

In a rapidly changing world, every Australian child must be given the very best start in life. We all recognise the critical importance of early childhood education to our children's development and life opportunities.

It is therefore of great concern that Australia has no national plan for preschool education. As educators and parents, we are worried about the Australian children who are missing out on this vital opportunity. As a nation, we must ensure that preschool education gets the national attention it needs and deserves. We ask you to consider that:

1. A quality preschool education provides lasting benefits for children's development and futures.
2. Children in different parts of the country do not get equal access to quality public preschool education, which is increasingly under-resourced.
3. This Commonwealth Government denies responsibility for ensuring that all Australian children can access quality public preschool education. So did the last Labor Government.
4. There is an urgent need for a new vision – and national plan – for preschool education for all Australian children.

## **The lasting benefits of preschool education**

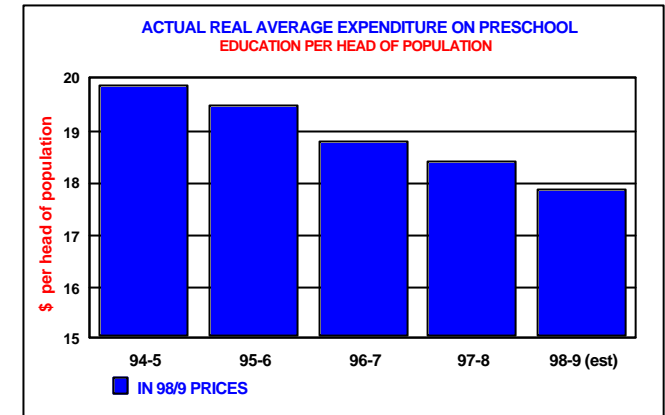
Quality preschool education is important in its own right. It also sets the foundations for children's intellectual, physical, social, emotional and language development.

Numerous studies *“have repeatedly demonstrated that quality early education, and intervention where children experience disadvantage or disability, has a measurable impact upon their intellectual performance upon entry to school, their social achievements, self esteem and task orientation”*. (Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee, 1996, *childhood matters, The report on the inquiry into early childhood education*, p. 138).

The benefits of preschool education can be long-lasting, through a reduced likelihood of school failure and increased chances of employment and higher living standards on leaving school.

Research has shown that for every dollar invested in an excellent preschool program for disadvantaged children, society received a return of \$7.16 by the time the children were 27 years old.

## **Investment in preschool education is falling**



Many states and territories have been reducing preschool education resources.

Commonwealth Grants Commission estimates for 1994-5 to 1998-9 show a fall of about 10.1% in real terms in preschool expenditure per head of population.

## **Australian children do not have equal access**

Because preschool education is left to the states and territories, children's access to quality public preschool education depends on where they live.

In some states and territories, preschool education is provided free by the public education system, often part of or linked to schools. In others, parents have to pay an average of \$18.60 a week for ten hours, to give their children the same experience.

There are no consistent national figures on how many children miss out on a preschool education, but we do know that it numbers tens of thousands of Australian children.

Children who are disadvantaged are more likely to miss out. And not all preschool education is provided by qualified early childhood education teachers.

### **No Commonwealth contribution**

**T**he Commonwealth Government plays an important role in funding all other sectors of education but takes no responsibility for preschool education.

The Commonwealth used to make a substantial contribution to preschool funding. Previous Liberal/National Governments began to reduce this effort and a Labor Government abolished Commonwealth funding support for preschool education in 1985.

## **What you can do**

**P**lease contact your politicians and help us to convince them that:

1. All Australian children must have fair and equitable access to a high quality, public preschool education for *at least* one year prior to going to school.
2. We need a national plan to make that vision a reality, including goals, standards, and frameworks for policy and funding.
3. The Commonwealth Government, in partnership with the states and territories, must take a responsibility for funding and planning public preschool education accessible to all Australian children.

**For further information or to offer your support please contact the AEU:**

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**For our children's sake:  
we need a national vision for preschool education**

