

# States, territories call for long-term funding for 3yo early childhood education <sup>[1]</sup>

Every Australian three-year-old child would have access to 15 hours per week of early childhood education under a bold pitch from state governments to boost the sector.

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

A review, commissioned by state and territory governments, also wants child care to have a greater emphasis on education and to have the area better incorporated into education policy.

The Lifting Our Game report, which includes talks with the second Gonski schools review, is set to be released today. In it, the report highlights that the commonwealth's current significant investment in early childhood education is "predominantly directed to facilitate parental workforce participation."

"The review considers this to be a missed opportunity," the report said.

"It is possible to reap a double dividend from this investment, to support a child's learning and development as well as a parent's workforce participation."

Australia is well below the OECD average in terms of investment in early childhood education as well as the number of young children who access pre-school education.

State governments, including Victoria, will use the report to put a case for a long-term agreement and commitment to funding from the commonwealth, rather than short-term packages.

Victoria's Minister for Early Childhood Education, Jenny Mikakos, said the current funding agreement with the Turnbull Government ended this year and there was a high level of uncertainty in the sector about future funding.

Every Victorian four-year-old is eligible for 15 hours per kindergarten a week, with the State Government paying for 10 hours and the Federal Government five.

Early childhood education an 'investment'

With students falling behind or at best stagnating in Australia, the report cites evidence that greater early childhood education improves results in the long term.

"Quality early childhood education and care is best considered as an investment, not a cost," the report said.

The report said many studies have shown that investing in early childhood education provides a return of two to four times the cost.

While conceding that the roll-out of 600 hours each year for three-year-olds will take some time, the report stresses that the reform is well backed by evidence from overseas.

"Almost every other developed nation in the world has come to the same conclusions — almost all invest more than Australian Governments do and provide at least two years of early childhood education. The case for investment is strong," the report said.

The Victorian Government supports the move for more three-year-olds to get more access.

Ms Mikakos said the report confirmed the Victorian Government's policy to invest in early childhood education.

"It's time Malcolm Turnbull backs the report's recommendations and locks in adequate and permanent funding for early childhood education," she said.

"If Turnbull refuses — it not only hurts our kids, but it could also result in Victorian parents paying an extra \$2,000 a year for alternative childcare arrangements."

Among the report's other recommendations were an increase in funding to OECD averages and to boost awareness among parents of the importance of preschool education and development.

-reprinted from ABC News

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