



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

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VISION:
EVERY
YOUNG
CHILD IS
THRIVING
AND
LEARNING**

MEDIA RELEASE

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Preschool funding extension is welcome but not enough to improve education outcomes for disadvantaged children

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) welcomes the extension of preschool funding announced by Education Minister Simon Birmingham in his National Press Club address today but more investment is needed in the early years to address Australia's poor performance in education and improve children's outcomes.

"While it is good that families have certainty that the current pre-school subsidy will remain in place for another year, this is not a long term solution - the same uncertainty will arise again next year," said ECA CEO Samantha Page. "ECA calls on the Federal Government to show leadership and work collaboratively with State and Territory Governments to agree on a permanent funding model for preschool that will increase and extend participation, particularly for children at risk due to disadvantage."

According to the Australian Early Childhood Development Census, one in five Australian children are developmentally disadvantaged when they start school. It is very hard for these children to catch up – they are more likely to remain behind their peers and they are at risk of leaving school early without adequate preparation for lifelong learning and workforce engagement. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children the proportion increases to a staggering two in five – that means that nearly half of all Indigenous children start school behind their peers. We need national leadership to turn this around and give all children a fair chance.

There is a very solid evidence base that all children benefit from at least 2 days per week of preschool in the year before they start school but to address inequity we need to provide more than that. Recent analysis by the Mitchell Institute makes a strong case for extending preschool to two years, or provide additional days for vulnerable children.

"Australia is under investing in preschool – we have just 66 percent of three year olds participating in preschool programs putting us in the bottom third of OECD countries," said Ms Page. "Our current system provides just 15 hours per week for one year before school (typically four year old children) and its only free in some areas.. By comparison, New Zealand has 96percent of three and four year olds attending preschool and they can enjoy free access for 20 hours per week for two years before starting school. The UK has recently extended preschool to 30hrs per week for two years before school (three and four year old children) and is extending it to vulnerable two year olds.

It is important to note that increasing access and participation is only beneficial when the preschool program is high quality which means age appropriate pedagogy, delivered by a qualified teacher in appropriate settings that support play based learning. Australia has the bones of a quality system across preschool and long day care settings but it needs to expand to increase access and participation.

"Early Childhood Australia would like to see our government take a long term approach, as New Zealand and the UK have done, to provide all children with high quality early learning in the two years before they start school," concluded Ms Page.

Early Childhood Australia is the peak advocacy body for children under eight, their families and early childhood professionals

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