



**Early Childhood Australia**  
A voice for young children

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

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

Wednesday 10 February, 2016

### **Close the Gap: Gains made may be lost if childcare package excludes Indigenous children**

Early Childhood Australia says progress made towards Closing the Gap in Indigenous literacy, early childhood education and school retention will be lost unless there is whole of government support to ensure all Islander and Aboriginal children can access quality early learning.

‘Only 75.4 per cent of Indigenous four-year-olds were enrolled in early childhood education in 2014 according to the latest Report on Government Services released last week’, said CEO Samantha Page, ‘While this is an increase on previous years, COAG has committed to achieving 95 per cent preschool enrolment for all Indigenous four-year-olds by 2025’.

Access to early learning is a critical part of ‘closing the gap’ on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more than twice as likely to be vulnerable in two or more domains in their first year of school compared with other Australian children as measured in the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). This means that children are already behind when they reach school, with later interventions being more costly and less effective.

If Australia is to address these vulnerabilities, every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child needs to have access to quality early learning, not just in the year before formal schooling, but also for younger children. A [literature review by the Australian Institute of Family Studies](#) suggests that disadvantaged and vulnerable children should have access from age two.

Therefore, it is vital that under the proposed [Family Assistance Legislation Amendment \(Jobs for Families Child Care Package\) Bill 2015](#) there is guaranteed access to the new Child Care Subsidy for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

‘We share the [concerns of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care \(SNAICC\)](#) that the bill in its current form would threaten the viability of Aboriginal-run child and family service centres, halve the number of subsidised childcare hours available to low-income families that don’t meet a new “activity test” requirement, and further disadvantage Aboriginal children’, said Ms Page.

We share concerns about the potential impact of the package that have been raised by SNAICC and believe that further work is needed to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families are not worse off. ECA would like to see the package include a stronger commitment to increasing participation of Indigenous children in early childhood education and care from the age of two.

A serious strategy to reduce educational disadvantage would ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have access to a quality early learning program led by a qualified teacher for three-to-four days per week for at least two years before the transition to school. This needs to be given priority and fleshed out in consultation with Indigenous communities, early education providers and families likely to be affected by proposed changes to funding and subsidy arrangements in early childhood education.

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