

15 HOURS KINDER FUNDING & QUALITY MUST CONTINUE

Updated December 2018

National Partnerships at risk

The 2018 Federal Budget confirmed Minister Birmingham's (Australian Government Minister for Education at the time) February announcement that funding under the [National Partnership Agreement for universal access](#) to early childhood education (15 hours kindergarten for four year-olds) has only been extended to December 2019.

\$740 million was allocated nationally over 2018-19 and 2019-20, with Victoria to receive \$211.1 million.

In addition, the Australian Government failed to extend National Partnership funding for the national quality agenda for early childhood education beyond June 2018. This agreement has supported an integrated national regulatory system for early childhood education and care services, as well as outside school-hours care since 2009.

- We have been advised that the Australian Government will continue to fund the national assessment function - the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) - for two years.
- However, it will no longer fund the \$20.3 million allocation to the states and territories, of which Victoria receives \$5.4 million.
- We are concerned about the broader implications of the Commonwealth abandoning this National Partnership Agreement and what this could mean for future partnership arrangements.

Program stability needed

Recent reports highlight the need for a stable funding and quality base for our youngest children, with national oversight and investment.

- The [Lifting Our Game](#) report – endorsed by all the states and territories – has called on the Australian Government to provide adequate and permanent funding to help educate our youngest kids. The report highlights that short-term funding arrangements are causing uncertainty and hampering future planning.
- The most recent [Gonski Report](#) emphasises the connection between quality early learning and school outcomes
- The [Royal Commission's report into institutional child sexual abuse](#) highlights the requirement for a 'national watchdog' to ensure our children's safety, security and wellbeing
- The importance of investment in early childhood education has been addressed, for the first time, at the recent G20 summit in Buenos Aires on 30 November 2018. The summit (made up of 19 countries) [affirmed](#) the critical importance of early childhood development, noting that it is one of the most important stages in human life, key for every child's development, future well being and learning capacity. The G20 agreed on three proposals to invest in the development of every child's first 1000 days of life. The Australian Prime Minister was present at the summit.

MAV advocacy

Over the past eight years, our advocacy efforts have and continue to include:

- The MAV has written to the Prime Minister and relevant State and Federal ministers urging them to provide enduring Commonwealth funding for 15 hours of preschool beyond the expiration of the current National Partnership Agreement and to extend the National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care
- regular meetings and briefings with Victorian Ministers and Shadow Ministers
- regular meetings with the Department of Education and Training (DET)
- submissions to the Victorian Budget, State kindergarten fee review, COAG mid-term review and Productivity Commission and Senate inquiries
- meetings and briefings with Federal Ministers and Shadow Ministers
- letters to successive Prime Ministers
- input into ALGA submissions and the National General Assembly.

The MAV is continue our advocacy on these issues. Please refer to the MAV [Kindergarten campaign website](#) for information on our latest advocacy work.

Sector advocacy

We acknowledge the considerable contribution that Victorian councils have made in advocacy to the Commonwealth since 2013 to achieve both 15 hours funding for four year-old programs and the quality reforms.

The current focus of our advocacy effort is to secure a commitment from the current Coalition Federal Government to continue its funding contribution towards 15 hours kindergarten for four year-olds. The [Federal Labor Party](#) in October committed to fund both three and four year-old kindergarten if they are elected in 2019. Further information on this commitment is available in their [fact sheet](#).

We are seeking councils to get involved in campaigning for ongoing and permanent Federal funding in the lead up to the 2019 Federal Budget on 2 April and the 2019 federal election (latest possible date is 18 May).

- Councils can download a campaign kit, social media guide, heart posters and A5 pledge cards from the I Love Kinder website <https://ilovekinder.org.au/campaign-resources>
- Councils are also encouraged to [sign the petition](#) to the Prime Minister and promote the petition among your local families and kindergarten communities.

The Andrews Victorian Government has also committed to introduce five hours of [funded three year-old kinder](#), with a staged rollout over 10 years commencing with six rural areas that have capacity from 2020.

Background

1. Funding Universal Access (15 hours kindergarten)

In November 2008 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), as part of its early childhood reforms, endorsed the national agenda of universal access to 15 hours of kindergarten a week for four year-olds from 2013. Since July 2013, the vast majority of Victorian preschoolers have had access to a 15 hour program.

