

Universal access to 15 hours of Kindergarten

The Federal Government urgently needs to ensure that every child in Australia has universal access to 15 hours of kindergarten per week in the year before they are due to start primary school.

At a time when our families are already struggling with the rising costs of childcare and school, any Federal Government funding cut would further disadvantage the children who need kindergarten education the most. Early childhood education is critical for all children - it transcends disadvantage and gives children a greater chance of success in life.¹

Current uncertainty on universal access to 15 hours of kindergarten

Under the current National Partnership Agreement, the Federal Government provides funding for five hours with the State Government contributing funding for 10 hours of kindergarten per child every week. The community and local governments provide a further 35 per cent towards the total funding required for 15 hours of attendance through parent fees and fundraising. The current National Partnership Agreement is due to expire in December 2018 and no indication has been provided that Federal Government funding will continue beyond this time.

Investment sought

- **Federal Government funding of five hours of kindergarten per week for every child.**

We seek a long term commitment from the Federal Government to fund five hours of four year old kindergarten per week for every child in the year before they start primary school. This will mean that each child has universal access to attend a total of 15 hours of kindergarten every week during this period.

- **\$100 million will otherwise be cut from Victorian kindergartens.**

If the National Partnership Agreement ends Victorian kindergartens will miss out on annual funding of \$100 million from the Federal Government and result in every kindergarten child losing the equivalent of one day of funded kindergarten per week.

What does universal access mean?

- **Access to early childhood education to all children, regardless of personal circumstances.**

Universal access means that services are available to all children, irrespective of their particular circumstances.² Participation is not based on personal circumstances - for example, it is not just available to children of working families.³ A universal approach has the best opportunity to reach all children who will benefit most from access to high-quality early education care, with significant potential to boost participation of children experiencing disadvantage.⁴

Benefits of universal access to 15 hours of kindergarten

- **Early childhood education sets children up for a successful life.**

We know that “investing in the earliest years of life builds a solid foundation for children’s development and increases everyone’s potential to contribute to society as productive adults. Programs that support children in the early years are the very best investments we can make as a country”.⁵

- **Fifteen hours of quality childhood education per week significantly enhances development.**

Children are helped to understand and manage their emotions, learn critical social skills and learn how to focus in order to handle the structure of their future school environment.⁶ International and Australian studies consistently demonstrate the significant benefits children experience from attending quality early learning. A recent Australian study found that children who attend a high-

quality early learning program in the year before school are up to 40 per cent ahead of their peers by the time they reach Year 3.⁷

Universal access to 15 hours of kindergarten benefits everyone

Transcending disadvantage through universal access to preschool means a more productive society. Giving children at least 15 hours of early learning every week before school gives them the best possible chance to succeed at school. We will see fewer children end up in the welfare and justice systems as adults.⁸ The well-known, Highscope Perry Pre-school study from the US found that disadvantaged children who participated in pre-school education were more likely to complete school, find higher paying jobs and own their own homes, and less likely to be involved in crime by the time they were 40, compared to children who did not get the extra support.⁹

Why universal access is important to the City of Whittlesea

- **Our local children are in high need of access to quality early childhood education.**

Results from the Australian Early Development Census show that children living in Thomastown, Lalor, Epping and Mill Park experience higher levels of developmental vulnerability in two or more domains when compared to results from Victoria.¹⁰

- **Our families can't afford to cover extra child-care fees should they lose a day of kindergarten.**

Fourteen per cent of our households are experiencing mortgage stress¹¹ and 32 per cent are experiencing rental stress,¹² rates that are significantly higher than for Greater Melbourne (11 per cent and 27 per cent respectively). Working families could face an extra \$2000 per year in child care costs (even after subsidies) and many of our families won't be able to afford those costs.

- **High levels of family violence.**

The City of Whittlesea has the highest rate of family violence in the northern region and one of the highest in Metropolitan Melbourne (1,401 per 100,000 of population, compared to Victoria 1,285).¹³ The most vulnerable children have the most to benefit from 15 hours a week of preschool.

- **Councils and kindergartens need to be in a position to plan.**

The City of Whittlesea has 35 kindergartens where nearly 2800 local children will begin a 15 hour program in 2018. Continual short-term funding arrangements make it extremely difficult for councils and kindergartens to plan for demand, for example, by ensuring facilities are available, undertaking timetabling, and recruiting and retaining educators.

- **Significant investment has already been made to deliver 15 hours of kindergarten.**

The City of Whittlesea and Victorian Government invested more than \$3 million in upgrading five facilities in 2013/14 for the purpose of delivering the 15 hour program. We undertook an extensive change management process to partner with stakeholders to ensure compliance with the 15 hour program.

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¹ Early Learning: Everyone Benefits (2017). *State of early learning in Australia 2017*. Canberra, ACT: Early Childhood Australia.

² Early Learning: Everyone Benefits (2017). *State of early learning in Australia 2017*. Canberra, ACT: Early Childhood Australia.

³ Early Learning: Everyone Benefits (2017). *State of early learning in Australia 2017*. Canberra, ACT: Early Childhood Australia, p.12.

⁴ Early Learning: Everyone Benefits (2017). *State of early learning in Australia 2017*. Canberra, ACT: Early Childhood Australia, p.12.

⁵ Centre for Community Child Health, *CCCH Newsletter June 2015*, <http://www.rch.org.au/ccch/newsletter/2015/june/-frank>, Professor Frank Oberklaid on ABC Radio's *Conversation Hour*, [accessed 23 January 2017].

⁶ Early Learning Benefits Everyone, *How quality early learning benefits, children, families and our whole society*. Available: <http://www.everyonebenefits.org.au/why-invest> [accessed October 2017].

⁷ Early Learning Benefits Everyone, *How quality early learning benefits, children, families and our whole society*. Available: <http://www.everyonebenefits.org.au/why-invest> [accessed October 2017].

⁸ Early Learning Benefits Everyone, *How quality early learning benefits, children, families and our whole society*. Available: <http://www.everyonebenefits.org.au/why-invest> [accessed October 2017].

⁹ Early Learning Benefits Everyone, *How quality early learning benefits, children, families and our whole society*. Available: <http://www.everyonebenefits.org.au/why-invest> [accessed October 2017].

¹⁰ AEDC Commonwealth of Australia (2015). *Australian Early Development Census: Community Profile 2015*. Available: www.aedc.gov.au/ClientData/CommunityProfiles/20075.pdf [accessed January 2017]

¹¹ Atlas id (2017). *City of Whittlesea Mortgage Stress*. Available: www.altas.id.com.au/whittlesea [accessed October 2017].

¹² Atlas id (2017). *City of Whittlesea Rental Stress*. Available: www.altas.id.com.au/whittlesea [accessed October 2017].

¹³ Crime Statistics Agency Victoria (2017), *Number and Rate per 100,000 population of family incidents by Local Government Area July 2011 to June 2016*. Data request April 2017. Data extracted from LEAP on 18th April 2017 and is subject to change.