

# LABOR'S NATIONAL PRESCHOOL AND KINDY PROGRAM

## GIVING YOUR CHILD THE BEST START

A Shorten Labor Government will establish a new National Preschool and Kindy Program - guaranteeing every three and four year old can access the quality early education they need for the best start in school and life.

**This is the biggest investment in early childhood education in our nation's history.**

It will give every Australian child the opportunity to access the early learning opportunities that will set them up for success later in life.

The former Labor Government's four year old preschool program has been a success and has resulted in over 90% of Australian four year olds enrolled in preschool programs. But the number of three year olds in an early education program is still well below the OECD average. We also know that these programs vary from place to place and children don't always attend regularly.

The rest of the world is moving, and under a Shorten Labor Government, Australia will too.

Labor's new preschool and kindy program will ensure all Australian children can access an affordable age-appropriate play-based early education program in the two years before school – boosting their success in school and beyond.

Offered across a variety of settings, including long day care, sessional preschools and kindergartens, parents will have the flexibility to choose the services that best meets their needs.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY EDUCATION

Between the ages of three and five are critical for a child's development – 90% of a child's brain develops before the age of five. Age-appropriate early learning programs have been proven to have a positive impact on children's outcomes through school.

Play-based preschool programs, delivered by qualified early childhood educators, have been shown to lift learning and development outcomes for *all* children, while also closing the achievement gap for disadvantaged children.

There is a strong correlation between children attending early learning and their results in primary school. For example, an OECD study found children attending more than one year of pre-school scored significantly higher in PISA test scores at age 15 years.

Numerous studies have demonstrated a positive return on investment from investing in two years of preschool, with a cost-benefit ratio ranging from 3.4 (Texas) to 4.3 (Spain) due to the better social, health and education outcomes for children, as well as increased female workforce participation.

Two years of preschool is also the key recommendation to achieving educational excellence in Australia in the recent *Lifting our Game Report* prepared by early education experts for state and territory education ministers.

## **AUSTRALIAN KIDS ARE FALLING BEHIND – LABOR WILL ACT**

Nearly one in four Australian children - 22% - start school without the foundational skills to be successful learners. Those children are twice as likely not to meet the minimum NAPLAN standards in Years 3, 5 and 7.

While Australia has a high rate of enrolment in preschool for four year olds, only 57% of Australian three year olds currently access some kind of early learning program - well below the OECD average of 78%.

The evidence shows the children missing out – children from disadvantaged backgrounds - are the ones who would benefit most from a preschool program.

Many OECD countries are prioritising the provision of two years of high-quality preschool. The UK, NZ and Ireland are already offering at least two years of preschool and China has commenced implementing its plan to ensure children have access to at least two years of preschool by 2020.

Australia now ranks 23<sup>rd</sup> (out of 30) in the OECD for early childhood education expenditure as a percentage of our gross domestic product – we only invest 0.5% of our national income on early education compared to the OECD average of 0.8%. Australia is below Brazil, Mexico and the Russian Federation in terms of funding for early education.

### **LABOR’S RECORD**

In 2009, Labor established the first preschool program for four year olds – which the Government is not funding beyond the next school year. The current program provides 600 hours of preschool and kindy a year for children in the year before school, delivered by a university trained early childhood teacher.

Labor will ensure that our investment supports every child, and that every child gets their fair share - whatever setting their parents choose.

Labor will work with the states and sector to build on the Early Years Learning Framework and draw on national and international experts to ensure our two-year play-based preschool program is truly world-class, because that’s what every Australian child deserves.

### **LABOR’S NATIONAL PRE-SCHOOL AND KINDY PROGRAM**

Labor will introduce a new National Preschool and Kindy Program, which will:

- Commit permanent ongoing funding to the national preschool and kindy program for all four year olds.
- Extend the program to cover all three year olds – commencing in 2021.
- Establish a \$100 million facilitation fund to support the roll-out of the program, including workforce development and supporting expanded capacity where required.
- Ensure early learning centres are high quality and safe by restoring the \$20 million safety and quality funding cut by the Liberals.

Labor will also extend the existing preschool exemption to the Child Care Subsidy activity test to all children accessing the preschool program at a centre-based day care service in their second year before school. This will ensure every child will have access to affordable early learning.

Labor will work with the States and Territories and the sector to deliver 90% enrolment of three year olds in the program by 2023.

The program will be delivered across government and community run preschools and kindies, and long day care centres. Parents and carers will be free to choose the setting that best suits their needs.

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### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Labor's commitment to early education will cost \$1.75 billion over the forward estimates.