



MEDIA RELEASE

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Missed opportunity on quality early learning

The early childhood sector continues to be concerned about the Federal Government's lack of clear policy objectives and investment strategy in early learning.

With the new Child Care Subsidy due to be implemented from July 2018, estimated expenditure has been revised down again from \$8.7 billion (2017) to \$8.0 billion (2018).

'While many working families will be better off under the new subsidy package, Early Childhood Australia (ECA) remains concerned that an estimated 25 per cent of families will be worse off, and approximately 130 000 children may miss out altogether on critical early learning', said ECA CEO Samantha Page.

'We continue to urge Federal Education Minister Simon Birmingham to reconsider the activity test and increase the base level of entitlement from 12 hours to 18 hours for children at risk of being excluded', said Ms Page.

Another missed opportunity in the Budget is an extension of just one additional year for universal access to early education in the year before school (preschool funding), despite strong consensus across state and territory Education Ministers on the need for a longer-term approach.

'ECA and our partners on the [Early Learning, Everyone Benefits Campaign](#) will continue to advocate for the Federal Government to provide all Australian children with access to at least **two days per week** of quality early learning, from the end of paid parental leave until transition to compulsory schooling', said Ms Page. 'Australia is well below OECD averages in terms of expenditure on early learning, and our participation rates are well below countries such as New Zealand, France and the United Kingdom.'

The one area where Australia performs well in comparison to other countries is in having a sound, evidence-based approach to ensuring that children receive high-quality education and care through our *National Quality Framework*. It is therefore of significant concern to ECA that the Federal Government is signalling a withdrawal from the *National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care*, with no further funding for state and territory regulatory authorities, and just two years of funding for the national regulator ACECQA.

'This surprise announcement leaves the relationship between state and federal governments on the regulation of early childhood quality unclear, and we strongly urge the Federal Government to commit to the *National Quality Framework* and ongoing quality improvement', said Ms Page.

'ECA is also disappointed that the government failed to heed calls from the sector to develop a workforce strategy. Low wages and poor job security are resulting in high turnover rates, while quality standards are creating more professional roles in the sector that will become harder to fill as the current supply of qualified early childhood teachers fails to keep pace. Having cut all investment in professional development, it has never been more critical to respond to looming workforce challenges', said Ms Page.

The \$6 million lost from the 'Child Care Early Learning Projects' could have instead been used by the government to engage the sector in effective workforce planning, as outlined in tonight's Health budget, where substantial investments are being made in workforce planning, including demand and supply mapping to meet local workforce needs for health professionals.

Full ECA Budget analysis here: <http://bit.ly/ECABudget2018Analysis>

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