

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION SUBMISSION

Childcare and Early Childhood Learning

SUBJECT HEADING

Gap Payment to Childcare Centres for Indigenous and at Risk Children

IN BRIEF

- Many disadvantaged children miss out on access to early learning and start school behind their peers as a result.
- Experience shows that children who start school behind tend to stay behind.
- Increased public investment in early learning for disadvantaged children will deliver economic and social benefits for the community.

BACKGROUND

Attendance at high-quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services is known to provide significant long-term benefits for disadvantaged children, including better school performance, staying longer at school and improved social skills at school and later in life.

Indigenous children are the most vulnerable group of children in Australia and disparities with non-indigenous children in some outcomes have widened in recent years. To reduce the gap in developmental outcomes between indigenous and non-indigenous children, COAG has set targets to ensure all indigenous children in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years.

COMMENT

Strong evidence confirms investing in quality early learning provides exponential economic and social return for the child, their family and for the community. One study has found that every dollar invested in quality early childcare and education saves taxpayers up to \$13 in future costs.

Early childhood education is particularly beneficial for children in low socio economic areas. Without it, these children can arrive at school behind and fall further behind. By age 15 they can be up to three years behind their peers. The inevitable consequence is an increased likelihood of unemployment.

Australian and international studies have shown that children's literacy and numeracy skills at age four to five years are a good predictor of academic achievement in primary school. Therefore, investment in early years care and education is critical to ensuring that children have developed sufficiently to engage and thrive when they arrive at school.

Targeted interventions from local Childcare and Early Learning services will address:

- Closing the Gap policy
- Child protection.
- Better health.
- Less police intervention

Better educational outcomes will be achieved and the following issues addressed:

- Will start school on an even “playing field” not behind
- Children used to going to school from early on, set up relationships within the school system
- Reduced absenteeism
- Will create better communities by reducing barriers through familiarity at an early age.
- Added cultural awareness.
- Child health improved.

Opportunity to improve Indigenous Parenting Skills can be achieved through:

- Parenting classes at childcare.
- Providing job skills (e.g.: computer classes)
- Entry to workplaces

The benefits of attendance at Early Education and Care Facilities:

- Adhere to Early Years Learning Framework, and this will set up children for the move into school.
- Parents will have access to the means tested childcare benefit this means the Childcare Centre gets the Childcare Benefit whilst the GAP payment could be funded.
- The benefits of attending daycare early are going to set the children on a path to a better quality of life.
- Daycare will allow access to parents as they love to be involved in their children’s life.

The Local Community will benefit as a result of more government investments in early childhood education and care, benefits will include:

- Daycares will expand and grow.
- Spend more money locally - community benefits indirectly through this.
- Employ more local people also indigenous people.
- Cert 3 courses in Day Care are very flexible with conditions.
- To enable workers to start traineeships Government funded.

Recommendation:

That the Commonwealth Government

1. Increase the overall investment in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) because it delivers social and economic returns and creates a strong foundation for a child's future schooling and employment prospects.
2. Reform the payments system to ensure all children can access ECEC but provide additional assistance to Childcare Centres serving low income and indigenous families and vulnerable children.

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