

Flying Start

Enhancing Quality
Guidance



Government of
South Australia

Flying Start

Acknowledgement of Country

From the heart

We acknowledge the Aboriginal peoples as the First peoples of South Australia and as custodians of the lands, waters, skies and Communities where we live, learn and raise children.

We recognise Aboriginal peoples as having the longest living culture, raising children safe and strong in their identity, Community, Culture, and Connection to Country.

We pay our deep respects to Elders past and present, and their role as the first knowledge sharers for children. We follow in their footsteps.

Aboriginal peoples, working with and for children, are central in shaping our work. Their wisdom, advice, and guidance enriches our practices, creating a more inclusive and culturally safe environment for children and families.

We respect Aboriginal peoples' ways of being, doing and wise practices guiding our continual learning.

Together we walk and build stronger, more supportive Communities for all children.



Terminology

In South Australia, we acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which the staff of the Government of South Australia works. We respect preference to use the term 'Aboriginal peoples' to acknowledge in written and spoken language both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This guidance sets out the funding requirements for the Flying Start Enhancing Quality program (Enhancing Quality). The program is administered by the Office for Early Childhood Development (OECD).

Overview

The Enhancing Quality program provides access to funding for Flying Start partner preschools to undertake learning and development at a service level that aligns to their strategic quality objectives.

The program will support lifting service quality, the retention of the early childhood workforce, and improving developmental outcomes for children across language, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical domains.

There are three key focus areas for the Enhancing Quality program, based on the National Quality Standard:

- ▶ QA1- Educational program and practice
- ▶ QA5- Relationships with children
- ▶ QA7- Leadership.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Enhancing Quality Professional Learning and Development Framework (the Framework). The Framework is included at the back of this document.

The Framework has been developed to provide guidance for early childhood leaders, teachers, educators and teams, to make informed and effective decisions when selecting and embedding high-quality professional development.



Available funding

To support services with implementing intentional professional learning aligned to service goals all Partner Services will receive an allocation of Enhancing Quality funding, based on the size of the service.

Funding amounts will vary based on the service's socio-economic index and the remoteness of the service, as determined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas 'SEIFA') and Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia 'ARIA+').

Size	2027 rate
Number of ECT-led rooms in the service	\$3,500 for the first two ECT-led rooms that a service has. \$1,155 for every subsequent room.
SEIFA Quintile	2027 rate, per room that a service has
5	\$0
4	\$175
3	\$315
2	\$438
1	\$560
ARIA+ rating	2027 rate, per room that a service has
Major Cities	\$0
Inner Regional	\$0
Outer Regional	\$263
Remote	\$613
Very Remote	\$1,006
Integrated Hubs	2027 rate
Service is part of an Integrated Hub	\$2,000

Minimum rates have been set to ensure all services can access high quality professional learning opportunities. These include:

- ▶ Major Cities or Inner Regional \$5,000 per service.
- ▶ Outer Regional areas (\$6,000),
- ▶ Remote Areas (\$8,000),
- ▶ Very Remote Areas (\$10,000).

Funding for the Enhancing Quality program will be paid annually in advance. The Program is a trial pilot for the 2027 year. Funding amounts will not be adjusted based on changes (+/-) during the calendar year.

What to do

All Partner Services must complete a Flying Start Partnership Plan (Partnership Plan), detailing how the funding will be allocated to support the service's outcomes. This plan ensures compliance with funding rules and will be subject to approvals.

Services are able to purchase professional learning that aligns to the Framework and is approved in their Partnership Plan.

The Framework and Partnership Plan will guide services to identify their strategic quality goals, aligned to their Quality Improvement Plan, and to consider what professional learning and development options would assist them to reach those goals. The Plan must include how the service plans to implement the learning that is undertaken and institute reflective practice to reach their quality goals.

Partner Services will be notified of their funding allocation in July, giving them several months to plan how they will use their funding, before the funding is paid in January.

Services must submit a simple plan for OECD approval before the start of the calendar year to access and spend their funding allocation. Local Teams will support services with planning and will manage endorsement and final approval of plans. Partner Services are required to submit their plan for approval, to allow sufficient time to book the approved supports/programs.

