

# EARLY LEARNING: Everyone Benefits

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) always has, and always will, advocate for the rights and wellbeing of young children and their families consistent with our vision ‘every young child is thriving and learning’.

In order to have a positive influence on the policy and programs of the Federal Government, much of our advocacy work is through formal means such as submissions to parliamentary and departmental processes, participation in consultation events, involvement in advisory or reference groups and regular meetings with decision makers. We are also active in the media to ensure that the interests of young children are identified and given priority.

In all of our advocacy work ECA is a strong but moderate voice, committed to children's rights but also understanding of the political, economic and social context of policy making. We promote credible policy solutions that are grounded in our convictions but also informed by research and consultation with our members. Contributions from members are vitally important—I strongly encourage you to provide feedback on draft positions,

contribute data and examples that help highlight shared positions and don't be afraid to challenge or disagree with something, our work is strengthened by debate and engagement.

The majority of our advocacy work is focused on policy positions—we have welcomed and supported government decisions we believe to be serving the best interests of young children.

Collectively ECA members have actively supported the *National Quality Reform Agenda*, the *National Partnership Agreement on Universal Preschool* and more recently the *Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early Learning* as well as the *Long Day Care Professional Development Programme*.

Nonetheless, it is inevitable that there will be times when we question, disagree or

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raise concerns about decisions or policy directions being considered by government. Politics is an arena for debating ideas and exploring alternatives. Peak organisations have an important role in this, while we aim to be respectful and collaborative it is important that we engage in the debate, contribute ideas, question analysis and outline possible impacts that may not have been identified.

We will sometimes be at odds with other stakeholders or perceived to be out of step with the Government's position and this can be uncomfortable. However, it is important to stay focused on the advocacy outcomes that we see as important—increased investment in young children, high-quality early childhood education and care, more support for families with young children, greater recognition of the rights of children and the value of childhood.

ECA is a large and powerful network of individuals and organisations with a common purpose. Together we can have a positive influence, by being active and engaged at every level. Some of the most powerful advocacy occurs in the everyday interactions between early childhood educators and families, when you communicate about the work that you do and the rich learning experiences you are providing for children. Also in the conversations you have with friends and colleagues about the importance of the early years and the services provided to

children and families; the impact of policy changes or the opportunities that may be available through collective action. Don't underestimate the power of these conversations; if we are to achieve real change for young children we need to raise public understanding and mobilise families to influence decision makers, from local government to the Prime Minister—we need everyone aware that investing in children is investing in the future of our nation.

The current Federal Government has reduced or withdrawn funding to a number of national peak organisations, including ECA, which means that we need to find other ways to resource the advocacy work that we do. We will be escalating our efforts through a national campaign *Early Learning: Everyone Benefits* which aims to increase investment in early childhood education and care. I hope that every member and friend of ECA will get involved. The campaign will rely on contributions of time and financial investment from individuals and organisations. It is an important opportunity to unite and focus our efforts on some very concrete goals and key messages. It was Aristotle who first proposed that the sum is worth more than its parts, a notion picked up by Gestalt psychologists and more recently by initiatives such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme. The time has come for a renewed sense of collective action and efficacy across the ECA network—I hope that you will join our campaign.



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