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Funding extension provides much needed time to 'Lift Our Game'

Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) welcomes the recent Turnbull Government announcement extending funding for the 15 hours a week of early learning currently available to Australian children in the year before school.

Funding for the Commonwealth portion of the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education was only guaranteed to the end of this year but will now carry on into 2019.

The announcement comes only a few days after the release of a watershed report into the state of early childhood education in Australia – *'Lifting Our Game': Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools Through Early Childhood Interventions*. The Report was commissioned at the request of all Australian States and Territories.

"The announcement by Minister Birmingham and the recent 'Lifting Our Game' Report respond to increased anxiety about the declining academic performance of Australian school children across national measures such as NAPLAN and international measures such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment)," said ELAA Interim CEO, Tina Martin. "And both the funding extension and Report recognise the intensifying national conversation about elevating the role of play-based early learning within the Australian education system."

The Report refers to studies that estimate universal access to quality early learning produces benefits in the vicinity of two to four times the cost. These benefits are further amplified in the case of vulnerable or disadvantaged children's performance once at school.

"We support the Report's key message for governments and the Australian public – that quality play-based early childhood education is best viewed as an 'investment, not a cost'," said Ms Martin.

While the extension of Commonwealth funding provides more time for the Federal Government to work out a plan with the States and Territories to achieve ongoing certainty regarding funding, it is only a stop-gap measure, and does not provide the long-term certainty that Australian families need to plan their lives and that early learning service providers need to plan and deliver the best possible early learning programs. "ELAA calls on the Federal, State and Territory governments to tackle the issue of ongoing funding once and for all rather than just keep relying on year-to-year extensions," said Ms Martin.

The 'Lifting Our Game' report also points to extending funded places in quality play-based early learning programs to three-year-olds as the "single most impactful reform Australia could undertake" to improving school outcomes for Australian children.

"In short – two years of early learning are better than one – and so we invite the Federal, State and Territory governments to work with the early learning sector to achieve this," added Ms Martin.

Media Release



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ELAA supports all 17 recommendations in the Report which also cover quality service delivery, workforce advancement, additional intervention to assist children from vulnerable or disadvantaged circumstances, engaging and supporting parents, data collection and coordination between levels of government.

"These recommendations align with ELAA's strategic vision for the early learning sector," said Ms Martin. "And, as the 'Lifting Our Game' Report notes, investing in integrating quality early childhood education with child care services can create a 'double dividend' – it supports children's wellbeing and development while also supporting parent workforce participation."

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