Local Teams will check in with services mid-year to assess whether planned supports are being implemented. A final programmatic and financial acquittal against the Flying Start Partnership Plan and evaluation process will take place in November of the same calendar year. Any unspent funding will be offset against the next year's allocation, with the net amount of unspent funds deducted.



Spending rules

All spending needs to be approved through the Partnership Plan, and be aligned with the Framework.

Additional spending rules include:

Allowable expenditure

Enhancing Quality funding is intended to support a whole-of-service approach to professional development.

This means that the professional learning must focus on the identified goals of the service towards quality improvement. It does not mean that all staff need to participate in the purchased professional learning, or that the funding cannot be used to target specific parts of the service. This could include a focus on upskilling for a teaching team or teams, leadership team, or pedagogical leadership and implementation. At a minimum the professional learning must benefit the preschool program. Professional Learning should be consistent with the EYLF.

Funding restrictions

Funding cannot be used as a substitute for a service's existing professional learning program, and must be planned in addition to a service's standard professional development. Services will be required to declare that their Enhancing Quality funding will be used for activities beyond their existing commitment to professional learning..

Funding cannot be spent on:

- ▶ activities not approved in the Flying Start Partnership Plan, or approved as a variation to the plan, without the prior approval of the OECD
- ▶ activities that do not represent good value for money, given the cost of the item and how the item will benefit the service

- ▶ subscriptions, conference registrations, or professional memberships
- ▶ mandatory training, such as First Aid, or
- ▶ physical or digital resources, except where they are delivered as a part of an active learning option.

Spending Parameters

Professional learning and development must be delivered by a suitably qualified person/ organisation. The person/ organisation providing the professional development must have an Australian Business Number (ABN) and provide professional development services that can be purchased commercially, whether or not the specific learning that is purchased is commercially available.¹

The person/organisation providing the professional learning must not be employed by or have a real or perceived conflict of interest with, the service or provider.

Waivers to these rules may be sought under exceptional circumstances, and should be discussed with the OECD Local Teams during the planning process.

Local teams will support Partner Services to ensure funds are effectively planned and spent.

1. This is intended to allow for services to organise professional learning that best reflects their quality goals, including curated or bespoke professional learning options where they are appropriate.

Category	Definition/ Purpose	Notes	Allocation
Administration support	Covers costs related to planning, booking, and administering programs or supports.	This may include backfill where staff are released to complete these administration tasks. A teacher is not required to perform the administration work.	Up to 5%
Professional Learning and Development	Programs and services	Costs may include supplier travel and accommodation, as part of the negotiated delivery price.	>0%
Staff backfill	Covers the cost of temporary relief ECTs/staff to cover service staff attending programs or training.	▶ Services may utilise their funding allocation to enable staff to participate in professional learning and development, including participating in post-learning implementation and reflective practice. ▶ This may include backfill to replace a staff member during service hours, or to pay a staff member beyond their ordinary hours. ▶ While there is not a cap on the proportion of a service's allocation that can be used to pay backfill, any use of backfill arrangements must be undertaken in conjunction with professional learning and be proportionate to the professional learning undertaken.	No cap

Support for services:

Further support is available through:

- ▶ Enhancing Quality factsheet
- ▶ Your OECD Local Team
- ▶ OECD.EnhancingQuality@sa.gov.au



Flying Start

Enhancing Quality

Professional Learning and Development Framework

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Acronyms	Definition
APST	Australian Professional Teacher Standards
EYLF	Early Years Learning Framework
NQS	National Quality Standard

Executive Summary

High-quality professional learning is critical to building and retaining a confident and capable early childhood workforce. When professional learning is sustained, embedded in practice and is purposeful, for individuals and teams, it strengthens professional identity, enhances reflective decision making and supports intentional practice improvement.

Ongoing reflective practice, coaching and collaboration, supported by leadership, leads to greater professional outcomes for educators, teachers and teams, which in turn improves outcomes for children.

Effective professional learning must build knowledge and skills, motivate professionals, and embed practice through ongoing learning.¹

Professional learning critical enablers:

- ▶ Sustained, continuous professional learning.
- ▶ Practice embedded and context specific adult learning experiences.
- ▶ Collaborative, relational professional learning (coaching, mentoring, reflective dialogue).
- ▶ Practice embedded professional learning leads to long lasting practice change.

