

KPV advocating on behalf of the sector

KPV presents to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG)

Last week, KPV's CEO, Emma King presented to the COAG review meetings held with Allens Consulting Group in Melbourne, regarding the impact of recent state and federal reforms on early childhood services. Emma specifically spoke about *Universal Access (15 hours or early childhood education)*.

This was timely in light of the upcoming federal election to be held on 21 August and provided an opportunity to highlight the issues facing Victorian early childhood services in the delivery of these reforms.

KPV is highly supportive of the commitment to provide all children with access to a quality early childhood education program by 2013. KPV recognises the importance of programs delivered by degree qualified early childhood teachers, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year in the year before formal schooling. Yet the recent state and federal reforms have added considerable pressure to services. KPV acknowledges the substantial budget contributions by the Victorian Government to provide additional funding to support kindergartens and we call on the Federal Government to fund the COAG reforms.

***Universal Access* is a critical step forward in recognising the extraordinary value of early childhood education. KPV recognises and supports the government for their initiative but believes that additional time, education and investment is required to ensure that the benefits are recognised by the community and to ensure implementation of high quality programs supportive by the effective management and governance of kindergartens.**

To implement the commitment to *Universal Access* services need genuine support, increased funding, additional staff, more qualified staff and additional facilities.

What are the benefits of 15 hours of kindergarten?

Research clearly shows that a child's experience in their first five years shapes their future and influences their long term learning abilities, social development, health outcomes and can set the course for the rest of their life.

The new reforms can only enhance these experiences by reinforcing a quality system that supports the critical early learning years. Accessing a quality early childhood program enhances all round development of children. Providing a more consistent approach to programs and staff qualifications can only enrich children's learning.

Now the imperative is to resource and support the sector to successfully implement these most influential reforms that will benefit our young children

Key issues raised:

- KPV recently held a seminar for parents and the managers of services to inform participants further about *Universal Access*. This was oversubscribed with a significant waiting list and KPV is running another seminar next month. The overall message KPV has received is one of frustration – essentially asking why educative and financial support is not being provided to services to assist in the implementation of *Universal Access*. It is clear that the providers of services are anxious for assistance.
- KPV believes the strong evidentiary basis for additional high quality early childhood education needs to be clearly and respectfully articulated to the early childhood sector, including staff and parents. Research demonstrates the significant advantage of access to high quality early childhood education, particularly for children who are vulnerable. However, there has been no systematic approach to educate staff, parents and managers of services. The education process is a critical step to enable the sector to understand the importance of these reforms and to embrace them.
- Cluster managers have already identified insufficient funding as a key barrier to their capacity to take on extra services and the added workload and resources required to implement the reforms.
- KPV members are concerned that an unacceptably high financial burden is being placed on parents and believes that government should fully fund access to one year of 15 hours preschool before school entry.
- The need for four year trained early childhood staff requires investment in workforce initiatives to ensure demand for extra qualified staff is met and for the upgrade of existing teacher qualifications. Within current workforce projections it is difficult to envisage that there will be an appropriate number of qualified staff to implement the reforms by 2013.
- Significant infrastructure investment is required, especially in areas where there are older stand alone kindergartens to service the community.
- There is a significant concern amongst our members that the provision of *Universal Access* will impact on the provision of three year old kindergarten and playgroups. This is a real tension within our membership and many committees of management have raised this with us.
- In Victoria there are a large number of cluster managers and volunteer committees that are struggling with the reforms and adequate timelines to support the change is essential. Parents have taken on committee roles with an altruistic view of wanting to assist their community and improve the educational outcomes of their children.