

**MEDIA RELEASE – 13 July 2017**

**Australia needs to pull its socks up when it comes to early learning**

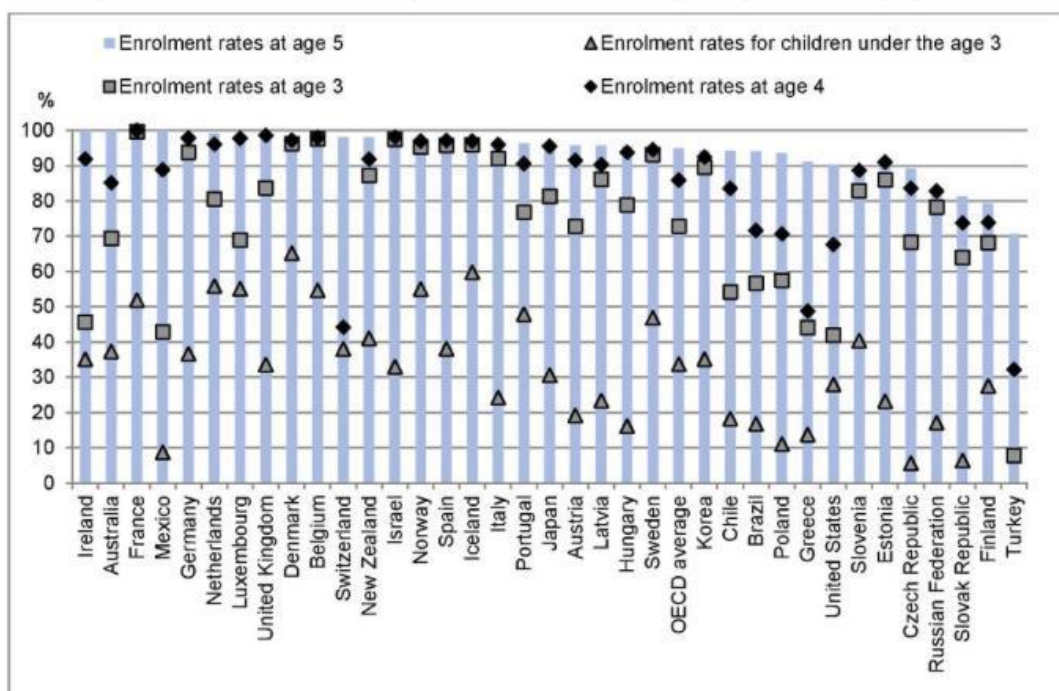
New OECD benchmarks place Australia well behind other nations in key areas of Early Childhood Education and Care

**Sydney:** The OECD’s Starting Strong 2017: Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care report<sup>1</sup> has been released, and the picture isn’t pretty for Australia.

Australia is below the OECD average when it comes to enrolment rates for three- and four-year-olds, and it ranks 30th out of 35 countries when it comes to spending on early childhood as a percentage of the GDP.

With a clear move internationally towards access to two years of preschool, president of Australian Childcare Alliance (NSW) Lyn Connolly warns that Australia is falling behind and leaving tomorrow’s workforce poorly equipped to compete in a globalised job market.

**Figure 1.3. Enrolment rates in early childhood education and primary education, by age (2014)<sup>1</sup>**



1. Children under the age of 3 are enrolled in formal childcare (ISCED 0 and other registered ECEC services); children at ages 4 and 5 can already be enrolled in primary education in a small group of countries.

Sources: OECD (2017c), OECD Family Database, OECD, Paris, <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm> and OECD (2016), Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/cag-2016-cn>.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.keeper.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/starting-strong-2017\\_9789264276116-en#.WWLZ4Hdh0-U#page1](http://www.keeper.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/starting-strong-2017_9789264276116-en#.WWLZ4Hdh0-U#page1)

“The number of years a child is enrolled in early childhood education and care (ECEC) has been proven to have a formative impact on their later life. Data from the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015 demonstrates that kids who attended at least two years of early childhood education typically performed better than others at age 15.

“Despite this, under the Jobs for Families Package, Australia only offers a meagre 12 hours of early childhood education and care a week in the year before primary school – and some children will not be offered any hours of early childhood education at all.

