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AUSTRALIA



The Hon Simon Birmingham
Minister for Education and Training
PO Box 6100
Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

4 June 2017

Dear Minister Birmingham

Re: Withdrawal of funding for the National Partnership Agreement for the Early Childhood National Quality Agenda

We are writing jointly to express our deep concern about the unexpected withdrawal of funding for the National Quality Partnership Agreement for the Early Childhood National Quality Agenda, announced in the 2018/19 Budget. We are concerned that this withdrawal could herald the end of a national system for education and care in Australia.

The introduction of the Agreement in 2009 was a transformational moment for children, families and the education and care sector. It raised the bar on quality but also brought disparate State and Territory licensing processes and a federal quality assurance process into one nationally consistent system that is far simpler for services to navigate. The progress made towards its objectives are a major achievement. As Victorian peak bodies we have tracked and celebrated the positive outcomes of the Agreement for children and families.

The National Quality Framework provides a regulatory and continuous improvement system, designed to ensure access to high quality education and care services for all children. It safeguards against the use of Australian Government funds to subsidise poor quality and unsafe education and care services, services that unregulated would potentially harm children, resulting in negative consequences in the both the short and long terms.

The benefits of regulation and continuous improvements systems for early childhood education and care are experienced across a lifecycle – not limited to the point of transaction. Lifecycle modeling conducted by Price Waterhouse Coopers identified long-term GDP impacts of the provision of quality education and care, demonstrating that:

- The benefits to GDP in terms of increased female workforce participation was equivalent to 6.0 billion dollars,
- The benefits for children receiving a quality education and care program could be up to 10.3 billion and



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- The benefits of increased participation of children in vulnerable circumstances were 13.3 billion¹.

This year, the report “Lifting our Game”, highlighted that “investment in early childhood education provides a strong return, with a variety of studies indicating benefits of 2-4 times the costs. Significant fiscal benefits flow to both the Commonwealth and state and territory governments”².

Any costs linked to compliance and continuous improvement, whether hours or monetary are an investment in the safety of children and in the quality of a service in the short term and investment in increased economic and social output in the longer term.

It is essential that Australia builds on the progress made in relation to the provision of quality early and middle childhood education and services and not weaken the regulatory framework or the assessments and ratings processes.

We call on the Australian Government to:

- Reinststate and increase funding for the National Partnerships Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care
- Work with the States and Territories to negotiate an enduring, long-term commitment to the National Quality Agenda on Early Childhood Education and Care.

Yours Sincerely,

Julie Price
Executive Director
Community Child Care Association

Emma King
Chief Executive Officer
Victorian Council of Social Service

David Worland
Chief Executive Officer
Early Learning Association Australia

Marie Howard
President
Victorian Branch Early Childhood Australia

Cc Minister Mikakos

¹ PwC (2014) Putting a value on Early Childhood Education and Care in Australia; price, Water House Coopers, retrieved <https://www.pwc.com.au/pdf/putting-value-on-ecec.pdf>

² Pascoe, S. and Brennan, D. (2017) Lifting our Game, retrieved <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/whats-happening-in-the-early-childhood-education-sector/lifting-our-game-report/Lifting-Our-Game-Final-Report.pdf>