



## 2019 Federal Election Survey

### ALP response to early childhood education and care peak bodies

1. **All children have access to affordable, high quality play based early learning for at least two days per week in the two years before formal schooling, in the setting that suits family needs**
  - a. **Secure and adequate long-term funding for four-year-old children in the year before school to access at least two days of an affordable, quality early learning preschool program delivered by a degree qualified teacher;**
  - b. **Extend adequate, long term funding to cover two years of early learning before school to ensure all three-year-old children have access to at least two days a week of an affordable, quality early learning preschool program delivered by a degree qualified teacher;**
  - c. **Address barriers to accessing quality early learning preschool programs (both cost and non-cost) to increase participation for children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage; and**
  - d. **Ensure the delivery of two years of quality early learning preschool is developed in close consultation with the sector and supported by a needs-based infrastructure program, sufficient preschool program places and sufficient supply of qualified teachers and educators in all service types.**

Labor knows how important it is to give every Australian child the best possible start to life. That's why we have a plan to build a world-class early education and care system.

Our plan will:

- Lower the costs of care for families and control fees.
- Expand access to early learning.
- Build a stronger early educator workforce.

Labor has a proud legacy in early childhood education and care. Labor introduced the universal access to preschool program in 2009, which has over the past decade resulted in between 93-95 per cent enrolment of 4-year-olds. We have always supported investing in the education of our youngest minds. Now we are taking the next step. We've talked with the experts and looked at the evidence, and it is clear that two years of quality early learning is vital for driving better educational, social, health and economic outcomes.

Labor's \$1.75 billion National Preschool and Kindy Program commits permanent, ongoing funding to the existing universal access program for 4-year-olds. We will lock the funding into the budget and provide certainty to parents, educators, and providers – something the Liberals simply refuse to do. We will also extend the program to 3-year-olds for the first time – locking in two years of preschool.

We will expect the states and territories to match our commitment and will expect them to meet enrolment and attendance targets, particularly for Indigenous and vulnerable children. If they don't, they will be penalised funding.

Labor will demand that Commonwealth funding directly supports the delivery of this program or is used to ensure fees are kept as low as possible. We will not accept cost being a barrier to participation in the program.

The program will be delivered across government and community run preschools and kindies, and long day care centres. Parents and carers will be free to choose the setting that best suits their needs.

Labor has also announced it will deliver massive cost of living relief for families struggling with the costs of early education and child care. We will invest an additional \$4 billion to increase the child care subsidy for all working families under \$174,000 from July next year. This will help 887,000 families across Australia with the costs of early education and care.

With Labor's plan for cheaper early education and care:

- Families with kids under five years old on incomes of up to \$174,000 will be, on average, \$26 a week - \$1,200 a year – better off per child.
- The vast majority of families earning up to \$69,000 will get their child care absolutely free – saving them up to \$2,100 per child per year.

Labor's plan is the biggest single investment in early childhood education in Australian history, and it will help expand access to quality, affordable early learning for children.

**2. Ensure that children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage are able to fully participate in early learning and receive the support that they need.**

- a. Additional fee subsidies beyond the current Child Care Subsidy for low income families and other equity families to attend quality early learning programs to ensure that cost is not a barrier to participation.**
- b. Reinstate the Priority of Access guideline and address barriers of entry to children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage from accessing and fully participating in early learning by giving the child and their family the support that they need.**
- c. Funding for specific initiatives to encourage children to attend early learning programs such as community outreach workers, buses and alternative models of delivery in disadvantaged areas with low participation in early learning.**
- d. Simplifying the application process for the Inclusion Support Subsidy to ensure children who need support receive it as early as possible.**

Unfortunately, the Liberal Government has made a number of changes that reduce access to early learning. The new child care system leaves one in four families worse off. It cuts support for early education of some of Australia's most vulnerable children in half. It will cost families as much as \$5,300 a year to replace the day of early learning their children will lose because of the new activity test.

Labor has announced that we will review the impact of the new system on low income and vulnerable families. This will include looking at the new red tape and activity test that vulnerable families are now required to pass in order to access early learning and care. Reports have suggested the number of these families in the system has fallen. We don't want these children slipping through the cracks. Our review will include looking at the application process for the additional child care and inclusion support subsidies.

At the same time, Labor is working to support low income and vulnerable families access early education and care. Our National Preschools and Kindy program policy will provide subsidised access to 15 hours of preschool and kindy for 3 and 4-year-olds from 2021. This will ensure every child will have access to affordable early learning in the vital two years before formal schooling starts. An important element to this policy is that it abolishes the activity test for 18 hours a week for 3-year-olds so that all 3-year-olds, regardless of their family's income or activity level, can access a preschool program.

