



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

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Victorian State Budget provides some welcome good news for Early Childhood Education

The Victorian State Budget 2014-15 announced today included some welcome good news for the early childhood education sector at a time when the Commonwealth Government is threatening the future of 15 hours of early learning for children in the year before school.

The Victorian Government today announced commitments totalling \$32 million over the next four years to improve the quality of early years services.

“This was an election year budget dominated by transport infrastructure – and a strong budget surplus,” Shane Lucas, CEO of Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) said today.

“In that context, ELAA was pleased to see a continuation of the Government’s commitment to quality early childhood education.

“But the budget was also a missed opportunity for the State to build on its support for the *National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education* that provides the mix of Federal and State funding to deliver 15 hours of preschool / kindergarten for four year olds.”

ELAA welcomed the Victorian Government’s commitment of \$15 million in capital grants to build and upgrade early years services.

“This new capital funding builds on the Government’s strong record in supporting infrastructure capacity across the sector,” Mr Lucas said.

“We are also pleased to see commitments for Early Childhood Intervention Services to provide support for children with a disability or developmental delay (\$1.2 million over two years) and to implement the Government’s Early Years Strategic Plan (\$8.4 million over four years).”

Today’s budget also saw an investment of \$3.8 million over two years for a “workforce package” to support quality improvement initiatives, including additional professional development opportunities for early childhood educators and service leaders, and planning for the implementation of early childhood teacher registrations under the Victorian Institute of Teaching.

Other initiatives included \$2.1 million over three years for Maternal and Child Health quality improvement reform and \$1.5 million over three years for a demonstration project to streamline access to early childhood services for vulnerable children.



In addition to the Budget, the Victorian Government has announced a \$200,000 project, to be led by ELAA, to support the ongoing provision of high-quality kindergarten services in rural areas by building long-term capacity in governance and service management.

“Over the coming weeks, ELAA will continue to support the State Government in its efforts to convince the Commonwealth to maintain its commitment to 15 hours beyond 2014,” Mr Lucas said.

“It is the Abbott Government – not the State – that has threatened to end the national partnership.

“But ELAA members expect the State Government to maintain its commitment to 15 hours also.

“The evidence base is compelling: children benefit greatly from the increase in hours from 10 to 15 hours of early learning per week.

“And in a recent survey of ELAA members and stakeholders, over 85 per cent of respondents stated that 15 hours of preschool / kindergarten should be maintained.

“We therefore remain very concerned by the State’s proposal – detailed in the budget papers - to return kindergarten services to 10 hours should the Commonwealth withdraw from the agreement.”

The Commonwealth Budget will be handed down on 13 May.

**Media contact: Shane Lucas, Chief Executive Officer, Early Learning Association Australia
Phone: 0417 308 751 or 03 9489 3500**