

AUSTRALIA NEEDS TO CATCH UP TO THE GLOBAL EARLY LEARNING REVOLUTION

Around the world, countries are investing in early childhood education because it is the most effective way to drive wellbeing and prosperity. Sadly Australia is lagging behind. Too many children are starting school developmentally vulnerable and, compared to other countries, not enough three year olds are attending quality early learning.

What can Australia do right now to improve outcomes for young children?

- Ensure all children have access to at least two days per week of early childhood education, irrespective of their parents' activities.
- Develop a whole of government 'Early Years Strategy' to ensure no children fall through the gaps.
- Provide a long-term commitment to maintain current total levels of funding for Universal Access to kindergarten or preschool programs in the year before school.
- Extend kindergarten/preschool funding for play-based programs for three year olds.
- Improve quality of early education and care through ongoing support for the National Quality Agenda and workforce development initiatives.
- Improve support for children who experience disadvantage, especially those living in regional and remote areas and from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Why Early Learning Matters for children and families

- In the first five years of life, children's brains are wired to learn quickly. Early learning helps to amplify their natural skills and abilities.
- Young children learn best through play-based activities that are suited to their age.
- Children develop social and emotional skills through the social interactions they have with other children and adults.
- Early learning can enhance cognitive skills, and improve lifelong outcomes for children as they progress through school and into the workforce.
- Families are given help to understand and support their child's development.

Early Learning Matters for our community

- The research tells us that high-quality early education can deliver long-term benefits into adulthood, and is a powerful intervention for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Australian studies show that children who attend a high-quality early childhood 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).
- Research undertaken in the UK 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 early learning, and the higher the quality, the better their grades were and the more likely they were to continue academic studies (Waldren, 2017).
- International research shows that disadvantaged children who attend quality early learning for at least two days per week are:
 - more likely to finish school
 - more likely to find higher paying jobs
 - more likely to own their own homes
 - less likely to be involved in crime as adults
 - less likely to need support with emotional and behavioural problems.

Early Learning Matters for Australia

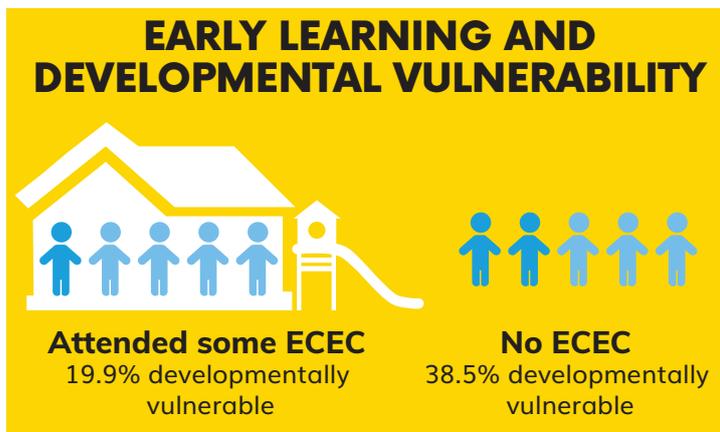
Currently, in Australia, one-in-five children start school developmentally vulnerable, according to the Australian Early Development Census (DET, 2016) conducted every three years. That figure is double for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The best way to stop generations of children continuing down the path of disadvantage is to get in early while their brain architecture is developing and set firm foundations for learning (Wendy McCarthy AO, 2018).

(Early Learning: Everyone Benefits, 2018, p. 2.)

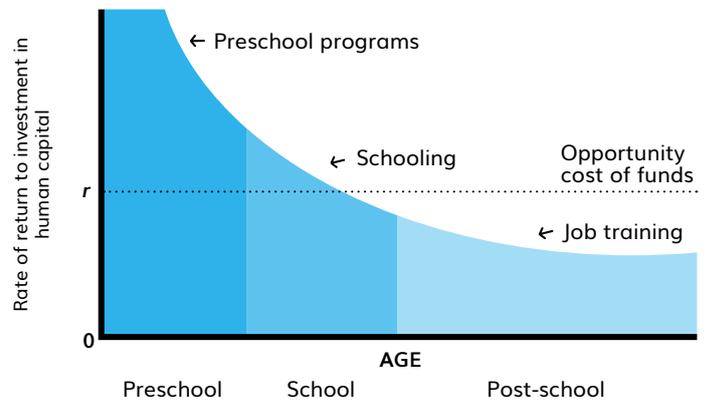
Australia lags behind the rest of the world in three year olds participating in early learning—only 68 per cent attend early education and care. Compared to other OECD countries, Australia ranks in the bottom third for participation of three year olds (OECD, 2017).

The latest Report on Government Services (SCRGSP, 2017) included data that shows children who participate in early learning have HALF the rate of vulnerability as children who don't attend any early learning.



Source: SCRGSP, 2017

Early education prevents achievement gaps, it boosts school achievement, presents better health outcomes, improves our workforce, increases our productivity and reduces the need for costly social spending (James J. Heckman, Nobel Laureate Economist, 2012).



Source: Cunha, Heckman, Lochner & Masterov, 2006

Modelling by economist James Heckman (Cunha, Heckman, Lochner & Masterov, 2006) shows that the most effective time to invest in education, to deliver the greatest return on investment, is at the early learning stage—before children start school.

A PricewaterhouseCoopers report (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.

All of this evidence is laid out in the *Lifting Our Game* report to COAG (2017). State and Territory governments are already acting on key recommendations to increase access to quality early learning for all Australian children.

It's time for Australia to increase our investment in early learning. It matters for our children, and it matters for our community into the future.

Quality early learning creates a quality future for Australia.

#EARLYLearningMatters

www.everyonebenefits.org.au

Early Learning: Everyone Benefits is a national partnership of 25 organisations including early childhood peaks, research institutions, early childhood service providers and community organisations. Our goals are: to increase community understanding of the long-term benefits of early learning for children, families, communities and the nation; and to secure political commitment to increase access to quality early learning for all children from birth to the start of school.

References

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