



**Early Childhood Australia**  
A voice for young children

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

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

Thursday 1 February 2018

# **Reports show that Australia needs to strengthen and extend early education**

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) today welcomes the *Lifting our Game* report, commissioned by state and territory governments, which calls on Australian governments to increase their investment in early education and extend universal preschool access to three-year-old children.

'This report makes very strong arguments that investing in high-quality early education for Australia's children delivers both education benefits for children and wider social benefits for the whole community', said ECA CEO Samantha Page.

In particular, ECA welcomes the call for Australia to extend preschool programs to three-year-olds, while ensuring that funding preschool in the year before school is made secure.

'This is not about three-year-old children starting school; three and four-year-old children benefit enormously from participating in **preschool** programs that are delivered in an age appropriate way—that means the program is play based, the environment is specifically designed for young children and the staff are qualified in early education', said Ms Page.

OECD data shows that Australia has historically one of the lowest participation rates of three-year-olds in pre-primary education, at just 15 per cent in 2015, compared to the OECD average of 69 per cent.

The "Lifting Our Game" report comes on the back of the Report on Government Services (ROGS) 2018 for early childhood data being released overnight, which shows that enrolments in four-year-old preschool are still improving.

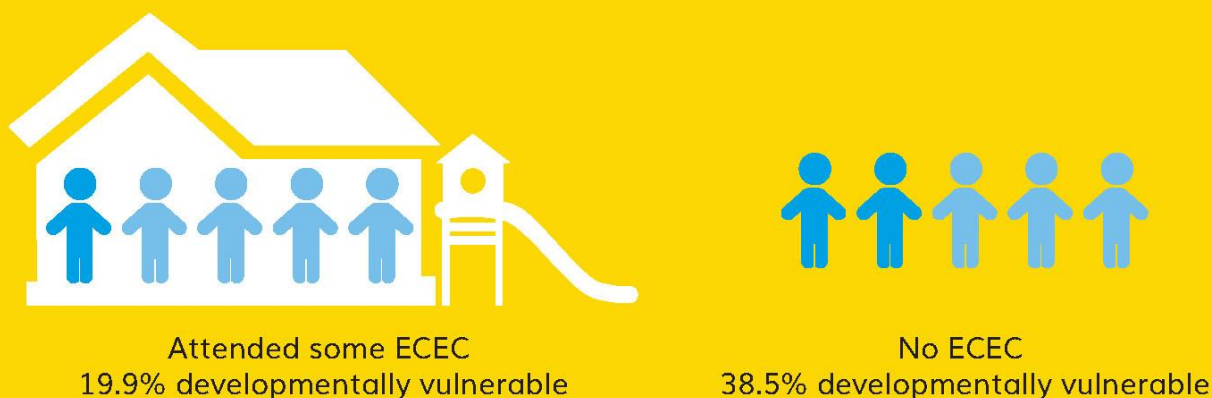
'It's good to see preschool enrolments are increasing nationally with 92.4 per cent of children attending a preschool program in the year before school in 2016', said Ms Page. 'While NSW demonstrated lower levels of enrolment than other jurisdictions in 2016, at 85 per cent, it is encouraging to see enrolments lifting in that state.'

'ECA is encouraged by the continued improvement in quality ratings, and supports government efforts to ensure that parents can readily access information about the performance of a service against the *National Quality Standard*, including any breaches. We also welcome that the proportion of educators with qualifications in early education and teaching continues to rise—this is a critical component of improving quality experiences for children, as well as addressing low wages in the sector', continued Ms Page.

The ROGS data from the Productivity Commission shows that there is still more work needed to ensure that children at greatest risk of educational outcomes have better access to high-quality early education, including children with additional needs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children in refugee and migrant families, children from low income households and those living in remote areas.

'We know that children who attend some form of quality early learning before they start school have significantly lower risk of being developmentally vulnerable (19.9 per cent), compared to children who don't attend any form of early education (38.5 per cent)', said Ms Page.

## EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENTAL VULNERABILITY



Source: [State of Early Learning in Australia 2017](#)

ECA welcomes the “Lifting Our Game” report recommendation for prioritisation of disadvantaged children, families and communities during the rollout of three-year-old preschool.

Research evidence tells us that children need at least 15 hours of a high-quality preschool program for two years before school. The current National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education seeks to ensure that in the year before school, children are attending 15 hours per week. We need to extend this same benchmark for three-year-old preschool to ensure we are meeting global best practice.

ECA also welcomes the increased focus on reporting of preschool participation in the ROGS report.

‘The latest ROGS report attempts to get a more accurate picture of how many children are participating in preschool programs at long day care centres, but ECA remains concerned that the methods for measuring enrolment don’t accurately reflect attendance levels.

‘Ultimately, if we want to measure the impact of early learning on children’s education experiences, we need the Australian Government to build a data system that can measure participation in a more meaningful way than just enrolment, and track children’s trajectory over time’, concluded Ms Page.

**Download the *Lifting our Game* report [here](#).**  
**View the Report on Government Services data [here](#).**

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

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