

# Preschool (kindergarten) education: A better future with earlier participation & equitable outcomes

It is now well recognised both locally and internationally that children benefit **enormously** from high quality kindergarten/preschool programs which focus on play-based, experiential learning<sup>1</sup>, with a **second year of preschool/kindergarten** giving our children an **even better start in life**<sup>2</sup>. In the two years before school, more than 60% of Australian children accessing early learning programs do so in a long day care centre<sup>3</sup>.

We believe that **all children** should have access to quality kindergarten/preschool programs, and parents **must have a choice** of early learning service type that **best suits their work/ life needs**.



## WHY LONG DAY CARE GIVES OUR CHILDREN THE BEST START IN LIFE

- Long day care offers the ideal learning environment for 0-5-year-old children. It delivers age-appropriate, tailored and culturally appropriate, physical early learning environments where children can also be bathed, have nappies changed and sleep.
- The infrastructure already exists and can help keep costs low for taxpayers. With 93% of long day care centres reporting vacancies<sup>4</sup>, they have the capacity to meet the needs of families with minimal further investment by government.
- Long day care is highly regulated; it is delivered under the National Quality Framework and the Early Learning Years Framework.

<sup>1</sup> Collection of academic research supporting the benefits of early learning and a play-based learning environment – [www.BestStartInLife.org.au/Resources](http://www.BestStartInLife.org.au/Resources)

<sup>2</sup> Preschool: Two Years Are Better Than One, Mitchell Institute, <http://www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/reports/two-years-preschool/>

<sup>3</sup> Report on Government Services 2018, PART B, CHAPTER 3, Early childhood education and care, <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-governmentservices/2018/child-cre-education-and-training/early-childhood-education-and-care>

<sup>4</sup> Federal Department of Education Early Childhood and Child Care in Summary Report 2018

- Long day care offers trained educators, both from the nurturing and education aspect. Our staff are well trained with centres having at least one Early Childhood Teacher or more.

Long day care must be recognised as the **key provider of three-year-old preschool/kindergarten programs** across Australia to help families, with children aged three and under. ACA strongly believes that co-locating early childhood education programs at schools **puts the needs of the children aged 0-5 years last** in these environments.

## CURRENT BARRIERS TO GREATER PARTICIPATION

The Federal Government's Universal Access funding model is seriously flawed, with **no national uniformity**, leading to grossly **inequitable outcomes** for children, families and service providers.

Meanwhile there is no Federal Government funding to support the attendance of **3-year-old kindergarten**. Whilst the preschool exemption to the activity test<sup>5</sup> (*which entitles the children of certain families to 18 hours a week of subsidised preschool at centre-based care in their year before school*) offers well-needed support to eligible families, sadly it does not apply to 3-year-olds in their **two years before school**.

## THE SOLUTION

We call on the Australian Government to:

- Commit to a 5 year funding arrangement as recommended in the UANP Review: Final Review Report<sup>6</sup> to provide a long term, sustainable model which ensures ensure that **all Australian children** have access to at least **15 hours per week** of a quality preschool (kindergarten) program lead by tertiary qualified early childhood teacher(s), for 40 weeks per year in the year before school **regardless of type of service**.
- Modify the existing Universal Access funding model:
  - To provide both greater certainty of funding beyond year-to-year agreements; and
  - Deliver equitable funding to **all children** (ie. funding that **follows the child**) regardless of service type or jurisdiction. This would support preschool (kindergarten) programs delivered in all settings, including centre based, long day care.
- Extend exemption of the **Child Care Subsidy activity test** for children in their year before school to children in their **two years before school**.

<sup>5</sup> [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/preschool\\_exemption\\_to\\_the\\_child\\_care\\_subsidy\\_activity\\_test.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/preschool_exemption_to_the_child_care_subsidy_activity_test.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> UANP Review: Final Review Report - <http://www.educationcouncil.edu.au/EC-Reports-and-Publications.aspx>