



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

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VISION:
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YOUNG
CHILD IS
THRIVING
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LEARNING**

MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 24 February, 2016

Guaranteed access to early learning is the way to 'close the gap' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Early Childhood Australia (ECA), Australia's peak body for young children, calls on the Government to guarantee Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children access to quality early learning. This follows a new report by Deloitte Access Economics released today showing that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families may face increased barriers to participating in early childhood education and care under the Government's new Child Care Assistance Package.

"The most effective way to close the gap on indigenous disadvantage is to improve access to early learning for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. No exclusions, no barriers," said Samantha Page, ECA CEO.

"The Government needs to make a serious commitment to this and the impact in improved education and life outcomes will more than pay for the initial investment.

Reflecting growing recognition of this issue, Stan Grant this week also called for a greater focus on early childhood in his moving and much acclaimed National Press Club address – 'so the next generation need not lament'.

"We share the concerns of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) that the Child Care Package in its current form will **halve** the number of subsidised childcare hours available to low-income families, and **cut the subsidy altogether** for other families that don't meet a new 'activity test' requirement which will further disadvantage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children," said Ms Page.

"Instead of improving the participation on current levels, we will see access to early learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children go backwards.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are already 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.

A recent literature review by the Australian Institute of Family Studies suggests that disadvantaged and vulnerable children should have access to early education and care from age two.

The Jobs for Families Child Care Package includes a new program called the Community Child Care Fund, which is designed to support remote services to remain sustainable, though for a limited period of time.

"The program parameters are not yet clear, but a guarantee of continued support would remove some of the uncertainty faced by services, children and families.

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“The Government needs to signal that it will do ‘whatever it takes’ to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have access to early learning,” concluded Ms Page.

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) is the peak early childhood advocacy organisation, acting in the interests of young children from birth to eight, their families and those in the early childhood field.