



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

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

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday 18 August, 2020

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING IS AN ESSENTIAL INVESTMENT

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) welcomes the federal government's decision to boost funding for children experiencing trauma and poor mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Federal Education Minister Dan Tehan has announced an extra \$5.2 million for the Inclusion Support Program (ISP), which helps early childhood education and care services to provide the expertise and resources required by children with additional needs.

'We know that stress and trauma can have powerful negative effects on children's development, including the development of skills and behaviours that help them to thrive at school and throughout their lives,' said ECA CEO Samantha Page.

'This is particularly important at the moment as children are having their lives disrupted by COVID-19 and many families are experiencing heightened stress'.

'Intervening early to support children's mental health and wellbeing is one of the best investments that governments can make. The additional funding for the ISP is a good start, and we're hoping to see the federal government follow through with a permanent increase, to match growing demand,' Ms Page said.

ECA has been advocating for more funding for the ISP, which was opened up to a much broader cohort of children from the start of 2020, including those not yet formally diagnosed with a disability. Broadening the user base of the ISP will increase the level of demand from early learning and care services. This requires an ongoing increase in real funding for the ISP in the Federal Budget, beginning in 2020.

There is also an opportunity to enhance inclusion through investment in professional development, which could be funded from short term reductions in Child Care Subsidy expenditure.

'Many early childhood services would like to provide educators and teachers with more professional development in inclusive practice including responding to children with additional needs and strategies for supporting children's mental health. A significant barrier to this is the cost of paying staff to participate in training as well as paying additional staff to back filling those roles in the service.'

'We are seeing a strong uptake of online learning where COVID-19 restrictions are reducing attendance levels and so more educators can participate in training without the need for back fill. This is a unique opportunity for the Federal Government to enhance access to professional learning.'

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ECA is one of the delivery partners of the Be You initiative, a Federal Health Department initiative that aims to transform Australia's approach to supporting children's and young people's mental health in early learning services and schools. Currently, over 3,000 early childhood services are accessing free professional learning through Be You.

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ECA CEO Samantha Page is available for comment. For interviews, contact ECA Media Officer: Katie Golding 0475 554 999

To download PDF version of media release, click here: <http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/media/>

To download Federal Education Minister Dan Tehan's media release, click here:
<https://ministers.dese.gov.au/tehan/supporting-vulnerable-and-disadvantaged-children-during-covid-19>

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