COMMONWEALTH ACTION ON 15 HOURS KINDER FUNDING

AND QUALITY MUST CONTINUE

Updated May 2018

**National Partnerships at risk**

The 2018 [Federal Budget](https://www.budget.gov.au/2017-18/content/bp3/html/) confirmed Minister Birmingham’s February announcement that funding under the [National Partnership Agreement for universal access](https://www.education.gov.au/national-partnership-agreements) to early childhood education (15 hours kindergarten) has been extended to December 2019.

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

Of great concern, however, is the Commonwealth’s failure 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 Commonwealth will continue to fund the national assessment function - the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) - for two years.
* However, the Commonwealth 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.

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](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/LiftingOurGame.PDF)  report – endorsed by all the states and territories – has called on the Turnbull 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](https://docs.education.gov.au/node/50516) emphasises the connection between quality early learning and school outcomes
* The [Royal Commission’s report into institutional child sexual abuse](https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/commissioners) highlights the requirement for a ‘national watchdog’ to ensure our children’s safety, security and wellbeing.

Future work announced by Minister Birmingham includes improving the quality of data collected and ensuring children, particularly vulnerable children are enrolled and attending the full 15 hours.

This is what councils have been supporting for years through kindergarten planning, facility provision and central enrolment.

**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 and the quality reforms.

While we have secured a commitment for funding through to the end of 2019 for 15 hours of universal access, advocacy must continue to secure commitments from the Commonwealth to:

1. Provide ongoing funding for the Commonwealth portion of 5 hours kindergarten funding to Victoria, and
2. Work positively and constructively with the states to secure an enduring funding arrangement for 15 hours of kindergarten beyond 2019 and a long-term commitment for the national quality agenda.

**Further MAV action:**

* The MAV has written to Minister Birmingham urging him to negotiate a long-term commitment to the *National Quality Agenda on Early Childhood Education and Care.*
* We arewriting to all council CEOs and Mayors urging councils to advocate with one voice leading up to the National General Assembly of Local Government in June.
* We will continue to advocate to the Commonwealth through letters, deputations and submissions to the Prime Minister, Ministers and Shadow Ministers leading up to the 2019/2020 Federal Budget and next federal election.

**What can councils do?**

1. Write a letter your [local member](https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Members), to the [Prime Minister, Minister for Education](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Parliamentary_Handbook/Current_Ministry_List) and [Shadow Ministers](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Parliamentary_Handbook/Shadow)
2. Join the [I Love Kinder campaign](https://ilovekinder.org.au/) and encourage your local services and families to show their love for kinders by:
* Sign up to receive I Love Kinder [campaign information](https://ilovekinder.org.au/) and download a Heart Gallery message to [share your support](https://ilovekinder.org.au/#share)
* Like the I Love Kinder campaign on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/ILoveKinderCampaign/)
* Follow the I Love Kinder campaign on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/ILoveKinder_)
* Follow the I Love Kinder campaign on [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/ILoveKinder_/)
* Help spread the #ILoveKinder message on your own social pages.

**Key messages**

1. Our children deserve the best – they deserve high quality education that is stable and secure.
2. Victorian families should not have to make up any government shortfall – they pay enough for kindergarten already.
3. The Australian Government must:
* provide ongoing funding for five hours of kindergarten
* commit to working positively and constructively with the states to secure an enduring funding arrangement for 15 hours of kindergarten beyond 2019
* commit to a long-term commitment for the National Quality Agenda.

## Background

**Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (15 hours)**

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 Commonwealth 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 Agreement with the current Agreement due to expire in December 2019.

In addition to the funding from the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments, the community 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]](#footnote-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.

**Local government and the kindergarten community need to continue to speak with one voice to ensure that Minister Birmingham delivers on his commitment:**

 *“This extension of the National Partnership gives us time to work through these issues and develop an enduring policy beyond 2019”[[2]](#footnote-2).*

## National Partnership - 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](http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/education/early_childhood/quality_agenda/national_partnership.pdf).

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 theresultant 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.

## The evidence:

1. Internationally and nationally[[3]](#footnote-3) there is irrefutable evidence linking preschool attendance to improved student results in numeracy, reading and spelling.
2. A 2010 study[[4]](#footnote-4) found that focused investment in early childhood education represents the best and most economically efficient period of life for such an outlay - returning at least $8 for every $1 spent in higher wages, increased tax revenue, reduced school expenditure and reduced criminal justice expenditure.
3. 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.*

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## What has our sector advocacy achieved?

Since our advocacy commenced on this issue in 2010:

* $5.5 million has been provided in Federal funding to Victorian councils for operational planning and capacity assessment
* Councils shared a further $4 million to support change management
* $370 million of state/federal funds were provided for capital investment.
* The Commonwealth has committed to develop an enduring policy with the states beyond 2019 to provide certainty for kindergarten programs.

**Councils have invested a further $780m of their own funds for early years capital to support the reform process.**

Over the past seven years, the MAV’s advocacy efforts have and continue to include:

* 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 election campaigns.

## 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
* 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](http://www.mav.asn.au/news-resources/campaigns/kindergarten).

MAV contact person:

Jan Barrett, phone: 03 9667 5594, email: jbarrett@mav.asn.au

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. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Minister Birmingham [Media Release](https://www.senatorbirmingham.com.au/preschool-funding-boost/) Feb 3, 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
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. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Return on Investment: Cost vs. Benefits. Professor James J. Heckman, University of Chicago, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)