from *bona fide* donors, business, independent experts, representatives from government and international organisations. The establishment of this impartial structure will be responsible for the receiving and reviewing of all applications, and deciding on the allocation of funds to programmes that meet the criteria.

“Areas that will be prioritised through this fund will focus on what is immediately needed to sustain not-for-profit early childhood development programmes,” said Saul. “These include salaries (partial or in full) of early childhood development practitioners/ educators and support staff, and operational costs directly related to the implementation of the early childhood development programme, such as municipal rates and taxes”.

King indicated that the *ECD-support-fund* will be established with no administrative fee being levied. “As NECDA we agreed that we will assist with the setting up of the fund at no cost to ensure that funding is accumulated as quickly as possible to support the sector. As the fund grows, it will be the responsibility of the *Independent Oversight Committee*, to determine when a maximum fee of 2% may be levied”, says King.

The first priority of the *Independent Oversight Committee* will be to invite individuals, donors, business and other interested parties to contribute to the *ECD-support-fund*. “It is important that we get the fund to a level where the *Independent Oversight Committee* can commence with disbursements in a fair and equitable manner. I know that there are already a few commitments from individuals, business and donors who have heard about this initiative, but it is important that everyone interested and who believes in the value of early childhood development rally towards the same goal and contribute to this fund”, says Leonard Saul, CEO of the South African Congress for Early Childhood Development.

“It is important that this *ECD-support-fund* is not only seen as an independent fund, but a fund that has clear defined and transparent measures of accountability in place. The fund will be subject to an independent audit at the end of the financial year or within three months after it has disbursed all available funding”, says King.



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Anyone interested in contributing to the *ECD-support-fund* can use the following account with SF- as a prefix followed by the contributor's name. Contributions can be made to NECDA's Standard Bank cheque account number 082 630 410. The Founding Document of the *ECD-support-fund* is available at <https://www.ecdalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ECD-COVID-19-Founding-Document-Final-for-Publication.pdf>. The email address of the fund is ecdfund@necda.org.za.

The *Independent Oversight Committee* shall publish the date and the procedures for applications within the next two to three weeks. "We ask that ECD programmes do not send any requests and applications now but wait for the announcement of the opening date and procedures for applications", said Rene King, Chairperson of the National Early Childhood Development Alliance.

King and Saul echoed the importance of civil society, the donor and business community, and government to work together within the parameters of the law, to make a lasting difference and impact on early childhood development programmes at a time when this support is most needed for the immediate and long-term sustainability of the early childhood development sector.

ISSUED BY: National Early Childhood Development Alliance and South African Congress for Early Childhood Development

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About the National Early Childhood Development Alliance

The National Early Childhood Development Alliance (NECDA) is an early childhood development (ECD) focused network, comprised of ECD NPO's and sector experts, located throughout South Africa. It was formed in 2005 in response to a need to strengthen the ECD sector, with a view to building a better future for children by promoting children's rights to ECD, strengthening NPO's and advocating for ECD. Member organisations and experts are united in their objective to provide capacity building, high quality training and resourcing to the ECD Sector. NECDA currently represents and serves approximately 103-member organisations across all nine provinces of South Africa

About the South African Congress for Early Childhood Development

The South African Congress for Early Childhood Development is the representative national mass-based, non-governmental early childhood development (ECD) organisation in South Africa. The organisation represents the interest of over 6 million young children (birth to six years old), early childhood development workers and the

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early childhood development sector in general. The organisation operates from a national office based in Pretoria and is represented by nine Provincial Executive Committees (PECs) in the province. The organisation was launched at a national conference during 23-25 March 1994 in Port Elizabeth. Our vision is access to a high quality, inter-sectoral, holistic and integrated ECD system for all children from birth to six. Our mission is the promotion of a conducive ECD environment through participating in policy development, monitoring implementation, ensuring quality early childhood development practices, mobilizing resources, disseminating information, lobbying and advocacy.