The Victorian preschool participation rate for 2016 was 96.2 per cent, with the preschool participation rate for Aboriginal children continuing to increase to 90.5 per cent. This represents over 82,000 Victorian children reaping the lifelong benefits of a quality early childhood education every year.

Under the National Partnership Agreement, the Australian Government provides about one-third of the funding for 15 hours of preschool and the Victorian Government contributes two thirds. To facilitate this funding arrangement, there have been five separate National Partnership Agreements, with the current Agreement due to expire in December 2019.

In addition to funding from the Australian and Victorian Governments, Victorian families and local government provide a further 35 per cent through parent fees, fundraising and council support to meet the government shortfall.

The most recent December 2017 Report: *“Lifting our Game”*¹, is the final report of a national education review on early childhood services – and backs continued investment in the early years to ensure Australian kids do better at school and later in life.

This latest report builds on many government reports – from the COAG’s 2009 *National Early Childhood Development Strategy, Investing in the Early Years* to the 2016 *Productivity Commission report into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning* – all recommending continued and stable Commonwealth investment in preschool programs.

However, the Australian Government’s current commitment of \$440 million to extend the *National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education* for another 12 months, ends in December 2019.

When it extended the national partnership to December 2019, the Australian Government announced it would use the extension of time to improve the quality of data collected so that children, including vulnerable children, are enrolled and attending kindergarten. (Whilst actual enrolments are collected, attendance rates at kindergarten are not always regularly collected by the states and territories). This is what councils have been supporting for years through their early years planning, infrastructure planning and central enrolment processes.

The Australian Government announced at the time:

*“This extension of the National Partnership gives us time to work through these issues and develop an enduring policy beyond 2019”*².

¹ Lifting our Game, Report of the Review to achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions, Susan Pascoe AM and Dr Deborah Brennan, December 2017.

² Minister Birmingham [Media Release](#) Feb 3, 2017

2. National Quality Agenda on Early Childhood Education & Care

In 2009, COAG endorsed the [National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care](#).

This agreement aimed to improve outcomes for children attending education and care services (including long day care, family day care, kindergarten/preschool², and outside school hours care (OSHC)) through the following objectives:

- deliver an integrated and unified national system for early childhood education and care services, which is jointly governed and drives continuous improvement in service quality
- improve educational and developmental outcomes for children attending early childhood education and care services, including by establishing a new national quality standard for all education and care services
- reduce the regulatory burden for education and care service providers
- improve public knowledge about, and access to, information on the quality of education and services to help families understand the quality of education and care provided to their children
- build a highly skilled workforce.

All governments, children and families benefit from a joint national approach to the regulation and quality assessment of early childhood education and care services. There have been significant benefits and efficiencies achieved.

The National Quality Framework has cut down red tape and duplicate systems, driven quality service provision and improved outcomes for children. The improvements include 57 per cent of services increasing their quality rating, and 75 per cent now meeting or exceeding the National Quality Standard.

Australia's jointly governed *National Quality Framework* upholds children's best interests through the implementation of a world-class quality system of scale and effectiveness. This aspirational system, coupled with national progress reporting, has underpinned significant advances in reducing vulnerability and increasing school readiness as evidenced by the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). The National Partnership has been the mechanism that binds this system together for the benefit of the 1.3 million children and 900,000 families accessing early education and care services across Australia.

National and international research data unequivocally demonstrate the benefits of quality early education programs. Australia remains in the transition phase of implementing the National Quality Framework and is only just beginning to see the benefit of the resultant quality improvements needed for every child, every family, our nation and the economy.

Recent reports including the Royal Commission's report into institutional child sexual abuse, the Gonski 2 report and the Lifting our Game report outline clear evidence that quality early education and care provides a double dividend to government. There are improved education, health, social and economic outcomes that can break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage.

