

Labor

MICHAEL DALEY & LABOR

Labor's plan for early childhood education

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Background

Every child deserves the best start in life

The education a child receives in their early years can benefit them throughout their life:

- Around 85 to 90 per cent of a child's brain development occurs in their first five years of life; and
- The way a child's brain develops in their first 1,000 days has been shown to affect events which will occur later in life, include the development of health conditions as an adult.¹

Every \$1 invested by governments in early childhood education ultimately saves taxpayers between \$2 and \$4 over time. This occurs by reducing the need to address problems associated with social disadvantage later in a person's life.²

Early childhood education in NSW is primarily delivered by:

- Community preschools, which are primarily not-for-profit organisations that generally operate between school hours; and
- Long day care centres, which are a mix of not-for-profit and for-profit providers that generally operate between 6:00am and 6:00pm.

In NSW there are approximately:

- 3,000 long day care centres; and
- 800 preschools.³



Labor's plan

Labor will make the largest investment in early childhood education in the history of NSW

To ensure every child has the best start in life, Labor will make the largest investment in early childhood education in the history of NSW.

This record investment will be delivered through a partnership between a NSW Labor Government led by Michael Daley and a Federal Labor Government led by Bill Shorten.

Over the forward estimates:

- A Shorten Labor Government will invest a total of \$449 million; and
- A Daley Labor Government will invest at total of \$90 million.

This combined investment will help to:

- Increase the availability of early childhood education;
- Improve the quality of early childhood education;
- Reduce fees paid by parents;
- Deliver new early intervention initiatives; and
- Develop and retain high skilled educators in the early childhood education workforce.

Key elements of Labor's Plan

Michael Daley and Labor will:

1. Increase funding for 3 year-old children in community preschools;
2. Provide funding for 3 year-old children who attend long day care services;
3. Double current state funding provided for children who attend long day care services;
4. Invest \$292 million to establish a new *Little Kids Big Futures* fund;
5. Invest \$18 million to trial Specialist Early Interventions;
6. Invest \$10 million for an Early Education Professional Development program;
7. Invest \$15 million to provide capital grants; and
8. Invest \$4 million to increase the number of staff who provide assessments and ratings.

Labor will increase funding for 3 year-olds in community preschools

Around 68 per cent of 3 year-old children in OECD countries receive the benefits of early childhood education.

However, only 15 per cent of Australian 3 year-old children participate in early childhood education.⁴

In the 2018-19 State Budget, the Liberals and Nationals announced they would provide funding for 3 year-old children who attend community preschools.⁵

However, it was later revealed:

- This funding would only be provided at 25 per cent of the rate provided for 4 year-old children; and
- The funding rate for 3 year-olds would incrementally rise to 50 per cent of the funding rate for 4 year-olds by 2022.⁶

A Daley Labor Government will immediately increase the rate of funding for 3 year-old children in community preschools to 50 per cent of the rate provided for 4 year-olds.

Labor's investment will:

- Double the current rate of funding for 3 year-old children in children in community preschools; and
- Bring forward the planned '50 per cent' funding rate for 3 year-olds from 2022 to 2019.

Labor will increase funding for children in long day care centres

There has been a historical distinction between community preschools and long day care centres.⁷

This distinction is out-of-date, because both community preschools and long day care centres now provide early childhood education.

Since 2009, there have been reforms to remove this distinction. While these reforms have delivered a single regulatory framework for the early childhood education sector, funding arrangements remain separate and complex.⁸

A Daley Labor Government will:

- Double the existing funding provided for children attending long day care centres; and
- Provide funding for 3 year-olds attending long day care centres for the first time.

Labor's investment will mean the NSW Government will provide around \$1,000 for each child attending a long day care centre.

Labor's investment will:

- Help long day care centres deliver quality services; and
- Help reduce fees paid by parents.



Labor will establish a \$292 million *Little Kids Big Futures* fund

Labor will invest \$292 million to establish a new *Little Kids Big Futures* fund.

The *Little Kids Big Futures* fund will ensure all 3 year-old and 4 year-old children in NSW have the opportunity to receive the benefits of early childhood education.

