



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

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VISION:
EVERY
YOUNG
CHILD IS
THRIVING
AND
LEARNING**

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday, 31 July 2018

Two years of free preschool – a good move for ACT children

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) welcomes the ACT Government announcement today by [Yvette Berry](#) Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, to extend 15 hours per week of free, universal early childhood education to three-year-old children as part of the ACT Early Childhood Strategy. This will mean that children in the ACT can participate in two years of a quality preschool education program before they start school.

‘High quality preschool programs, led by qualified early childhood teachers, provide children with the opportunity to learn through play—developing their confidence in communication, collaboration and social skills and emotional regulation’ said ECA CEO Samantha Page ‘children who are at risk of educational disadvantage will benefit the most from the extension to two years. This was a key recommendation of the recent report [Lifting Our Game: A Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions](#) which found compelling evidence for increasing early education investment to extend universal access.

Preschool education is particularly effective in reducing the opportunity gap, where some children would otherwise be at a disadvantage when they begin school. It also means that children with speech or language difficulties can be identified early and provided with extra support.

The ACT has had one of the highest rates of participation in early childhood education in the year before school because it has provided a free, universal preschool program as part of the public education system. This means that all children are entitled to access a service, within walking distance from where they live, without the barrier of high out of pocket costs for families.

‘Many working families in the ACT will continue to access early education programs offered in long day care services, which are funded through the Federal Government’s Child Care Subsidy system and that is entirely appropriate,’ said Ms Page. ‘Quality early childhood education can be delivered in a range of settings to meet the needs of families as well as children, but it is important that the education program is delivered by a qualified teacher and meets the National Quality Standards for Early Childhood Education.’

ECA understands that some early childhood education providers in the ACT may be concerned about the impact of this policy decision but we urge everyone to engage in the consultation process on the model for delivery. The need for a mix of service options is important alongside the benefits of a universal platform. The recognition that more needs to be done to support the early childhood workforce in the ACT is very welcome. ECA understands that many early childhood services are struggling to attract and retain qualified early childhood teachers and educators due to a significant skills shortage.

ECA looks forward to engaging in the consultation process the ACT Government is conducting through www.yoursay.act.gov.au.

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

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