

New Families Package is the beginning of welcome reform

Victoria's largest not-for-profit early childhood education and care provider, ECMS, applauds the Federal Government's increased investment in early childhood education and care announced in the Families Package.

"This is a major reform and is definitely heading in the right direction. An investment in our social capital and economic development is good for children, good for families, and good for the economy in the short and the long term," explains ECMS Chief Executive Officer, Bernie Nott.

"We appreciate the government's intent to encourage more parents to return to work and see clear economic benefits for the nation. We also see incredible benefit to the children who are therefore exposed to quality early childhood education. For us, this is not only about caring for children and supporting families, it's also about amplifying children's learning and development."

"The new subsidy system targeted towards low and middle income families is a big step towards improving access and affordability for families, while also making it easier for parents to navigate and understand their options."

A child's early learning experiences have lifelong effects on their later achievement, social adjustment, mental and physical health and life expectancyⁱ. Attendance at high quality early childhood services has a positive impact on children's cognitive development and learning, both in the short and the long termⁱⁱ. The positive impact of early childhood education and care is multiplied when provided to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

"Inclusion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds in quality early childhood education improves life chances for children who have the odds stacked against them," says Bernie. "We warmly welcome the announcement of the Child Care Safety Net with increased funding of programs for children with additional needs and those children who are at-risk. This will increase their chances of contributing to a more prosperous society," explains Bernie.

ECMS believes that all children should have access to two days of early childhood education regardless of their family situation. "It concerns us that children from low income and disadvantaged backgrounds will have their access to early learning cut under the proposed package," says Bernie.

In a recent longitudinal study conducted in Jamaica, Heckman et al found that extremely disadvantaged children who received a quality early childhood education intervention in 1984-1986 earned 25% more as adults than disadvantaged children who received no treatment—and they earned as much as their more advantaged peers.ⁱⁱⁱ

Bernie continues, "Many of our OECD partners are recognising the short term and long run benefits of investing in early childhood education and are expanding access to realise

those benefits. While the package represents a significant and welcome reform, there is more work to be done.”

“We look forward to working with government to develop inclusive and responsive early childhood education services that realise the benefits of these significant and welcome reforms.”

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About ECMS:

ECMS is a not-for-profit community enterprise providing quality early childhood education and care for children, families and communities in 73 services across Melbourne. Our services touch the lives of approximately 6500 children and families in many varied and diverse communities each week.

ⁱ Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2010; Field, 2010; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Shonkoff et al., 2009.

ⁱⁱ Apps et al., 2012; Barnett et al., 2004; Boyd et al., 2005; Doherty, 2007; Early Childhood Knowledge Centre, 2006; Elliott, 2006; Gormley, 2007; Howes et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2008; Phillips & Lowenstein, 2011; Sammons, 2010; Sammons et al., 2007, 2013; Sylva et al., 2010; Vandell et al., 2010; Work and Family Policy Roundtable, 2006.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gertler, Paul, James Heckman, Rodrigo Pinto, Arianna Zanolini, Christel Vermeersch, Susan Walker, Susan M. Chang, Sally Grantham-McGregor. “Labor market returns to an early childhood stimulation intervention in Jamaica.” *Science* 344.6187 (2014): 998-1001.

