



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **No surprises Budget for early education**

**There are no surprises in this Federal Budget and no new initiatives for improving Australia's performance in early childhood education and care, says Early Childhood Australia (ECA).**

The Government's *Jobs for Families* childcare subsidy reform package (detailed in the 2016 Federal Budget) passed through the parliament in March without critical amendments [proposed by experts](#) in the early childhood sector that would have strengthened the safety net for vulnerable children and families.

When the bill comes into effect on 1 July 2018, the *Jobs for Families* childcare reforms will increase subsidy assistance for families where both parents consistently meet a new activity test—this ties childcare access closely to workforce participation. 'Early Childhood Australia believes this is a missed opportunity to strengthen early learning outcomes for children at risk of disadvantage, particularly in families with patchy or irregular work', said ECA CEO Samantha Page.

'A major flaw in the subsidy reform package is that it doesn't factor in the significant benefits to children and society, of improved education outcomes—especially when vulnerable children attend at least two days of early learning per week.

'The Budget confirms last week's announcement by Education Minister Birmingham of the 12-month extension of universal preschool funding for four year olds. This provides some welcome clarity for parents and services in 2018 but fails to provide a longer term vision for increasing preschool participation.

'Early Childhood Australia would like to see the Government lock in the agreement permanently and extend it to three year olds. Ensuring vulnerable and disadvantaged children attend two days per week of quality early learning is an effective way to break the cycle of disadvantage and reduce inequality. It benefits the nation's economy because it reduces the rate of people needing welfare support in the future.

'Other countries like New Zealand and the United Kingdom are racing ahead and reaping the benefits of providing free access to early learning for all three and four year olds for the two years before school. This increases education performance throughout school and increases children's likelihood of success in later life', said Ms Page.

This Budget sees the last of investment in professional development and supporting quality in early learning with the lapsing Early Years Quality Fund coming to an end. This means that the Federal Government is no longer investing in the early education workforce to enhance the quality of service delivery.

In the broader arena of supporting families with young children, investments in Medicare should see an expansion of bulk billing for children visiting GPs; there will be a new information campaign to support vaccination; there is also a modest program for new vulnerable families seeking to develop a pathway into employment (Parents Next); and some additional investment in the Smith Family's *Learning for Life* program. However, ECA believes that a more ambitious, national education campaign is needed to raise awareness of the importance of the early years, together with a stronger vision to coordinate national investment to provide children with the best start in life.

*ECA is the peak advocacy body for children from birth to eight years, their families and early childhood professionals.*

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