



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

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

MEDIA RELEASE

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Australia improves in early learning but still lags behind OECD countries

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) is pleased that more Australian children are attending quality early learning, but concerned that we are still significantly lagging behind other OECD countries, particularly on three-year-old participation, according to the report [*Starting Strong 2017—Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care*](#).

'It is very encouraging that Federal funding since 2009, specifically for preschool education, has increased our participation of four-year-olds in quality early learning from 67 per cent in 2009 to 85 per cent in 2016. But according to the latest OECD *Starting Strong* report, we're still below average with most of the 37 OECD countries having 90 per cent or more of four-year-olds enrolled in a preschool program', said ECA CEO Samantha Page.

'We continue to be disappointed by our poor three-year-old participation rates; at around 70 per cent, we are still in the bottom third of all OECD countries.'

The report provides strong evidence of the benefits for children's later education performance if they have a solid foundation in quality early learning.

For example, across the 35 OECD countries with available data, 15-year-old students who had attended more than one year of early childhood education and care (ECEC) scored, on average, 41 points higher in the PISA 2015 science assessment than those who had attended one year or less of ECEC. Students who had attended more than two years, but less than three years, of ECEC scored, on average, 16 points higher than those who attended for just one year.

According to the OECD report:

A growing body of research recognises that ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) can improve children's cognitive abilities and socio-emotional development, help create a foundation for lifelong learning, make children's learning outcomes more equitable, reduce poverty, and improve social mobility from generation to generation.

'If we as a nation want to improve our children's education performance, reduce inequality and increase our future prosperity, the best investment we can make is to ensure that all Australian children can access at least two days per week of quality early learning.'

'We need to address the poor enrolment of four-year-olds in pre-school programs in some states, and make quality early learning by qualified educators available to more three-year-olds, in an age-appropriate play-based early learning environment', concluded Ms Page.

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

View or download the full report [here](#)

For more information contact:

Carolin Wenzel 0475 554 999