



▶ Early Childhood Education and Child Care

The Australian Government's agenda for early childhood education and child care focuses on providing Australian families with high-quality, accessible and affordable integrated early childhood education and child care. The agenda has a strong emphasis on connecting with schools to ensure all Australian children are fully prepared for learning and life. Investing in the health, education, development and care of our children benefits children and their families, our communities and the economy, and is critical to lifting workforce participation and delivering the Government's productivity agenda.

The Government will work closely with state and territory governments, key child care and early learning stakeholders and families to implement its election commitments in this area.

The Government has been working hard since taking office to commence implementation of the plan for early childhood services in Australia.

The plan includes:

Universal Access for all Children in the Year Before Formal Schooling— \$533.5 million over five years

The Government aims to ensure that all children in the year before formal schooling will have access to high quality early childhood education programs delivered by degree-qualified early childhood teachers, for 15 hours per week, 40 weeks of the year, in public, private and community-based preschools and child care.

This initiative will be underpinned by the development of the Early Years Learning Framework and supported by National Quality Standards for Child Care and Preschool, which will raise the quality of early childhood education delivered, regardless of setting, and improve access for disadvantaged children to early learning opportunities. Universal access is to be achieved by 2013.

Early Years Learning Framework—\$2.5 million over 2008-09

Developing a national Early Years Learning Framework which will have a specific emphasis on play-based learning, early literacy and numeracy skills and social development. The Framework will be linked to the National Quality Standards for Child Care and Preschool to ensure they encompass a nationally consistent and quality early childhood education component. The Framework will be developed in consultation with State and Territory Governments and early childhood experts and educators.

National Early Years Workforce Strategy—\$126.6 million over four years

Increasing the quality, numbers and retention of the early childhood workforce. The National Early Years Workforce Strategy will include creating additional early childhood education university places each year from 2009, increasing to 1500 additional commencing students each year by 2011; paying half the HECS-HELP debts for early childhood education teachers who work in rural and regional areas, Indigenous communities and areas of socio-economic disadvantage for up to five years; and removal of TAFE fees for Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas of Children's Services qualifications from 2009.

Strong Quality Standards in Child Care and Preschool— \$22.2 million over four years

Introducing national strong quality standards for child care and preschool and a new quality and an A-E rating system to drive continuous improvement and provide information to parents. Consultations with the sector are expected to commence shortly.

Changes to the Child Care Tax Rebate—\$1.6 billion over four years

Increasing the level of assistance to families with child care costs by increasing the Child Care Tax Rebate from 30% to 50%, up to \$7,500 per child and paying the rebate quarterly, rather than annually. Quarterly payments provide more timely assistance to families with their child care costs, with the first payments due from October 2008.

JET Child Care fee assistance—extension of funding for study of up to two years—\$23.9 million over four years

Increasing the level of support provided to parents under the Jobs Education and Training Child Care fee assistance (JETCCFA) program. From 1 July 2008 eligibility for JETCCFA funding will be extended from the current policy of up to one year of study, regardless of the course duration, to up to two years. JETCCFA provides extra help with the cost of approved child care for eligible parents undertaking activities such as study, work, job search or rehabilitation as part of an activity agreement, to help them enter or re-enter the workforce.

More Child Care Centres—\$114.5 million over four years

Establishing up to 260 additional child care centres across Australia. The Government will look to locate the centres on school grounds or other community land, to avoid the “double drop off”. The Australian Government is working collaboratively with state and territory governments to deliver on this measure. Further information about the implementation of this policy will be available following the announcement of the 2008-09 Budget in May.

National rollout of the Australian Early Development Index— \$20.2 million over five years

Rolling out the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) nationally. The AEDI is a population-based measure of child development, which enables communities to assess how children are developing by the time they reach school age. The AEDI will help communities to tailor their resources and programs to the developmental needs of their children.

The Indigenous Australian Early Development Index (I-AEDI) project will adapt the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) for use with Indigenous Australian children. The purpose is to develop, trial and evaluate a culturally appropriate summary measure of Indigenous children’s early child development, as a community level measure of children’s readiness for school learning. It is anticipated that the I-AEDI will serve as a tool for communities and policy makers to identify the vulnerabilities for children in individual Indigenous communities.

Home Interaction Program—\$32.5 million over five years

Rolling out the Home Interaction Program in partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence to 50 communities nationally. The Home Interaction Program assists disadvantaged 3 to 5 year olds, and provides for home tutors, books and associated educational resources to help parents improve their children’s school readiness. This program is innovative in its holistic emphasis on providing enduring skills to children, parents and the community. Planning for this initiative has commenced and new sites will be launched in 2008-09.