



Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early
Childhood Learning
5 September 2014

Getting it right the first time

The early years have a profound and lasting impact throughout a child's life. The brain develops rapidly in the first three years of life and is extremely vulnerable to both positive and negative influences. Quality environments, nourishing relationships and positive early experiences, both in and outside of the home, are crucial to optimal brain development. All Australian children should have access to quality early learning and care environments in the first five years of life.

A growing body of research evidence demonstrates the effectiveness of prevention, early detection and early intervention in addressing common childhood problems that carry with them an increased lifelong risk of disease, mental illness, antisocial behaviour and increased public health and welfare costs.

Children who are vulnerable or at risk – those disadvantaged or exposed to risk of abuse, neglect, violence or toxic stress – are the children who benefit the most from quality early learning, but they are also the children least likely to participate. The Productivity Commission's draft report recommendations designed to address the needs of this group are welcome, however the execution of the Special Early Care and Learning Subsidy (SECLS) in the context of existing policies and systems will be critical in maximising the participation of children at risk in early childhood education and care.

The Centre for Community Child Health commends to the Productivity Commission Inquiry on Childcare and Early Childhood Learning the establishment of a task force to consider how to facilitate the participation of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families in high quality early childhood education and care services, and how to optimise the outcomes of the SECLS.

Quality early learning environments need to be universally accessible to all, and in particular to vulnerable children and families, to support Australia's future social and economic prosperity.

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