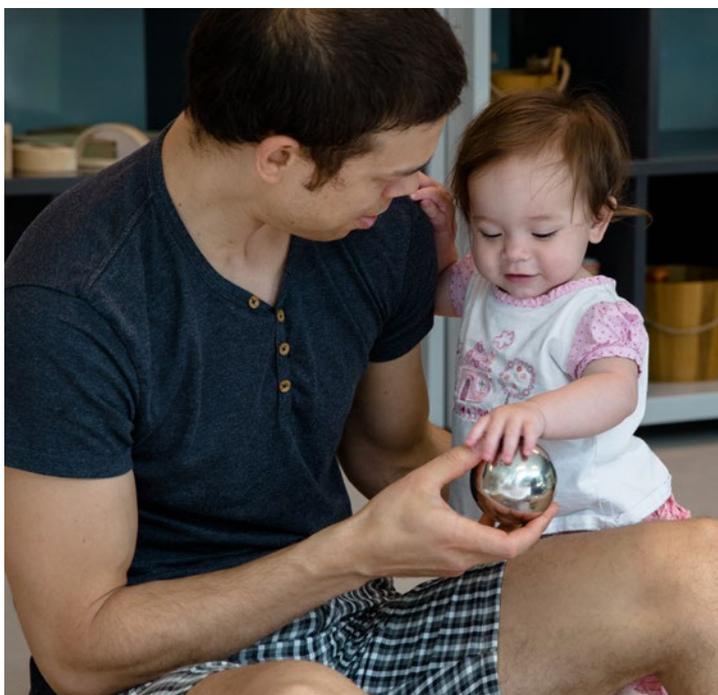


FAMILIES DESERVE MORE SUPPORT SO ALL AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN CAN BENEFIT FROM EARLY LEARNING

Families matter for children. The first and most important impact on every child's early development is their parents.

Babies are born ready to learn, and their brains develop through use. In the first five years of life, your child's brain develops more, and faster, than at any other time in his or her life (Raising Children Network, 2018). Your child's early experiences—their relationships and the things they see, hear, touch, smell and taste—stimulate their brain, creating millions of connections. This is when the foundations for learning, health and behaviour throughout life are laid down. Because of this, your child needs a stimulating and caring environment with lots of different activities that provide plenty of ways to play and learn, and plenty of opportunities to practise what they're learning.

There are many things parents can do at home to engage and stretch their child's mind. This includes reading together, teaching songs and nursery rhymes, painting and drawing, playing with letters and numbers, visiting the library and creating regular opportunities for them to play with their friends at home.



How early learning supports parents

Participating in quality early learning is a great support for parents to help their children's development.

By design, quality early childhood education and care services are focused on nurturing children in an environment in which the children are agents of their own learning. This recognises and celebrates what it means to be a child. Educators work with and plan for the child who is, rather than the adult to come. Acknowledging and prioritising the unique strengths and capabilities of each child gives them the gift of becoming themselves (Pascoe & Brennan, 2017, p. 20).

Parents with children currently participating in early learning recognise the benefits. Last year, a survey of almost 3000 parents by the Early Learning: Everyone Benefits campaign found that 96 per cent of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child had positive experiences and developed skills from their participation in early childhood education and care.

More than 90 per cent of parents said their children had improved their social skills, confidence and emotional capacity as a result of attending early learning, and they had observed improvements in their thinking, speaking and listening skills. Parents also commented on their children's engagement in creative projects and that they benefitted from building relationships with other children and educators.

Attending quality early learning programs provides all children with a foundation that sets them up for success. An Australian study found that young children who attend a high-quality preschool program in the year before school are up to 40 per cent ahead of their peers by the time they reach Year 3 in primary school (Warren & Haisken-DeNew, 2013).

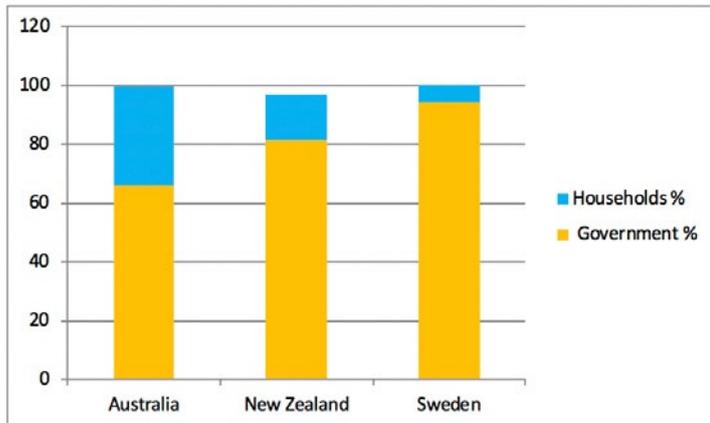
A United Kingdom study (Waldren, 2017) found that children who attended quality early learning had higher grades in school, were better able to manage their behaviour and had lower levels of hyperactivity. The longer they spent in preschool, and the higher the quality, the better their grades and the more likely children were to continue on an academic pathway.

But what about the cost?

Many parents struggle to meet the cost of early learning (child care, family day care, preschool or kindergarten), making it difficult for their children to attend as much as they would like them to.

The introduction of the new Child Care Subsidy system will reduce the cost for most families with **both parents working**, but Australians still pay a much higher proportion of the cost of early learning when compared to other developed countries.

Australia has one of the lowest rates of government funding of all countries assessed in two OECD reports: *Education at a Glance* (2017a) and *Starting Strong* (2017b). Australian families pay more than a third of the cost of early education services. In New Zealand, families pay half that (15 per cent), and in Sweden, families pay less than 6 per cent. A Swedish family with three children under five years pays no more than **\$400 per month** for early learning.



Source: OECD.Stat. (May, 2018).

What does our government need to hear?

Access to early learning is most valued by the current government as a support for parents to return to work, and while child care is a necessity for working families, the developmental benefits for children of participating in early learning are not valued enough.

Investing in integrating education and care creates the potential for a double dividend—promoting children's wellbeing, learning and development, and supporting parental workforce participation. If supporting workforce participation eclipses children's education, this opportunity is lost (Pascoe & Brennan, 2017, p. 7).

All politicians need to hear from parents like you that early learning matters for children because it enhances their early development, helps them transition well to school and sets them up to be lifelong learners.

These benefits to children flow on to everyone through improved economic outcomes. A PricewaterhouseCoopers report (PwC, 2014) found that if all Australian children could access quality early learning, this would add \$10.3 billion to our gross domestic product (GDP) by 2050; and if all vulnerable children attended early learning, it would add \$13.3 billion to the GDP.

Governments in other developed countries invest in their children so families pay less for early learning. Our government should invest more and reduce the costs to all families so that all children can access early learning.

Tell the government that **investing in quality early learning creates a quality future for Australia.**

What you can do

- **Follow the hash tag #EARLYLearningMatters on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter**—like and share the photos and tag your local MP and any other relevant politicians.
- **Find out how to get involved in Early Learning Matters Week:** www.everyonebenefits.org.au.
- **Join thousands of parents and educators in the Early Learning: Everyone Benefits campaign:** www.everyonebenefits.org.au/getinvolved.

References and further reading

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