

20/21 Vic Budget keeps up the pace on kindergarten reform

25 November, 2020

Yesterday's Victorian 20/21 Budget, reflected a continued commitment to what is most certainly the biggest Government investment in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Sector in our State's history.

While many of the big-ticket items in the budget were the result of previous announcements and therefore already known to our sector, this by no means diminishes their significance. Key commitments in this category include:

- \$302 million to continue the three-year-old kindergarten expansion program by 2022
- \$169.6 million to fully subsidise the cost of kindergarten places in funded four and three-year-old programs during 2021, the provision of a comparable subsidy for parents whose children attend a kinder program within long day care, and reduced fees for children attending unfunded three-year-old programs
- a further \$38.5 million under the Building Blocks grants program for ECEC providers to build, expand, and improve infrastructure including making facilities more inclusive
- \$6.2 million that specifically responds to the impact of COVID-19 on pre-school aged children. This includes specialist support to children whose preparation for school has been hampered by the Pandemic and to engage vulnerable children who may have become disconnected from early learning during pro-longed lockdown periods.

"To see these commitments appear as line items in the 20/21 budget, with many including projected funding out to the 2023-24 year, reinforces the message that the Andrews Government is in for the long haul when it comes to Early Childhood Education and Care policy," said ELAA CEO, David Worland.

There were also some welcome bonuses for the ECEC sector including a boost for Early Years Manager (EYM) service providers under the 'Supporting Victorian Kindergartens' initiative in this year's Budget. Given ELAA's continued advocacy to the government on the matter of EYM sustainability, it is very pleasing to learn that an additional \$1.4 million has been allocated in the 2020-21 Victorian State Budget to support Early Years Manager providers managing small sessional kindergarten services to respond to sustainability pressures. The funding, to be allocated at the provider level, will support EYM-managed sessional services with low enrolment numbers and who meet eligibility criteria.

Other welcome 20/21 Victorian State Budget initiatives include:

- \$46.6 million over next four years committed to regulation of quality and safety in Early Childhood service provision via the funding of the Quality and Regulation Division (QARD) of Vic DET



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- \$13.8 million toward the development and implementation of the Child Link database which will provide greater information sharing capacity between prescribed entities such as the police and youth justice. This will be another weapon in the battle against child abuse
- \$2.5 million over next four years to extend Early Start Kindergarten funding to children of asylum seekers and refugees.

"ELAA welcomes this year's Victorian State Budget as one that essentially maintains the momentum of the Government's 2018 landmark commitment to Early childhood Education and Care when it announced its goal of fully funded three-year-old kindergarten for all Victorian children," said Mr Worland.

For more information or to arrange an interview with ELAA CEO, David Worland, contact James Gardener 0413 483 182.

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ELAA is the national peak body for not-for-profit providers of early childhood education and care. Our vision is Excellence in Early Learning for Every Child. www.elaa.org.au