Key Messages:

- ▶ Identify priorities through critical reflection and self-assessment.
- ▶ Select professional learning that aligns with your priorities- consider which modes of learning you require, online, self-paced, workshops etc.
- ▶ Ensure professional learning is credible-does the provider have testimonials- can they demonstrate delivery is evidence informed?
- ▶ Consider if the professional learning is or can be contextual for your team and service- does it suit your context and needs?
- ▶ Plan for sustainability- strengthen learning, implementation and embedding practice change through professional dialogue, coaching, mentoring, goal setting and observing practice for change.



1. Education Endowment Foundation, 2021

Context

In response to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, the Office for Early Childhood Development (OECD) was created as the system steward. Its task is to elevate South Australia as a national leader in the early childhood sector and improve the lives of South Australian children, reducing vulnerability and improving outcomes.

The OECD will provide funding through the Flying Start Enhancing Quality program for professional learning and development in early childhood partner services, to lift capability of leaders and teaching teams in their educational program, practice, and relationships with children. This initiative will assist with ensuring the early childhood workforce is **retained**, service **quality lifts** and children have improved **developmental outcomes** across language, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical domains.

The Framework was developed to provide guidance for early childhood leaders, teachers, educators and teams, to make informed and effective decisions when selecting and embedding high-quality professional learning.

The Flying Start Enhancing Quality program will be made available to all South Australian non-government partner services to access high-quality professional learning opportunities for educators, early childhood teachers and leaders across the sector.

There are 3 key focus areas for the Flying Start Enhancing Quality program:

- ▶ Leadership and governance
- ▶ Educational program and practice
- ▶ Relationships with children

Objectives

The Framework aims to:

- ▶ Provide a holistic approach to professional learning.
- ▶ Enhance educator, teacher, leadership, and team knowledge, skill and practice.
- ▶ Support informed decision making for ongoing learning and continuous improvement, contributing to high-quality early learning programs.



Purpose of Professional learning

Key messages:

- ▶ Professional learning strengthens confidence, expertise and professional identity.
- ▶ When professional learning is tailored to the context of the service and teams, it can be more meaningful.
- ▶ Early childhood professionals, have an ethical commitment to ongoing professional learning.
- ▶ Professional development that strengthens practice and service quality increases retention, reinforcing professional capability, recognition and commitment.

The Early Childhood Australia (ECA) [Code of Ethics](#) states as professionals we have a commitment to engage in critical reflection and ongoing professional learning to build knowledge.

Professional learning plays a vital role in supporting early childhood educators, teachers and leaders to build confidence, deepen their expertise, and develop a strong professional identity. These roles require engagement in complex decision-making, fostering meaningful relationships, delivering high-quality programs, and applying evidence-informed practices, all of which can be strengthened through high quality, intentional Professional Learning².

When professional learning is meaningful and contextual to the early years service, individuals and teams feel valued and supported in their learning and practice. There is deeper understanding, knowledge, skill, reflection and motivation. This enhances not only their own wellbeing and professionalism; it also creates a sector which continually strives to improve learning, development and wellbeing outcomes for young children.

Making connections

EYLF Principle

Critical reflection and ongoing professional learning

Collaborative leadership and teamwork support a culture of peer mentoring and shared learning where all team members contribute to each other's professional learning and growth.

NQS Element 4.2.1

Professional collaboration

In a collaborative environment, staff value and respect diverse contributions, share resources, and engage in a lively culture of professional inquiry.

NQS Exceeding theme

Practice is embedded in service operations

At the Exceeding level, educators demonstrate a deep understanding of pedagogy, leading to exemplary practice, embedding high quality service provision.

APST focus area 6.2

Engage in professional learning

- ▶ Engage in professional learning and improve practice.
- ▶ Participate to update knowledge and practice.
- ▶ Engage in high quality opportunities and expand professional learning.

What is Professional learning?

Key messages:

- ▶ Consider the delivery and content of the professional learning that will have the most meaningful impact for individuals or teams.
- ▶ Determine, prioritise and align key indicators of high-quality professional learning that are non-negotiable for your service, when selecting professional learning programs.
- ▶ Use reflection questions to support informed decision making and planning.

