



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

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

MEDIA RELEASE

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More progress on early learning needed to support children's rights

A new report by the Australian Child Rights Taskforce, reflecting on 25 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Australia, has found that there is more work to do to improve access to quality early learning in Australia.

"Australia can be proud of the fact that we are providing children with access to better quality services through the National Quality Framework, and are giving children full access to preschool education in the year before school," said ECA President Ros Cornish.

"However decision-makers still prioritise workforce participation of parents over children's education – and – and despite the profound body of evidence-based research supporting the importance of quality early childhood education and care, early childhood services continue to be seen as babysitting."

"In fact, quality early learning can help children experiencing disadvantage to prepare them for school and for life, leading to improved education and employment outcomes."

"This Report confirms the evidence accumulated over the past 25 years that early childhood services amplify children's development benefiting our whole society."

"Australia must focus on improving the participation of all children to quality early learning that boosts their development and Australia's future prosperity," said Ms Cornish.

"Measures that seek to exclude children from access to early learning on the basis of parental workforce participation violate the principals of the Convention (on the rights of Children) and would take Australia in the opposite direction to international best practice," said Professor Deborah Brennan of the Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW.

A key recommendation of the report is to ensure all children have access to at least two days of quality early learning as well as looking to extend universal access to preschool.

It's a legal right for children to access early learning in eighteen OECD countries. This is not the case in Australia.

"Australia has not progressed children's right to early childhood education to the extent of other countries, particularly in providing Australian children with sustained early childhood education for at least two years before they enter school."

Only 62% of children have access to an early childhood program at age three in Australia. Many countries including New Zealand, Denmark, the UK and Japan have close to full participation at this age.

"The UK provides 15 hours FREE early childhood education for every three and four year old, and to 40percent of most disadvantaged two year olds – regardless of their parents workforce status or income," said Professor Brennan. "Our New Zealand neighbours similiary provide 20 hours FREE early childhood education and care for all three and four year olds."

The Report recommends providing sustainable funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to foster participation.

“If Australia is serious about bridging the gap that we have in life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – then we must address that disadvantage from the beginning and provide children with guaranteed access to culturally appropriate and high quality early childhood programs from birth.”

The Report also recommends that higher qualification standards continue to be implemented and calls on the Government to invest in a new early years workforce strategy.

“Our early childhood educators and teachers are quite literally helping to build Australia’s human capital.”

“To ensure that children get the benefit of early learning we must ensure children are in the care of a better qualified workforce, and that requires strategic government investment.”

Key policy recommendations include:

- All children to have access to at least two days of quality preschool per week in the year before school.
- at least two days (20 hours) of subsidised quality early learning per week for particularly vulnerable children from birth to two years of age.
- sustainable and ongoing block funding to integrated early childhood services that supports improved outcomes for vulnerable families.
- early childhood services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with opportunities for ongoing funding with a focus on providing free or affordable access.
- practical strategies and advice on how to support and promote children’s rights by collaboration between the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority, the National Children’s Commissioner and the early childhood sector.
- Implementing the the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care as agreed by COAG, including child to staff ratio improvements for children 24 to 36 months old.
- Applying the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care to all services, including those currently out of scope.
- Working the early childhood sector to develop a new early years workforce development strategy.

View the UNICEF report here: <http://bit.ly/CRC25-Aust>

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