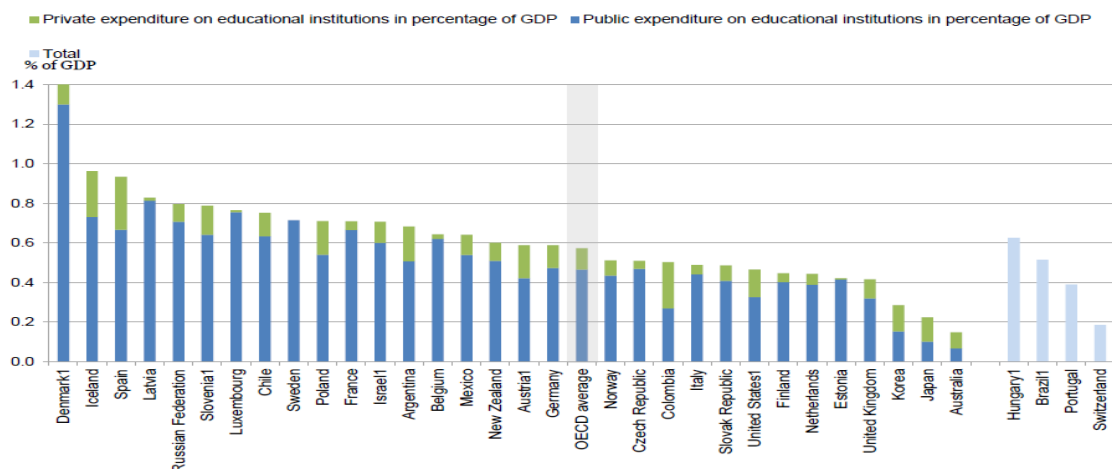
We must embed the progress to date and continue the transformative possibilities of the early years. The small short-term financial gains of ceasing this National Partnership has the potential for significant long-term risks to quality and safety for Australian children. The National Partnership must continue, and be supported by sustainable and recurrent funding.

3. Evidence of the need for permanent, quality kindergarten

- Internationally and nationally³ there is irrefutable evidence linking preschool attendance to improved student results in numeracy, reading and spelling.
- The OECD Report *Starting Strong IV* has placed Australia last in public expenditure in percentage of GDP:



Elevated expenditure on early childhood educational institutions (2011)



What other OECD countries are doing:

- *New Zealand: 20 hours per week free for three and four year old children*
- *UK: 15 hours per week free for three and four year olds, & disadvantaged two year olds*
- *Norway: preschool education up to 41 hours per week for children from the age of one and capped fees to maintain affordability*
- *France: free preschool education for children from two years for 25 hours per week*
- *Sweden: preschool education up to 50 hours per week, with capped fees and subsidies for families*
- *Spain: free preschool education for 50 hours per week for three and four year olds*
- *Scotland: free preschool education for three and four year olds for 15 hours per week.*

³ Nationally - NAPLAN – Melbourne Institute of Applied Economics and Social Research January 2014; Internationally –

- A comprehensive literature review undertaken by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research found that a longer duration of early childhood education and care experience is linked with improved academic outcomes for children.
- The OECD's PISA results show that in practically all OECD countries 15 year old students who had attended pre-primary school outperformed students who had not, even accounting for their socio-economic backgrounds (OECD 2009).
- Stanford University's Professor Linda Darling Hammond recently reported that across OECD countries, students who indicated that they had attended pre-primary school for more than one year score 53 points higher in mathematics – the equivalent of more than one year of schooling – than students who had not attended pre-primary education.

About Victoria's kindergarten model

- Local government voluntarily invests significant funds and resources towards kindergarten provision – councils own the majority of facilities (est. \$2 billion investment in M&CH and kindergarten), are a major service planner and provider, and offer subsidies and other assistance for kinder programs.
- To achieve the 15 hours national kindergarten reforms, Victorian councils initially invested \$300 million of ratepayer funding towards capital investment in facilities, with a further \$480 million invested between 2014-2018 – a total of \$780m of council funds has been invested over eight years
- Of Victoria's 1,320 community-based kindergartens, at least 1,094 (83 per cent) operate from council-owned buildings.
- The vast majority of Victorian kindergartens are operated on a not-for-profit basis by community organisations, councils, cluster managers or parent cooperatives.
- Victoria's 'community model' also relies on community and parent support (including fees and fundraising) to keep programs running. This community investment equates to 35 per cent of the operating costs of service delivery.
- This unique partnership model has resulted in more than 96 per cent of Victorian children attending 15 hour kindergarten programs in 2016.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Go to our [kindergarten funding campaign page](#).

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