



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

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

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 17 March 2016

Labor platform moves in right direction on investing in the early years and supporting parents

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) welcomes Labor's new commitment to invest in the early years as part of its 'Agenda for tackling inequality' released by the Opposition Leader Bill Shorten and Shadow Minister for Families, Payments and Disability Reform, Jenny Macklin at the Australian National University last night.

'If we want to tackle disadvantage in Australia and close the gap, we need to strengthen the connection between economic and social policy and work across the portfolio areas with a long term view—this means better support for families, strengthening workforce participation and investing in the early years for future prosperity', said ECA CEO Samantha Page.

'It is very heartening to see such a comprehensive policy document (*Growing Together—Labor's agenda for tackling inequality*) acknowledge the key role of early childhood development in determining child wellbeing, and going through the range of policy levels that can support parents to raise their children well.

'We agree with the analysis in the "Investing in the Early Years" section which states:

Access to quality child care and early childhood education give children a good start to life, particularly for children from vulnerable and disadvantaged families. Quality child development centres have the power to amplify children's development. High quality education in the first five years flows through to learning outcomes in primary school and high school, as well as life outcomes beyond school.

'The clear thinking on the need to expand Paid Parental Leave, for both mothers and fathers, is also very welcome.

'ECA agrees that there is a strong need for an "integrated, cross-portfolio framework for investment in the early years". We support the recommendation that:

future Labor governments should lead the development of a National Early Years Framework, including key targets for improvement, comprehensive data collection and rigorous program evaluation ... done in partnership with the states and territories, local government, health and education providers and community organisations.

'We are particularly pleased to see the Opposition making a commitment to increase universal access to early learning to three-year-olds.

'While we would like to see access to quality early learning at all ages, it is a strong move by the ALP to recognise that improving participation of children in early childhood education at younger ages is important. There is a very strong evidence base for this and ultimately we need to build understanding across political parties and levels of government so that it is as well accepted as the benefits of school education.

'A universal platform is critical for ensuring that disadvantaged children engage in early learning that boosts their development.

‘The evidence shows that the duration matters, and when children attend early learning for more than one year they have better outcomes when they enter school, and throughout their school years.

‘Countries like the UK and New Zealand are finding that this approach provides results for the children, society and the economy—everyone benefits.’

How Australia ranks with early learning:

- Australia ranks in the bottom third of developed countries for the enrolment of children in early childhood education at age three in 2013.
- Australia ranks 27 of 39 countries ranked by the OECD, with only 62 per cent of three-year-old children enrolled in early childhood education. This includes both children enrolled in early childhood education and care services (47 per cent) and preschool education (15 per cent). The OECD average is 72 per cent.
- The highest participation of children in early learning is in countries where quality affordable early learning is easily available for families.

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Download ALP report here: http://www.alp.org.au/growing_together

