



## 2009/10 Victorian state budget submission

Kindergarten Parents Victoria urges the State Government to capitalise on its investment in early childhood to date by ensuring two years of early childhood education delivered by a degree qualified teacher is available without cost to families, for all Victorian children.

This follows recent recommendations from the OECD for Australia that Government fund two years of kindergarten for all children.<sup>1</sup> It is also consistent with large scale research which conclusively shows that preschool enhances the general development of young children and that the overall length of time spent in preschool is positively related to the intellectual development of children. Quality kindergarten and other preschool programs deliver significant benefits for all children. The benefits of preschool are especially dramatic for children from disadvantaged backgrounds<sup>2</sup>.

The economic benefits that flow from quality preschool education are equally profound. Improved outcomes for children's learning and development translate to reduced government spending later in their lives to redress educational and social disadvantage including criminal behaviour<sup>3</sup>. In the US, the Obama administration has identified the return on this investment as worth pursuing despite the difficult economic environment.

Both the Victorian and Australian Governments recognise the value of early childhood education. The Victorian Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development and a number of reforms at the national level set out an ambitious agenda to lift the participation of four year old children and vulnerable three year old children in quality early childhood education programs.

Last year the Victorian Government's "baby boom budget" recognised the need to invest, especially to help the most vulnerable children and families. This year government must go further to ensure universal access to kindergarten is a reality and to ensure adequate support is available to its partners in the delivery of this agenda, parents, parent committees and the community and local government agencies that serve as cluster managers (kindergarten group employers).

Early childhood education providers currently face significant challenges. Constraints on existing infrastructure, ongoing workforce shortages and shortfalls in the provision of support

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<sup>1</sup> OECD (2009) Economic Policy Going for Growth: Australia

<sup>2</sup> Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. & Taggart, B. (2004) *The effective provision of pre-school education (EPPE) project: Final report*, p.ii

<sup>3</sup> Schweinhart, L.J. (2005) *The High/Scope Perry preschool study through age 40: Summary, conclusions and frequently asked questions*, High/Scope Press, p. 3; Kilburn, M.R. & Karoly, L. (2008) *The economics of early childhood policy: What the dismal science has to say about investing in children*, Rand Corporation, p. 11

to vulnerable children thwart the efforts of early childhood services to provide kindergarten programs to all four year old Victorian children and vulnerable three year old children. The early childhood sector must be supported to provide fully funded services to all three and four year old children through renewed investment, including improved operational funding and capital works.

Importantly, the increasing costs of kindergarten and renewing infrastructure must not be passed on to parents. Recognising the importance of an extended period of preschool, many Victorian families shoulder the full costs of their children attending a 3 year old kindergarten program. These fees, which often exceed \$950 per year, are an unacceptable burden on families.

The 2006 *Starting Strong II* report identifies investment in early childhood education in Australia as a percentage of its gross domestic product as among the lowest in the OECD<sup>4</sup>. This has resulted in inadequate provision of early childhood services and the transference of much of the cost of early childhood education to parents. Government must fully fund two years of quality early childhood education in order that Victoria captures the extraordinary returns to the community that quality early childhood education can generate.

This submission proposes recommendations for contributing to the realisation of a stronger system of early childhood education in Victoria. Recommendations are presented under the principles KPV has identified as critical to the achievement of this vision:

- Education for life
- Universal participation
- Excellence and innovation
- A cohesive service system
- Involved community
- Responsive and flexible programs

#### **About Kindergarten Parents Victoria**

KPV promotes the voice of parents in quality early childhood education for Victorian children, serving more than 200,000 children and their families. Our membership is made up of over 1200 early education and care providers such as independent kindergartens, cluster managers, long day care services, childcare centres and local governments.

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<sup>4</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2006) *Starting Strong II: Early childhood education and care*, OECD Publishing, p. 105

Vision	Recommendation	Comments	Cost
<b>Education for life</b>	In recognition of the contribution degree qualified teachers make in promoting quality in early childhood education, the early childhood education sector is supported to increasingly place degree qualified teachers in positions of pedagogical leadership.	Degree qualified teachers make an important contribution to quality in early childhood education. Where teachers are employed in positions of pedagogical leadership, this contribution is maximised. New children's services regulations will require teachers in all child care services but not necessarily providing educational leadership for the whole service.	\$4m for degree qualified teachers to work for 2 hours per week as pedagogical leaders in children's services.
	Support the campaign for Commonwealth recognition of parents with children at kindergarten as eligible for the child care tax rebate and the child care benefit.	Unlike children in child care, children in kindergarten programs are ineligible for approved child care benefit and this inequity for parents accessing kindergarten programs should be removed. In addition, parents who meet the work test and whose children access kindergarten programs should be eligible for the child care tax rebate.	Under current arrangements, costs will sit with the Australian Government.
<b>Universally inclusive</b>	Continue to phase in fully funded four year old kindergarten, fully subsidising the contribution currently made by parent fees. In phasing in this principle of universal access to fully funded four year old kindergarten, priority should be given to subsidising parent fees in the localities of disadvantage targeted by the Universal Access to Early Childhood Education Program in 2008/09.	Two years of fully funded early childhood education will help deliver improved outcomes for all Victorian children. In recognition of the benefits of early childhood education for vulnerable children, fully funded places should be commenced in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.	\$32m to subsidise all parent fees. \$600,000 to subsidise four year old kindergarten fees for parents residing in identified localities of disadvantage.
	Building on the additional packages of support announced in the 2008/09 Budget for children with additional needs to access kindergarten, further increase packages of support available for children with additional needs in accessing kindergarten. These packages of support must reflect the true costs of attendance for the duration of the educational	KPV member consultations indicate many Victorian families miss out on support for children with additional needs to access and be supported in kindergarten programs. In addition, some families in receipt of packages of support find that the package does not adequately cover the full weekly duration of the	\$15m for 500 additional packages of support.

