

EARLY LEARNING ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIA – THE VOICE FOR PARENTS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

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'Rebooted' Child Care Package is welcome – but it could still be so much better

The Turnbull Government re-introduced legislation into the new Parliament today to 'reboot' the *Jobs for Families* Child Care Assistance Package originally announced in the May 2015 budget.

"There is over \$3 billion of new investment in this package and we have always supported its core intentions to better target child care subsidy, make it more easily understood by families, and pay it directly to services to support higher quality educational programs for children," said Mr Shane Lucas, CEO of Early Learning Association Australia.

"But we remain concerned about the impact of proposed changes to the Activity Test that requires parents to undertake a certain amount of work or study each week to be eligible for the subsidy."

Currently, all children can access at least 24 hours or two days of quality early learning per week - but under the new Activity Test, children from single income families or non-working or casually and insecurely employed parents might have access to only 12 hours a week of education and care.

Research evidence from Australia and overseas indicates that access to quality early childhood education and care dramatically improves children's developmental and educational outcomes, and generates longer term social and economic benefits for all communities.

"We have always been clear with the Government on this aspect of the package," Mr Lucas said.

"While we understand that the Government has a workforce participation agenda and wants to encourage more parents to return to, or commence work or study – we do not believe that children's right to access quality early learning should be linked to the actions or inactions of their parents.

"The proposed Activity Test reduces the existing entitlement in an effort to change parental behaviour – but that will have a detrimental effect on some vulnerable or disadvantaged children.

"At a time when many other developed countries are increasing children's access to quality early learning and care, the proposed changes to the Activity Test are a regressive step.

"So while this package is good in many respects, we hope that new and returning members of Parliament take the opportunity to look closely at the detail over the coming weeks, and seek to amend the legislation to protect future educational outcomes for all children."

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