Professional learning in the Early Childhood education and Care (ECEC) sector can be vast and varied. Determining the type, purpose, and value for professionals, whether that be for individuals or teams, is complex. The type of professional learning can have as much impact as the content of the learning.

Key indicators of high-quality professional development (PD) describe essential characteristics that support professional learning. The indicators are intended to be used as a guide, informing decision making and encouraging reflection, focusing on what influences learning, embedding practice, and improving learning outcomes.

Key Indicator	Description	Considerations
Evidence Based	Underpinned by research and practices that directly support effective teaching and learning.	▶ Does the PD reflect current understanding and evidence in the sector? ▶ Is the delivery/provider (of the PD) credible, can they demonstrate expertise, are they a recognised professional?
Collaborative	Provides opportunities for professionals to learn with and from each other through dialogue, inquiry, and problem solving.	▶ Are there opportunities to learn with peers and discuss ideas, either online or in person? ▶ Is there time and space for dialogue rather than passive listening? ▶ Are participants encouraged to network and connect beyond the professional development?
Reflective	Encourages participants to analyse their own practice, identify areas of strength and for growth.	▶ Will the PD encourage you to examine your current practice and beliefs? ▶ Are there tools for self-assessment and reflection or planning? ▶ How are you encouraged to revisit your learning after the PD?
Relevant	Aligns with, and meets the needs of educators, teachers and leader's roles (as individuals and in teams) along with the context of each service, including communities, families and children.	▶ Does the PD reflect and support the role of individuals, teams or the whole service? ▶ How does the PD align with your goals and priorities? ▶ How does the PD suit the context of your service? Can it be adapted and contextualised?
Sustainable	Occurs over time, and focuses on ongoing learning, reflection and continuous improvement.	▶ Is there learning over time rather than a single event? ▶ What are the opportunities for further discussion, coaching, or supports to implement? ▶ What time and structures will be required to trial, refine and revisit new strategies?
Impact-focused	Is considered, purposeful, planned, and outcome-focused for ECEC professionals and children.	▶ What are the intended outcomes for individuals, teams and the service? ▶ How will you know when you have success? ▶ How will you determine and measure practice change?

Leadership and Governance

Effective leadership is a key enabler of high-quality pedagogy and practice across the ECEC sector.

Research identifies purposeful, collaborative leadership and role clarity as essential conditions for successfully embedding evidence informed practice and to sustain quality improvement.³

Strong leadership supports reflective practice, team building and continuous improvement. Leadership not only influences educator practice, it improves educator retention; this in turn, enables positive child outcomes.

The EYLF frames leadership as a shared professional responsibility, encouraging educators at all levels to contribute to a culture of evidence informed practice, collaboration and ongoing learning.

The role of the Educational Leader

The role of the educational leader is critical for shaping high-quality practice and fostering a culture of ongoing professional growth within the service.

Motivating, affirming, challenging and extending educators' understanding and practice builds a culture of reflective practice and professional learning, beyond the professional development.

This approach creates opportunities for capability building, offers guidance and ensures educators are confident in applying not only the EYLF, but evidenced informed, best-practice approaches. When working collaboratively with service leadership and team members, the educational leader nurtures a professional learning community where practice becomes embedded.

Professional learning to consider:

- ▶ Pedagogical leadership, leading program and practice.
- ▶ Leading practice informed by critical reflection.
- ▶ Leading practice to embed in service operations.
- ▶ Leading continuous improvement and the quality improvement plan.

Making connections

EYLF Principle

Collaborative leadership and teamwork

All educators exercise aspects of leadership, leading their own ethical practice and take professional responsibility.

Collaborative leadership is built on a sense of shared responsibility and professional accountability.

NQS Element 7.2.2

Educational Leadership

The educational leader plays a significant role, working alongside educators to build capacity and understanding about their pedagogy and practice.

NQS Exceeding theme

Practice is embedded in service operations

Members of the service team understand what is expected regarding quality practice, can explain practice and are thoughtful and intentional in practice.

APST focus area 6.3

Engage with colleagues and improve practice

- ▶ Contribute to collegial discussions.
- ▶ Apply feedback to improve practice.
- ▶ Implement professional dialogue within the service or professional learning network.

