

# EARLY LEARNING 2019 ELECTION BRIEFING

Early Learning  
**EVERYONE  
BENEFITS**

## WHY EARLY LEARNING MATTERS FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND THE COMMUNITY

Around the world, countries are investing in early childhood education because it has been recognised as an effective way of driving wellbeing and prosperity.

Australia's attendance and participation rates in early learning are lagging behind other countries. Too many children are developmentally vulnerable when they start school, putting them at a higher risk of experiencing reduced educational, behavioural, health and social outcomes during adulthood.

**The Early Learning: Everyone Benefits campaign urges political parties at the 2019 Election to commit to the following early learning priorities:**

1. Develop a cross-portfolio 'Early Years Strategy' which recognises the importance of early childhood development, family support and play-based early learning across home, community and early childhood settings.
2. Children have the right to access at least two days per week of quality early childhood education, irrespective of their parents' workforce participation or other activity.
3. Provide a long-term funding commitment for universal access to quality early childhood education (kindergarten/preschool programs) in the year before school.
4. Extend universal access to high quality early education to two years before school.
5. Commit to strategies to increase access to quality early learning programs for children at risk of educational disadvantage—with particular attention to the need for appropriate service models for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and rural/remote communities.
6. Commit to quality improvement through the ongoing funding of the *National Quality Framework*.
7. Commit funding to workforce development strategies to address capacity and quality.

### Early learning is the foundation for success

- Children's brains are wired to learn quickly. It's in the first five years that the foundations for learning, health and behaviour are laid down for life.
- Intentional play-based activities and social interactions help young children develop the cognitive, social and emotional skills necessary for future success in school, career and adult life.
- Early learning amplifies children's natural skills and abilities, helps them become confident learners, and enhances resilience. All of these factors contribute to improved lifelong outcomes.

### DEVELOPMENTAL VULNERABILITY IN CHILDREN STARTING SCHOOL

Some children in Australia are starting school vulnerable in areas of social, emotional, language, general knowledge, cognitive and physical development.



One in five children were developmentally vulnerable in one or more domain(s) when they started school.



Two in five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were developmentally vulnerable in one or more domain(s) when they started school.

Source: DET, 2016

### Early learning transforms children's lives

Children who attend playgroups are less likely to be developmentally vulnerable when they start school (Gregory, Sincovich, Harman-Smith & Brinkman, 2017), and **children who participate in early learning have HALF the rate of vulnerability** compared to children who don't attend any early learning (SGRSP, 2017). Yet, in 2017, only 62.5 per cent of Australian three-year-olds attended early education (SCRGSP, 2017). In comparison to other OECD countries, Australia ranks in the bottom third for three-year-old participation (OECD, 2017).

## EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENTAL VULNERABILITY



**No ECEC**  
38.5% developmentally vulnerable



**Attended some ECEC**  
19.9% developmentally vulnerable

Source: SCRGSP, 2017

Numerous studies have proven that high-quality early childhood education can deliver long-term benefits.

For example:

- Children who attend a 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).
- A research study from the UK found that children who attended quality early learning had higher grades in school. 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).

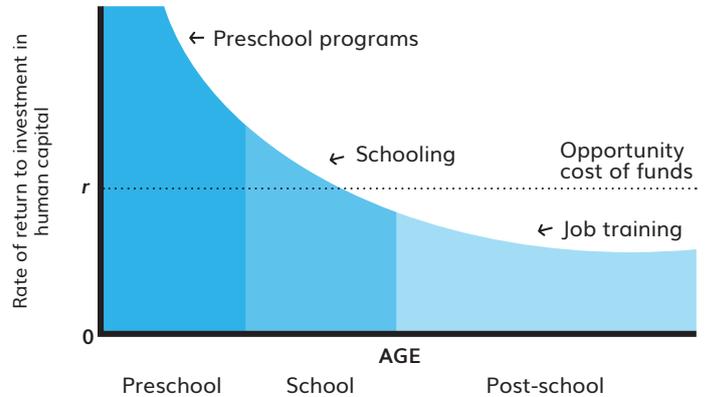
### Early learning: Social and economic benefits

International research shows that early experiences affect lifelong health and learning. More support is needed to overcome the impact of adversity during pregnancy and the first three years (Shonkoff, 2016). However, 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 (Schweinhart et al., 2005).

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.



Source: Cunha et al., 2006

If Australia is to thrive as a nation in today's globalised economy, we must commit to providing all children with the best start in life. By ensuring that all children access quality early learning TWO years before school, we will be able to maximise educational outcomes, break the cycle of disadvantage, and build a brighter future for Australia.

A PwC (2014) report 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.

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

**Quality early learning creates a quality future for Australia**

[www.everyonebenefits.org.au](http://www.everyonebenefits.org.au)

**Early Learning: Everyone Benefits is a national partnership of 25 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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