

AUSTRALIA NEEDS TO CATCH UP WITH 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?

- Improve support for children who experience disadvantage, especially those living in regional and remote areas, and children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Ensure all children have access to at least two days per week of early childhood education, irrespective of their parents' activities.
- 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.

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 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 their social interactions with other children and adults.
- Early learning enhances cognitive skills and improves lifelong outcomes for children as they progress through school and as they join the workforce during adulthood.
- Early learning also helps families understand and support their children's development.

Early learning matters for our community

- Research tells us that high-quality early education can deliver long-term benefits well into adulthood, and that it can be 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 shows that children who attend quality early learning have higher grades in school, are better able to manage their behaviour and have lower levels of hyperactivity. The longer children spend in early learning and the higher the quality, the better their grades are and the more likely they are 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 as adults
 - more likely to own their own homes as adults
 - less likely to be involved in crime as adults
 - less likely to need support with emotional and behavioural problems.

Early learning matters for Australia

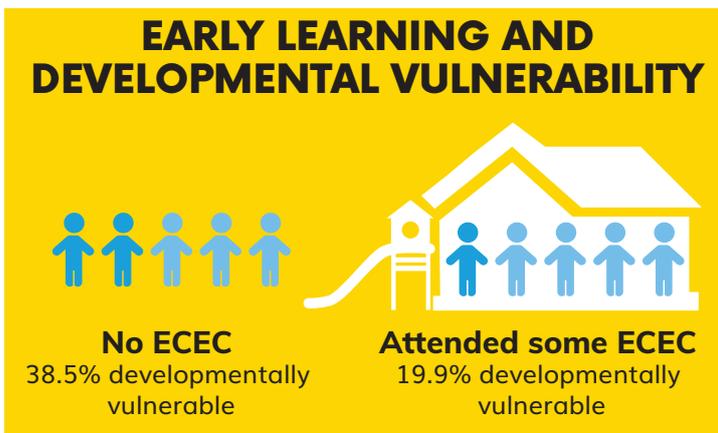
Currently, one-in-five children in Australia start school developmentally vulnerable, according to the Australian Early Development Census (DET, 2016) conducted every three years. That figure is double for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

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

Australia lags behind the rest of the world in terms of three-year-olds' participation 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).

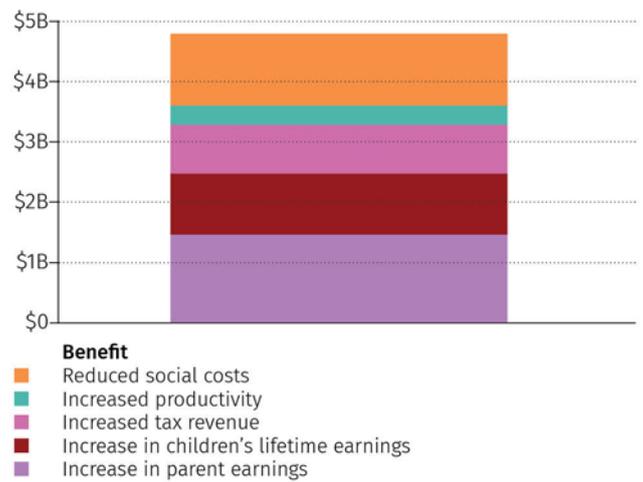
Children who participate in early learning have HALF the rate of vulnerability as children who don't attend any early learning, according to the 2017 *Report on Government Services* (SCRGSP, 2017).



Source: SCRGS, 2017

Economist James Heckman (2017) writes that quality early learning and development programs, especially for disadvantaged children, can prevent achievement gaps, boost school achievement, improve health outcomes, strengthen our workforce, increase productivity and reduce social spending.

\$4.8B benefits generated by every cohort of children attending early childhood education



Source: The Front Project (2019)

A recent report by The Front Project (2019), *A smart investment for a smarter Australia*, found that for every dollar invested in quality early childhood education, Australia receives \$2 back over a child's life.

Every cohort of children that attends quality early learning before starting school generates \$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.

Much of this evidence is also laid out in the *Lifting Our Game* report (Pascoe & Brennan, 2017) presented to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). The 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 its investment in early learning. It matters for our children, it matters for our community and it matters for our future.

#EARLYLearningMatters

www.everyonebenefits.org.au

Early Learning: Everyone Benefits is a national partnership of 27 organisations including early childhood peak bodies, 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.

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