3 AERO – Insights into implementation in early childhood education and care 2025

Program and Practice

High-quality program design and pedagogical practice are central to children's learning and development outcomes.

High quality educational programs and practices can reduce developmental vulnerability, reinforcing the critical role of intentional, evidence-based curriculum design.

Research consistently shows intentional teaching, responsive planning, and play-based learning significantly enhance children's cognitive, social, emotional and language development.⁴ Deep understanding and implementation of the Principles and Practices of the EYLF, aligned with the EYLF planning cycle are essential to develop high quality programs.

The NQS requires that programs be child-centred, thoughtfully planned and continually evaluated, ensuring that every child is supported to progress towards learning outcomes, while promoting equity, engagement and meaningful learning.

Professional learning to consider:

- ▶ Documenting and assessing children's learning as part of the EYLF planning cycle.
- ▶ Intentional teaching.
- ▶ Child-centred planning and programming.
- ▶ Understanding and embedding the principles and practices of the EYLF.

Making connections

EYLF Principle

Assessment and evaluation for learning, development and wellbeing

Assessment and evaluation are part of an ongoing cycle that includes, observing, documenting, analysing, planning, implementing and critical reflection.

NQS Quality Area 1

Educational program and practice

- ▶ Educational program is based on the EYLF and is child centred.
- ▶ Intentionality facilitates each child's learning, development and wellbeing.
- ▶ Evaluation, including critical reflection, informs the assessment and planning cycle.

NQS Exceeding theme

Practice is embedded in service operations

Educators understand the themes of exceeding for high quality practice and for the purpose of improving learning and development outcomes for children.

APST Focus area 2.3

Curriculum, assessment and reporting

- ▶ Use curriculum and assessment to design learning.
- ▶ Plan and implement learning and teaching, understanding curriculum and assessment requirements.

4 OECD (2021), Starting Strong VI: Supporting Meaningful Interactions in Early Childhood Education and Care, Starting Strong, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f47a06ae-en>

Relationships with children

Strong, secure, trusting, culturally responsive relationships are critical to children's learning, development and wellbeing.

Attachment theory and contemporary neuroscience highlight that warm, attuned relationships lower stress, promote regulation and foster brain development.

The EYLF Principle **Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships** and the **NQS Relationships with Children** positions relationships as foundational, requiring educators to build respectful, equitable, trusting relationships with children and facilitate strong peer to peer relationships ensuring all children have a sense of belonging. When children feel safe, valued and understood, they are more likely to explore, play and engage in learning.

Professional learning to consider:

- ▶ Attachment and relationships.
- ▶ Play-based relational pedagogy.
- ▶ Collaborative (peer to peer) learning.
- ▶ Understanding respect and dignity.
- ▶ Culturally responsive relationships.

Making connections

EYLF Principle

Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships

Educators who are attuned to children's thoughts and feeling, support their learning, development and wellbeing.

NQS Quality Area 5

Relationships with children

- ▶ Building positive relationships between educators and children
- ▶ Ensuring the dignity and rights of all children are maintained
- ▶ Supporting children to collaborate and learn from each other.

NQS Exceeding theme

Practice is shaped by meaningful engagement

Educators view secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships as crucial to gaining a greater understanding of the priorities and aspirations of children.

APST Standard 1

Know children and how they learn

- ▶ Knowledge of strategies that are responsive
- ▶ Understanding of the impact of culture and cultural identity
- ▶ Develop teaching strategies that are responsive to children's strengths.

Whole service approach

Key messages

- ▶ Whole service professional development builds consistency and quality.
- ▶ Collective learning strengthens collaboration, shared knowledge and expertise.
- ▶ Feeling valued and adding value builds confidence, alignment and supports retention.
- ▶ When an individual or the whole service team participates in professional development, opportunities are created for professional dialogue, coaching and critical reflection.

Whole team professional development strengthens consistency and overall quality, ensuring all educators have a shared understanding of knowledge, content and best practice. Research shows, this is essential for high-quality learning, development and wellbeing programs for children.

