

## **BRIEFING 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2021**

### **Three-year-old kindergarten and four-year-old kindergarten should be free**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org) states that children have the right to be active participants in all matters affecting their lives. Also, Article 29 of the Convention addresses the purposes of education which shall be directed to: “The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential”.

Research has shown that children accessing three- and four-year old kindergarten and well-structured childcare, have a head start when entering school. The National Council of Women of Victoria (NCWV) implore the State Government to support free kindergarten for all children.

#### **Background – a decade of research and improvements**

In 2019, Price Waterhouse Cooper for The Front Project, reported on the economic benefit of early childhood education, identifying \$2.34 billion in costs associated with the provision of 15 hours of early childhood education in the year-before-school, with \$4.74 billion in benefits. Some benefits are short-term (additional income and higher taxes paid by parents or carers), while other benefits are more long-term. Cognitive benefits for children can be linked to \$1.06 billion in higher earnings over a lifetime and a further \$495 million in higher taxes paid to government. <https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/images/downloads/ECO%20ANALYSIS%20Full%20Report.pdf>

The Effective Early Education Experiences for Kids (E4Kids) was Australia's largest research project into early childhood education and care, started in 2010, and conducted by the University of Melbourne and Queensland University of Technology. The 5-year study gathered data about more than 2500 children aged three and four living in Victoria and Queensland, attending early childhood services like structured day care and kindergarten, and were tracked through to Year 3 at school. They were compared to another group who did not attend formal early childhood services, to measure the effectiveness of early childhood education programs. E4Kids data showed kindergarten and preschool kids rated higher than those in long-day and family day care settings, [E4Kids overview of findings](#). The gap was significant in children's verbal and mathematical ability.

Analysis of the international assessment 'Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)' 2019, <https://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2019/>, links kindergarten attendance and numeracy skills. Australian Year 4 students were outperformed by 22 countries in mathematics. Principals from 570 Australian primary schools were surveyed about prep students literacy and numeracy skills on entry. In almost half of schools, less than 25% of students had basic skills, many principals noting low kindergarten attendance, especially from disadvantaged, rural/remote areas.

#### **Respect – skills for school and beyond**

The E4Kids and other research informed the development by the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF), [Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework: for all children from birth to eight years](#).

This stresses that the environments for children need to be dynamic and holistic to maximise their learning and development, physically, socially, intellectually and emotionally. **Respect for others and collaboration also need to be embedded.**

Children should be supported to try and test ideas, make decisions, and be challenged. Many play activities enable them to organise, self-regulate, plan, design and develop cognitively.

**These skills can take them into school and beyond.**

### **Targeted professional development supported by DET**

In the E4Kids research, children learned the most when programs were delivered by educators with good content knowledge, who facilitate learning through play activities, systematically and purposefully provide learning opportunities. Early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers, require targeted professional training in order to recognise and respond to learning opportunities.

It is pleasing to see that DET is offering scholarships and employment incentives for people looking for a career in early childhood, with a range of sholarships available: starting to study; upskilling as an educator; already studying for an early childhood teaching qualification. Incentives of between \$9,000 and \$50,000 are available to take up positions in regional areas rolling out the Three-Year-Old Kindergarten reform in 2021, which will create more than 6,000 early childhood education jobs across Victoria. [Financial support to study and work in early childhood \(education.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/financial-support-to-study-and-work-in-early-childhood).

### **The 2021 State Budget**

NCWV acknowledges and supports the recent Victorian budget commitment of **\$167.1 million** to continue the roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, supporting children to access the benefits of two years of kindergarten before school. However, this is a meer 5 hours in 2022 increasing to 15 hours a week for 40 weeks by 2029! The 'Early Start Kindergarten' program is meant to be available to children known to Child Protection. This is vital to engage these children when their brains are developing rapidly, and link them to teachers who can support them. Recent figures show that only 36% have ever attended, with 2020 Australian Bureau of Statistics data showing this is getting worse. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/preschool-education-australia/latest-release#enrolments-by-sector>. Strategies to address this need to be developed, recommended by the 'Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children' inquiry 9 years ago! <http://childprotectioninquiry.vic.gov.au/>

At the National Press Club in March 2021, Nicola Forrest said "High-quality early learning centres should be a basic human right for every single Australian kid, no matter their postcode and regardless of whether both or neither parent works. Its about consistency and equality of access." This supports the UN Convention cited earlier. The National Council of Women of Victoria (NCWV) endorses this, advocating for equal access to early education for all children **as a right**.

### **Conclusion and Request**

With research showing that children accessing three- and four-year old kindergarten and well-structured childcare, have a head start when entering the school system, and the support of this by DET in funding further early years teaching positions, **NCWV implores the State Government to provide three- and four-year old kindergarten and childcare settings with registered early years education programs for all children – free of charge - as soon as possible, not in seven years time. One strategy could be incorporating kindergartens as part of the Department of Education.**

Patron in Chief: Her Excellency the Honourable Linda Dessau AM, Governor of Victoria

Patron: The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Sally Capp