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	program provided by the kindergarten, if full attendance is desired by parents.	program. In these cases, children may miss out on a portion of the program or families may fund the gap.	
	Extend the eligibility criteria for children to access additional supports and resources in accessing kindergarten programs under the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Service (KISS) to include those deemed by teachers to be in need of this support.	KPV member consultations indicate that many children who might benefit from additional support in accessing kindergarten programs are currently ineligible for additional support and resources. Currently the eligibility criteria for kindergarten support are significantly more narrowly defined around high support needs than are comparable programs in child care and government schools.	\$53m per year.
	Ensure all children can access two years of kindergarten delivered by a degree-qualified teacher, beginning with children in the localities of disadvantage targeted by the Universal Access to Early Childhood Education Program in 2008/09.	Recognising the benefits of two years of quality early childhood education, government has made progress in this area with the extension of fee subsidies for many vulnerable children. To achieve the full benefits of quality early childhood education, however, all children should have access to two years of fully funded kindergarten.	\$10m for children in localities of disadvantage, including residents who do not hold a health care card, to access two years of fully funded kindergarten.
	Increase the number of Koorie preschool assistants and improve their ability to support quality programs through professional development.	Koorie preschool assistants are in a strong position to improve the accessibility and relevance of early childhood education programs for indigenous families. Increasing the number of assistants in each region will build on existing work.	\$1.08 m per year.
<b>Cohesive service system</b>	Kindergartens are funded to obtain administrative support to assist independent committees of management and avoid these costs being passed on through parent fees. Option 1: Fund kindergarten committees to access 5 hours of paid administrative support for 40 weeks per year.	The lack of funding for administrative support for independent committees of management results in volunteer committee members and teachers shouldering significant administrative responsibilities. KPV members report around a quarter of Presidents, Treasurers and a third of early childhood teachers in these settings	Option 1: \$3m per year. Option 2: \$21m per year.

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	Option 2: Fund all kindergartens to employ a part-time manager.	experience an unreasonable administrative workload.	
<b>Involved community</b>	Conduct a price review to cost the delivery of professional and sustainable cluster specifications and new cluster managers.	The funding structures underpinning cluster management require a price review. Issues for the review include existing and potential education program support, integration, inclusion, planning with local government and local communities, innovations, recruitment and due diligence.	\$250,000
<b>Excellence and innovation</b>	Establish a central long service and sick leave records register to assist in the tracking and maintenance of leave entitlements of children's services staff, including early childhood teachers.	The establishment of a central long service and sick leave register would address some governance and management issues facing kindergartens.	\$95,000 in the first year.
<b>Responsive and flexible</b>	To ensure the roll out of the Universal Access to Early Childhood Education Project and flexible models of delivery generally, continue the Children's Capital program beyond 2011 to fund renovations to existing facilities and build new children's centres.	Children's services are suffering from ageing facilities that inhibit their ability to offer flexible children's programs and additional services to complement early childhood education. This ageing infrastructure represents a constraint on the ability of children's services to extend kindergarten programs to 15 hours per week for 40 weeks per year for all Victorian children, in addition to providing 3 year old programs in order for vulnerable children to access two years of quality early childhood education.	\$38m over four years from 2011 to 2015.
	Increase the per capita grant for kindergarten places.	An increase to the per capita grant for kindergarten places will assist the sector to increase the numbers of hours taught by kindergartens by assisting with staffing and other operating costs, providing an incentive for existing services to increase their hours of service	\$46m per year.

Vision	Recommendation	Comments	Cost
	<p>Audit the support and infrastructure needs of the early childhood sector, incorporating cluster managers and independent committees of management, to facilitate the streamlined implementation of the full range of reforms proposed in early childhood education.</p>	<p>Early childhood education services will require additional support to implement wide ranging reforms in early childhood education. KPV recommends funding a project auditing the support needs of this sector in implementing the Universal Access to Early Childhood Education Project including the proposed 15 hour kindergarten programs, the National Quality Framework including the Early Years Learning Framework, the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework and the Children's Services Regulations 2009.</p>	<p>\$250,000</p>