



FAMILIES DESERVE MORE SUPPORT FOR ALL CHILDREN TO BENEFIT FROM EARLY LEARNING

Families matter for children. Parents have the first and most important impact on children's early development.

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). Children'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 are laid down for lifelong learning, health and behaviour. Because of this, children 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 children to play with friends.



How does early learning support parents?

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

Parents with children currently participating in early learning recognise the benefits. A survey of almost 3000 parents by the Early Learning: Everyone Benefits campaign (2017) found that 96 per cent of the parents agreed or strongly agreed that their children had positive experiences and developed skills from their participation in early childhood education and care.

The experiences of these parents reflect the high national standards for early learning in Australia. All long day care centres, family day care centres and preschools/ kindergartens are assessed according to how well they achieve the *Early Years Learning Framework* outcomes that aim for children to:

- have a strong sense of identity
- be connected with and contribute to their world
- have a strong sense of wellbeing
- be confident and involved learners
- be effective communicators.

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).

Families benefit when their children attend quality early learning through increased family earnings. A recent PwC (2019) report, *A smart investment for a smarter Australia*, shows that Australian families with a child attending early learning in the year before school can benefit by almost \$1.5 billion through greater earnings.

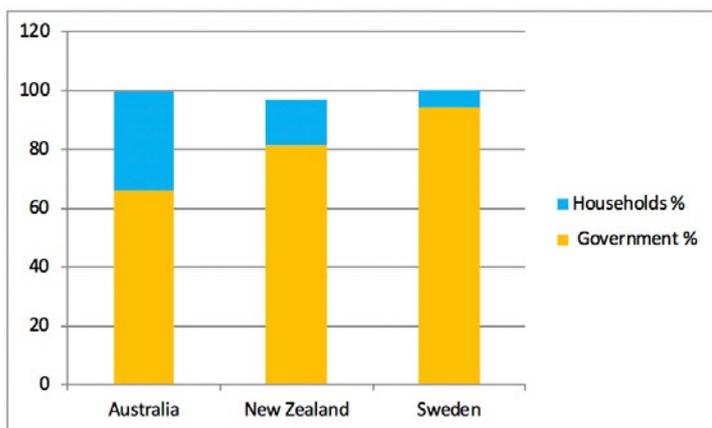
A United Kingdom study (Waldren, 2017) found that children who attended quality early learning had higher grades in school, were better able to manage their behaviour and had lower levels of hyperactivity. The longer they spent in preschool, and the higher the quality, the better their grades and the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

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 has reduced 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 (2017a; 2017b) reports. In New Zealand, families pay only 15 per cent of the cost of early education services, 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 way to help parents return to work. While child care is a necessity for working families, its developmental benefits for children are not being 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.

—Susan Pascoe AM & Deborah Brennan (2017, p. 7).

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

These benefits for children flow on to everyone through improved economic outcomes. The PwC (2019) report also found that every cohort of children that attends quality early learning before starting school would generate \$4.8 billion in benefits for the Australian economy through reduced social costs, increased productivity, increase in lifetime earnings, increase in parent earnings and increased tax revenue from both children and parents over their lifetime.

There is now overwhelming evidence that ensuring all Australian children can participate in quality early learning for two days per week—ideally for two years before they start school—will benefit children, families and the whole community.

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

What you can do

- **Follow #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 by visiting:** www.everyonebenefits.org.au.
- **Join thousands of parents and educators in the Early Learning: Everyone Benefits campaign. Visit:** www.everyonebenefits.org.au.

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