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**3. Develop, implement and evaluate a strategic vision and action plan to implement a ten-year National Early Childhood Education Workforce Strategy (2019-2029) that builds a stable quality early years workforce.**

- a. Work with states and territories through COAG to develop a comprehensive national workforce strategy ensuring all levels of government commit to appropriate funding to achieve the agreed strategic plan.**
- b. Offer ongoing professional development and scholarships to upskill qualifications accessible by all teachers and educators.**
- c. Develop specific policy initiatives to increase the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and provide additional professional development for existing Indigenous teachers and educators.**
- d. Support moves to National Teacher Registration ensuring early childhood teaching degree qualifications and experience are recognised regardless of workplace setting or the age of children they work with.**

Labor has a history of supporting the early childhood education workforce. We introduced the Early Childhood Workforce Strategy in 2012, which expired in 2016. The Liberal Government has let the strategy lapse and neglected to develop a new one. The Liberals also abolished the Long Day Care Professional Development Program and the funding for the Professional Support Coordinators. This is shocking neglect when the government knows we will need an additional 36,000 early childhood teachers over the next five years.

Labor will sit down with early educators, their representatives, the sector and the states and territories to develop a new workforce strategy. We know there will be a shortage of educators over the coming years, and the current government has no plans in place to deal with this shortage. Labor has already announced it will provide 10,000 fee-free TAFE places for early education to help develop the next generation of educators as the first step in developing a new strategy. 200 of these places will be reserved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Labor also knows that quality early education and care can only be provided by a skilled, professional and well-paid workforce.

Labor will ensure Australia's early childhood educators are better paid by delivering a pay increase of 20 per cent over 8 years. This is in addition to any wage increases made by the Fair Work Commission as part of their annual wage review, or any additional increases in wages employers agree with their workers.

We know families are paying enough, and that providers are doing their best to keep fees as low as possible. That's why we will fully fund the pay rise – parents and providers are not being asked to pay for the pay rise.

Labor will sit down with the sector – educators, their representatives, employers and providers to determine the mechanism and schedule for delivering the pay rise in a way that ensures early educators get every cent, and fees are not increased. We will also establish an audit process to ensure educators are getting their extra pay in full.

#### **4. Continued support to raise the quality of early learning and early childhood policies**

- a. Provide ongoing support for the implementation of the National Quality Framework and ensure adequate funding for implementation and administration to maintain a national quality system and quality standards in early childhood education.**
- b. Ensure that the regulatory regime supports high quality practice without imposing unnecessary regulatory burdens on families, educators or providers.**
- c. Work in partnership with the sector to improve quality program delivery in early childhood education.**
- d. Invest in ongoing research on the impact of early learning to inform both policy and practice.**

Labor introduced the National Quality Framework (NQF) in 2009 to lift quality throughout the sector and boost educational outcomes. The NQF is a success story and one of the foundations for Australia's high-quality early childhood education and care sector. At 30 June 2018, almost 78 per cent of services that have received an assessment under the NQF achieved the National Quality Standards – up from 73 per cent the year before. It is a disgrace the Morrison Government slashed its funding for the NQF in last year's budget.

Labor will restore the \$20 million the Liberals cut. We will work with the states and territories and the sector to improve the delivery of the NQF and support high-quality practice.

## **5. Improve Child Care Subsidy to support all children to access early learning**

- a. Fix the activity test to ensure all children can access at least two full days regardless of their parent's work activity.**
- b. Fix the Additional Child Care Subsidy to provide a more timely, equitable and effective safety net for children at risk, single parents, and grandparents.**
- c. Review the subsidy settings, rates, rate caps and processes to ensure that access to early learning and care remains affordable and compliance costs are kept to the minimum necessary.**

Labor wants to expand access to early learning. It is unfortunate the Liberal Government has made a number of changes that reduce access to early learning and overseen a 28 per cent increase in child care fees on their watch. The new child care system leaves one in four families worse off. It cuts support for early education of some of Australia's most vulnerable children in half. It will cost as much as \$5,300 a year to replace the day of early learning their children will lose because of the new activity test.

That's why Labor has announced that we will review the impact of the new system on low income and vulnerable families. This will include looking at the new red tape and activity test that vulnerable families are now required to pass in order to access early learning and care. Reports have suggested the number of these families in the system has fallen. We don't want these children slipping through the cracks. Our review will include looking at the application process for the additional child care and inclusion support subsidies.

Labor's has a plan to expand access to quality early learning. Our National Preschools and Kindy program policy will provide subsidised access to 15 hours of preschool and kindy for 3 and 4-year-olds from 2021. This will ensure every child will have access to affordable early learning in the vital two years before formal schooling starts. An important element to this policy is that it abolishes the activity test for 18 hours a week for 3-year-olds so that all 3-year-olds can access a preschool program.

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