Labor will allocate funds from *Little Kids Big Futures* to initiatives which are supported by:

- Research regarding the benefits of early childhood education; and
- The advice of the early childhood education sector in NSW.

Some of the initiatives which may be funded by *Little Kids Big Futures* include:

- Short-term operational subsidies for emerging services in areas with critical service gaps;
- Additional measures to assist children who live in low socio-economic status areas to access early childhood education;
- Support for mobile preschools servicing rural and remote areas; and
- Supporting Playgroups NSW services as a pathway to preschool.

Labor will invest \$18 million to establish a Specialist Early Intervention trial program

Early childhood education services play an important role in the early identification of learning difficulties, disabilities and health issues.

Research from the United Kingdom has shown early intervention in preschool significantly reduces the number of children who develop learning difficulties by the time they start primary school.⁹

To support and expand the work of early childhood education services, Labor will invest \$18 million to establish a Specialist Early Intervention trial program.

The Specialist Early Intervention trial program will develop collaborations between early childhood education services and allied health professionals, such as occupational therapists, speech pathologists and psychologists.

The Specialist Early Intervention trial program will aim to:

- Identify children requiring extra assistance at the earliest possible time; and
- Provide those children and their parents with personalised support services.



Labor will invest \$10 million to support teachers and educators

A study in 2016 found one in five early childhood educators planned to leave the profession in the next 12 months.¹⁰

One reason cited by educators for wishing to leave was they feel their profession is undervalued.

Labor will invest \$10 million to establish an Early Education Professional Development program. This program will:

- Support teachers and educators by providing professional development opportunities;
- Help teachers and educators to develop their skills;
- Recognise the value of the early childhood education profession; and
- Help to retain teachers and educators in the early childhood education sector workforce.

Labor will invest \$15 million to provide capital grants

Labor will invest \$15 million to provide capital grants for the early childhood education services.

This funding will help services invest in new facilities in order to expand and address unmet demand.

Labor will invest \$4 million to boost assessments and ratings

The NSW Department of Education is responsible for assessing and rating early childhood education services under the National Quality Framework.

The Department of Education only assessed and rated 26 per cent of services in 2017.¹¹ Some services have had to wait more than five years to be assessed and rated.¹²

Labor will invest \$4 million to increase the number of staff at the Department of Education available to assess and rate early childhood education services.

Labor will review existing tender processes

Labor will review existing tender processes for:

- Before-and-after-school care services; and
- Mobile preschool services.

Labor will ensure these processes appropriately value the quality of care provided when tenders are evaluated.

Labor will establish a Ministerial Advisory Panel

Labor will establish a Ministerial Advisory Panel for early childhood education.

The Ministerial Advisory Panel will:

- Provide advice to the Minister for Early Childhood Education;
- Assist the Minister to develop and implement new initiatives, such as the \$292 million *Little Kids Big Futures* fund; and
- Assist the NSW Government to develop and implement a long-term road-map for the early childhood education sector.

The Ministerial Advisory Panel will include a broad range of representatives from across the early childhood education sector, including:

- Representatives from service providers;
- Representatives for parents;
- Representatives for teachers and staff;
- Academics and experts in the field of early childhood education.

The Ministerial Advisory Panel will meet at least once every three months.

Labor will develop a long-term road-map for early childhood education

Labor will deliver a long-term road-map for early childhood education in NSW.

Labor will develop the road-map in consultation with the early childhood education sector.

The road-map will:

- Allow stakeholders from across the early childhood education sector to contribute to long-term decision-making;
- Provide a guide for the implementation of future reforms and initiatives; and
- Allow reforms and new initiatives to be implemented in a manner which provides stability and predictability for the sector on a long-term basis.

The process to formulate the road-map will be initiated within the first 12 months of Labor forming government.

Labor will make the largest investment in early childhood education in NSW history.

References

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- 5 Budget Paper Number 3 (Budget Estimates), NSW State Budget, p. 1-5
- 6 2019 Funding Subsidy Update, NSW Department of Education, 13 September 2018
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- 10 One in five early childhood educators plan to leave the profession, The Conversation, 23 June 2016
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- 12 National Registers Data, Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority.

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