



Australian Council of Social Service

4 October 2019

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To whom it may concern,

Submission: Review of the Universal Access National Partnership (UANP)

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) is a national advocate for action to reduce poverty and inequality and the peak body for the community services sector in Australia. Our vision is for a fair, inclusive and sustainable Australia where all individuals and communities can participate in and benefit from social and economic life. ACOSS welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the work of the state, territory and Commonwealth Governments in this important area.

Evidence shows that a well-educated population is the key to Australia's economic productivity and social wellbeing. Access to high quality early childhood education and care plays a critical role in children's educational outcomes throughout formal schooling, including in areas such as school attendance, completion rates, behavioural outcomes in class and interest and motivation.¹

ACOSS endorses the submission of Early Childhood Australia to this process, makes the following recommendations, and wishes to highlight a number of specific issues in relation to the UANP, outlined below:

Recommendations

(a) That the UNAP be negotiated for a term of five years.

(b) To improve access to early childhood services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the following steps should be taken:

- (1) Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander three and four year olds have a minimum of three days per week of high-quality preschool with a bachelor-qualified teacher;*
- (2) Adjust the activity test within the Child Care Subsidy so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children can have up to 30 hours per week of subsidised early education and care, without parents having to meet work or study requirements;*

¹ Berlinski, S., Galliani, S. and Gertler, P. (2009), 'The effect of pre-primary education on primary school performance'. *Journal of Public Economics*, 93(1-2), 219-234; Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment (2013) 'Evaluation of the Early Years Centre initiative – Summary Report'.



- (3) *Fund a targeted program to support evidence informed, culturally safe, and well integrated early childhood and family-focused programs, across the nurturing care spectrum in early education and care services that work with high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.*

(c) That Australian governments implement universal access to 600 hours per year of a quality early childhood education program, for example preschool, for all three year olds, with access prioritised for disadvantaged children, families and communities during the roll out.

Preschool Funding Stability

The benefits for children of early childhood education are clear and well established, including developmental gains, improved health and social wellbeing outcomes and economic productivity arising from improved educational outcomes. Australia needs to build and strengthen its early childhood education system for the long term. However, UANP agreements since 2013 have been short term, creating uncertainty for parents and their children, as well as for the sector, and for state and territory governments. Providing certainty via a five year agreement would enable preschool providers to better plan their educational programs and infrastructure. Notably, schools funding is governed by a five year agreement, and it seems appropriate that this agreement should also run for a similar term.

Recommendation: That the UNAP be negotiated for a term of five years.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are supported by their families, their communities and their culture. Despite this support, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to face challenges arising from colonisation and its effects. Achieving equality means we need to dismantle the systems that perpetuate the ongoing trauma experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. SNAICC and ECA have developed a position paper - [Working Together to ensure Equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children](#)²— that outlines a way forward for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, that formed the basis of ACOSS' advocacy on these issues during the Federal Election. ACOSS endorses this paper and recommends:

Recommendation: To improve access to early childhood services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the following steps should be taken:

- (1) *Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander three and four year olds have a minimum of three days per week of high-quality preschool with a bachelor-qualified teacher;*

² SNAICC and ECA, (2019), [Working Together to ensure Equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in the early years – Positions Paper](#), SNAICC and ECA



- (2) *Adjust the activity test within the Child Care Subsidy so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children can have up to 30 hours per week of subsidised early education and care, without parents having to meet work or study requirements;*
- (3) *Fund a targeted program to support evidence informed, culturally safe, and well integrated early childhood and family-focused programs, across the nurturing care spectrum in early education and care services that work with high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.*

Preschool for three year olds

The case for expanding universal access to preschool to three year olds is compelling. The [Lifting our Game](#) report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools Through Early Childhood Interventions found that “...in terms of improving school outcomes through early childhood interventions, the evidence points to (expanding universal access to preschool to three year olds) as the single most impactful reform Australia could undertake, with international comparisons highlighting it as the biggest gap in the current system.”³ Yet currently only 15% of three year olds in Australia participate in pre-primary education, compared with the OECD average of 68.6%⁴.

There is significant evidence of the impact of a second year of preschool on a child’s development and later performance at school, and several states and territories have already extended access to preschool to three year olds in some cases (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children in contact with the child protection system, and children on low incomes). While these initiatives are welcome, they mean that a child’s access to a high quality preschool education is determined by geography and/or vulnerability. A universal, national approach, led by COAG, is necessary to ensure that the wellbeing and educational outcomes we want for all of our children are realised.

Should a staged approach to implementing universal access to preschool for all three year olds be necessary due to workforce challenges, priority should be given to parents and their children who are most likely to otherwise face barriers to accessing educational opportunities for their children—those from low income and otherwise disadvantaged families and communities.

Recommendation: That Australian governments implement universal access to 600 hours per year of a quality early childhood education program, for example preschool, for all three year olds, with access prioritised for disadvantaged children, families and communities during the roll out.

³ Pascoe, S., and Brennan, D., (2017) [Lifting our Game – Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australia Schools through Early Childhood Interventions](#). Council of Australian Governments, Melbourne p 8

⁴ ibid



If you have any questions regarding this submission, the ACOSS contact person is Senior Advisor John Mikelsons, on (02) 9310 6212 or john@acoss.org.au .

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Goldie".

Dr. Cassandra Goldie
CEO