

New Families Package is the beginning of welcome reform

Victoria's largest not-for-profit early childhood education and care provider, ECMS, applauds the Federal Government's increased investment in early childhood education and care announced in the Families Package.

"This is a major reform and is definitely heading in the right direction. An investment in our social capital and economic development is good for children, good for families, and good for the economy in the short and the long term," explains ECMS Chief Executive Officer and Co-chair of the Early Learning and Care Council of Australia, Bernie Nott.

"We appreciate the government's intent to encourage more parents to return to work and see clear economic benefits for the nation. We also see incredible benefit to the children who are therefore exposed to quality early childhood education. For us, this is not only about caring for children and supporting families, it's also about amplifying children's learning and development."

"The new subsidy system targeted towards low and middle income families is a big step towards improving access and affordability for families, while also making it easier for parents to navigate and understand their options. We encourage the Government to be mindful of how the package is funded so that families are not cumulatively worse off as a result of savings in other areas," he says.

A child's early learning experiences have lifelong effects on their later achievement, social adjustment, mental and physical health and life expectancyⁱ. Attendance at high quality early childhood services has a positive impact on children's cognitive development and learning, both in the short and the long termⁱⁱ. The positive impact of early childhood education and care is multiplied when provided to the most vulnerable and at-risk children.

"Inclusion of vulnerable and at-risk children in quality early childhood education improves life chances for children who have the odds stacked against them," says Bernie. "We warmly welcome the announcement of the Child Care Safety Net with increased funding for programs for vulnerable and at-risk children. This will boost children's development and increase their chances of contributing to a more prosperous society," explains Bernie.

In a recent longitudinal study conducted in Jamaica, Heckman et al found that extremely disadvantaged children who received a quality early childhood education intervention in 1984-1986 earned 25% more as adults than disadvantaged children who received no treatment—and they earned as much as their more advantaged peers.ⁱⁱⁱ

Early childhood education and care services are proven to benefit all families when they enable participation in the workforce; contributing indirectly to economic benefits for families and society as a whole through higher productivity and life-time earnings and increased taxation revenues.^{iv} Findings from the UK Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Study^v were so compelling that the UK Government's current policy is to deliver 30 hours of free early education and care to all three and four-year-old children and to 40% of the country's most disadvantaged two-year-olds.

"If we are to be on par with early childhood education and care standards in leading countries like the UK and Sweden, there is more work to be done. We look forward to working with government to develop inclusive and responsive early childhood education services that realise the benefits of these significant and welcome reforms."

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About ECMS:

ECMS is a not-for-profit community enterprise providing quality early childhood education and care for children, families and communities in 73 services across Melbourne. Our services touch the lives of approximately 6500 children and families in many varied and diverse communities each week.

ⁱ Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2010; Field, 2010; Nationals Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Shonkoff et al., 2009.

ⁱⁱ Apps et al., 2012; Barnett et al., 2004; Boyd et al., 2005; Doherty, 2007; Early Childhood Knowledge Centre, 2006; Elliott, 2006; Gormley, 2007; Howes et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2008; Phillips & Lowenstein, 2011; Sammons, 2010; Sammons et al, 2007, 2013; Sylva et al., 2010; Vandell et al., 2010; Work and Family Policy Roundtable, 2006.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gertler, Paul, James Heckman, Rodrigo Pinto, Arianna Zanolini, Christel Vermeersch, Susan Walker, Susan M. Chang, Sally Grantham-McGregor. "Labor market returns to an early childhood stimulation intervention in Jamaica." *Science* 344.6187 (2014): 998-1001.

^{iv} Daley, J., McGannon, C., and Ginnivan, L. 2012.

^v E. Melhuish. 'Let evidence lead the way: Findings from the UK's effective provision of pre-school education study.' Toronto, Canada, (2013).



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