

FACT SHEET

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

The Early Childhood Education National Partnership will deliver the provision of universal access to early childhood education.

What is the content of the National Partnership Agreement?

The Early Childhood Education National Partnership aims to support universal access to quality early childhood education whereby every child in the year before school has access to a pre-school program delivered:

- in the 12 months prior to full-time schooling;
- by a four-year university qualified early childhood teacher;
- for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year;
- across a diversity of settings;
- in a form that meets the needs of parents; and
- at a cost that does not present a barrier to access.

What will the impact of the Agreement be?

For the first time the Commonwealth will be making a major investment in early childhood education for all Australian children (\$970 million in Commonwealth funding, over five years to 2012-13) and the States and Territories (the States) have committed to achieving universal access to early childhood education for all children in the year before school by 2013. Starting with \$40 million in 2008-09, this funding is to increase progressively over the life of the National Partnership to \$450 million in 2012-13.

The \$970 million includes funding of \$15 million over five years to support data development and evaluation.

The distribution of funding across the States in the first four years will have an emphasis on assisting those jurisdictions that are further behind in the delivery of pre-school services. Funding from the final year will be on a four-year old population basis.

The Early Childhood Education National Partnership provides for a comprehensive, national approach to pre-school, and is closely linked to other elements of the Commonwealth's early childhood reform agenda, including the development of a national Early Years Learning Framework, workforce reforms and the development of a national early childhood education and care quality framework.

What will change?

By 2013 all Australian families will have access to a quality early childhood education. Attendance will not be compulsory. In order to meet the needs of working families, quality early learning programs will be delivered in a range of settings including child care.

COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS

FACT SHEET

A key national objective is to ensure access to quality early childhood education programs for all Indigenous four-year olds in remote communities. The National Partnership funding and associated State action plans will be a major factor in achieving this goal, together with linked initiatives, including the previously agreed Indigenous Early Childhood Development National Partnership.

The States are responsible for ensuring the delivery of pre-school education. Existing arrangements for the regulation, funding and delivery of early childhood education and child care services differ in each State. Therefore, a number of different approaches will be taken to ensure better access and greater participation, including addressing barriers such as distance, cost, cultural appropriateness and convenience for working families.

What are the benefits that will flow from the Agreement?

Research shows that participating in a quality early childhood education program can significantly increase positive educational and life outcomes for children, especially those from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

The number of children with access to early childhood education in the year before full-time schooling will increase progressively towards the COAG goal of universal access by 2013.

Current estimates are that around 20 per cent of four-year olds are not participating in pre-school programs in Australia. Most of those who do attend pre-school programs do so for less than 15 hours a week, and some programs are not delivered by an appropriately qualified early childhood teacher. Many of the children who miss out on pre-school programs are those who are most disadvantaged, including Indigenous children and those in rural and remote locations.

When will the changes take effect?

The timing and mechanisms for delivery of universal access are being developed together with State governments. Because of the different systems and approaches across the country, each State will be implementing tailored, agreed action plans, with an initial focus on 2009 and 2010.

The Commonwealth invested \$10 million in 2007-08 in innovative projects to support the Universal Access initiative, in all States. The projects that have been funded are intended to improve access to early childhood education and learning programs immediately.

FACT SHEET

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. How will COAG ensure that quality pre-school education is delivered?

The Commonwealth has committed \$22.2 million over four years to develop a National Quality Framework, including rigorous new national quality standards for child care and pre-school and a ratings system.

The Commonwealth is working with State governments, as well as childhood experts and educators, to develop a customised framework. Emphasis will be placed on play-based learning, relationships between staff and children, family engagement, and social development. The framework will underpin universal access to early childhood education and will ensure quality and national consistency in the delivery of early childhood education.

2. How can non-government organisations become involved?

A national roundtable consultation with non-government stakeholders was held in Canberra on 16 October 2008. A series of State roundtable consultations will be held between December 2008 and February 2009. Implementation of universal access within each State and Territory strategies will require the close involvement of non-government schools, pre-schools and child care providers as progress is made towards the 2013 objective for universal access.