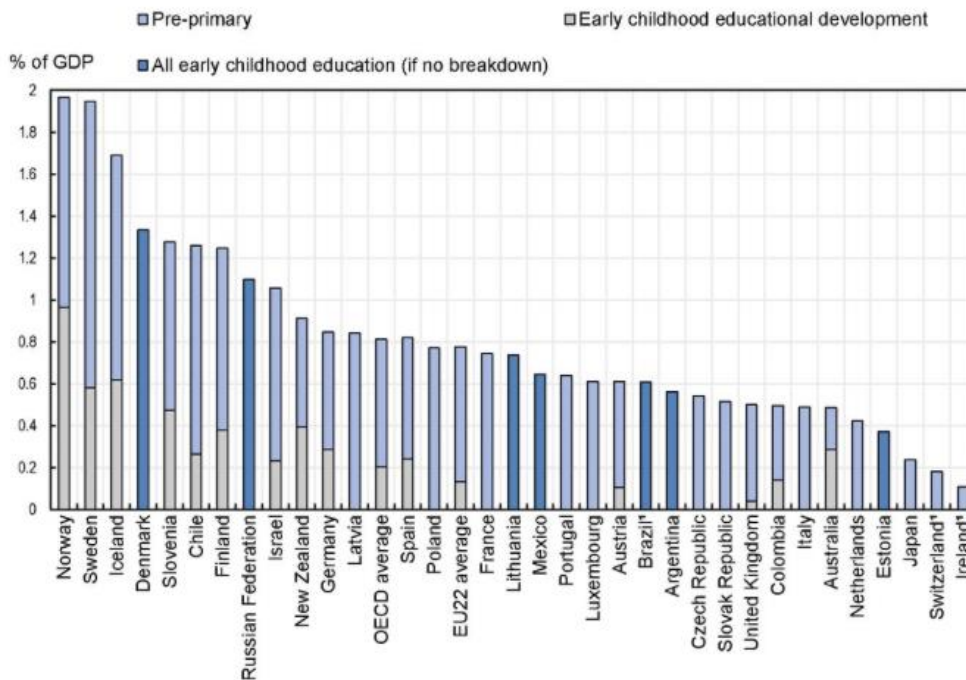
“We need to be doing better for our kids; every child has a right to an early childhood education to set them up for success,” said Ms Connolly.

The key to bringing Australia in line with OECD benchmarks is greater government funding to ensure all children are funded for 30 hours of early childhood education per week. With many families finding early childhood education and care too expensive, allocating more government funds in this area will help Australian households that are already shouldering record debt levels and stagnant wage growth.

Currently, the Australian government is only spending half a percent of the GDP on early childhood education and care – or a fraction of its expenditure on other education sectors. This is in stark contrast to the OECD average of 0.8%, while countries such as Chile, Denmark, Finland, Norway, the Russian Federation, and Sweden all spend more than 1% of the GDP on ECEC.

Even New Zealand is doing better, spending 0.9% of the GDP on ECEC per year.

**Figure 3.2. Expenditure on early childhood education and care (ISCED 0) as a percentage of GDP, public and private settings (2013)**



Note: Countries are ranked in descending order of public and private expenditure on educational institutions (2013).

1. Public institutions only.

Source: OECD (2016), Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators, Table C2.3, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2016-en>.

StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933487340>

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Centres in Australia have been left with no choice but to increase fees in order to cover the increased costs of service delivery resulting from the introduction of the new National Law and Regulations.

“With the annual cost of early childhood education and care more expensive than a private school tuition, it’s no wonder that many mothers are deferring going back to the workforce, and this is having a knock-on effect on the Australian economy,” said Ms Connolly.

Recent research by Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman<sup>2</sup> has found that every dollar spent on early childhood programs for disadvantaged children has a 13% return on investment per child, per annum through better education, economic, health and social outcomes.

“The economics add up. If the government wants to spend taxpayers’ money more effectively, it should continue to support the Hawke Government’s private-public partnership model, whereby Australian small businesses provide the infrastructure and the

<sup>2</sup> <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/invest-in-early-childhood-development-reduce-deficits-strengthen-the-economy/>

service, and the government funds the user by investing more money into long day care and early childhood education.

“Money put into ECEC will be returned in orders of magnitude to the community by way of higher wages, increased tax revenue, and reduced expenditure on school, welfare and criminal justice,” Ms Connolly said.

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Australian Childcare Alliance New South Wales ([www.nsw.childcarealliance.org.au](http://www.nsw.childcarealliance.org.au)) is the peak body for privately owned early childhood education and care services in NSW, numbering approximately 1,600 long daycare services and supporting over 100,000 families. ACA NSW provides advocacy, policy and regulatory and business support and advice, member services and professional development for members and their staff across the state.

**For further media inquiries,  
ACA NSW President Lyn Connolly on 0425 225 275.**