



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

**OUR
VISION:
EVERY
YOUNG
CHILD IS
THRIVING
AND
LEARNING**

MEDIA RELEASE

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Attend preschool early and reap the benefits

The peak advocacy body for young children, Early Childhood Australia (ECA), welcomes the announcement today of an agreement between the Federal and State/Territory Governments on \$840 million in preschool funding as allocated in this year's budget.

'We welcome the delivery of this funding, as announced in the Budget, because it will provide certainty for families and service providers that all children in Australia can access 15 hours of preschool for children in the year before school, over the next two years,' said ECA's CEO, Samantha Page.

'The research evidence is unequivocal that 15 hours per week in a teacher-led preschool program gives all children a good start, making a successful transition to school more likely and impacting on long term educational outcomes in literacy, numeracy and school completion. It is particularly important for children from a disadvantaged background who might otherwise be at risk of poor education outcomes.

'This COAG commitment to universal access has already been highly successful in lifting the enrolment of children in early childhood education since 2009 when it began.'

Enrolment in preschool by children in the year before school increased from 70 per cent in 2008 to 98 per cent in 2013.

Ms Page acknowledged the Commonwealth's role in providing incentives to the States and Territories to lift participation in the program, while recognising that all levels of Government need to work together to ensure all children can access quality early learning by focusing on attendance.

'It is great that States and Territories have received this incentive to lift participation of children in early childhood education, but we urge Education Ministers and Departments to address the gap between enrolment and attendance,' said Ms Page.

The latest available data published by COAG shows that in 2013 only 69 per cent of children nationally were attending for 15 hours or more per week, while 98 per cent were enrolled.

'The Commonwealth, States and Territories must be focused on attendance, because children will not benefit if they are not attending.'

Ms Page said that if Australia was to reap the dividends, we should be looking at the next steps for access to preschool education, starting from a child's third birthday.

According to the OECD's *Starting Strong IV* report released this month, Australia currently sits at the bottom of the OECD for access to preschool for three-year-old children.

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'We know from the research that two years of early learning before formal schooling further amplifies children's development and ability to learn at school and would be a particularly good investment for disadvantaged children who are at risk of starting school well behind their peers in development domains such as vocabulary as well as executive functioning skills such as self-regulation.

'The success of the four-year-old program, and the quality standards we now have in place mean that it is possible to expand access, but Australia's poor results in international education testing also mean it is critical that we expand access to three-year-olds as well as ensuring all four-year-olds attend,' concluded Ms Page.