Engaging in shared professional development enhances collaboration, reflective practice, collective expertise and creates environments for teams to apply new strategies more effectively. Creating opportunities for teams to learn together supports professionals to build confidence and competence, while increasing wellbeing and retention. When educational teams and leaders build a shared understanding, they demonstrate alignment with the service philosophy, feel valued, increase their self-efficacy and develop a strong professional identity.

Sustaining professional development for continuous improvement

Strategic planning is essential to ensure new learning is understood, shared, discussed, and embedded in practice. What happens after professional development is even more important as what is being learned.

Research tells us that professional development is most impactful when it is supported by professional dialogue, and critical reflection through mechanisms such as coaching and mentoring and communities of professional learning⁵. Professional development in isolation has limited impact on developing deep understanding and embedding practice change.

Making connections

EYLF Principle

Critical reflection and ongoing professional learning

Within early childhood settings, team members share new knowledge and skills gained through professional learning experiences and encourage and support the ongoing learning of others.

NQS Quality Area 7

Development of professionals

- ▶ Educators who are committed to ongoing learning and performance improvement lift the quality of the service
- ▶ Learning and development can be enhanced when leaders (educational and service) take an active mentoring role, in collaboration with educators.

NQS Exceeding theme

Practice is embedded in service operations

When the service team approaches practice with a shared sense of understanding, purpose and agency, this creates a stable, high-quality education and care environment.

APST Focus area 6

Apply professional learning and improve student wellbeing

- ▶ Demonstrate an understanding for continued professional learning
- ▶ Engage with colleagues to evaluate the effectiveness of professional learning
- ▶ Advocate, participate and lead strategies to support high-quality professional learning.

⁵ Merchie (et al., 2016) Evaluating teachers' professional development initiatives: towards an extended evaluative framework

Reflection, self-assessment and planning

Key messages:

- ▶ Embedded and ongoing self-assessment strengthens a whole service approach to critical reflection and quality improvement planning.
- ▶ Reflective practice and a robust cycle of professional performance review identifies individual strengths, opportunities, interests and areas of development.

Reflective practice, self-assessment, professional development plans (and processes) and Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) are all tools to support intentional decision making when thinking about professional development for professionals and services.

The NQS (element 7.2.3) asks leaders to support the development of professionals through a cycle of performance review, planning and improvement. Engaging in strengths-based reflection on practice and capability, identifying current interests (professionally-individually and holistically-for the wider service community), determining professional goals and timelines, planning for professional development, and identifying strategies to support ongoing learning and practice, ensures professionals have the right supports in place to develop their professional learning, knowledge and skills.⁶

For a whole service approach, embedding a process of ongoing self-assessment to determine strengths and opportunities for improvement supports effective decision making. Using this to consider what professional development would benefit the wider team ensures that planning for learning is deliberate and informed.

Using the QIP to plan for professional development, and to support learning beyond it, is crucial for ongoing learning and embedding changed practice. It also ensures professional development is not a one-off event. Setting goals and stepping out clear actions for dialogue, reflection, coaching and practice, encourages ongoing participation and engagement.

Making connections

EYLF Principle

Critical reflection and ongoing learning

As professionals, educators are committed to lifelong learning and seek out opportunities to strengthen their professional knowledge and skills to support continuous quality improvement in practice.

NQS Element 7.2.1

Continuous Improvement

- ▶ Quality services monitor and review their performance to guide planning and improve service quality.
- ▶ Creates a shared understanding and encourages continuous improvement in practice.

NQS Exceeding theme

Practice is informed by critical reflection

Engaging in critical reflection supports the service team to make well-informed decisions and plans. Reflective practice supports educators to continue their ongoing professional learning, developing their knowledge, skill and practices.

Tools and Resources



[ECA Code of Ethics - Early Childhood Australia](#)



[AITSL Teacher Standards](#)



[AITSL Enabling High-Quality Professional Learning - Practical Guide](#)



[Quality Improvement Plan | ACECQA](#)



[Self-assessment tool for centre-based care \(long day care, OSHC and preschool\)](#)



[QA4 Belonging, being and becoming for educators.pdf](#)



[QA7 Educational leadership and team building.pdf](#)



[QA7 Supporting performance and the development of professionals](#)



[QA7 - Developing and reviewing your Quality Improvement Plan | ACECQA](#)



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