



24 June 2016

Australian Community Children's Services
PO Box 11, Northcote Plaza
Northcote VIC 3070

Thank you for the opportunity to outline Labor's plan for early education and care in Australia.

Labor believes better early education and care is essential to a strong economy and a fair society.

Every child deserves the very best start – and that means access to affordable, quality early education and care. Early education is one of the smartest investments we can make as a nation. It helps parents return to work and sets children up for success at school and later in life.

Please find responses to the issues you have raised below.

Increased subsidy support for early education and care and ensuring all children continue to have access to two days per week of subsidised care

Labor also recognises that many families struggle with the cost of child care, which has increased by more than 20 per cent under the Abbott-Turnbull Government; who have done nothing to make child care more affordable for ordinary families in the last three years.

That is why a Shorten Labor Government will deliver an immediate increase in child care support that is fairer and will make child care more affordable for over a million families.

Our package will give parents the child care relief they need now – from 1 January 2017 – not in two years' time as announced by Liberals. Labor's plan will take pressure off the family budget and help grow the economy supporting more parents to return to work, or work more.

In government, Labor will not proceed with the Liberals' child care changes in their current form, because they will leave one in three families worse off. The impacts of the Government's proposed activity test would cut access to early education in half for many vulnerable children, and push others out of the system altogether.

By boosting the current system Labor will ensure that all children continue to have access to two days of vital early education. As part of continuing the current system, the Priority of Access criteria would be maintained.

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A Shorten Labor Government will increase assistance for families through the current system from 1 January 2017 – making sure all children continue to have access to two days (24 hours) of early education a week.

With Labor's plan:

- Low and middle income families will benefit from an increase to the Child Care Benefit of 15 per cent – an increase up to \$31 per child per week, or up to \$1,627 per year.
- The annual cap on the Child Care Rebate will be increased from \$7,500 to \$10,000 per child, leaving families up to \$2,500 per child, per year, better off.

A Shorten Labor Government, Labor will work with experts, the sector, parents and educators to examine whether it is possible to fix the problems with the Liberals' proposed changes. Labor will make sure early education and care reform gets the balance right between children's development and parents' workforce participation.

Unlike the Liberals, Labor will consult transparently and provide information about any proposals to experts, parents and the sector. There will be none of the Liberals' secrecy agreements or gag orders. Australian families expect and deserve an open and constructive policy discussion they can participate in.

To ensure the early education and care sector has a formal role in shaping future policy, Labor will re-establish the National Children's Services Forum.

Before the last election, the Liberals promised to make child care more affordable for Australian families, but they have gone a whole term in government without delivering any relief.

Increasing the availability of early education and care places

Many parents face long and frustrating waiting lists to access early education and care services – with the current arrangements limiting work options for parents. A Shorten Labor Government will also act to address the issue of waiting lists and help parents return to work faster.

To help tackle waiting lists, Labor will invest \$100 million over three years from 2017-18 so services in areas of very high demand can expand, creating more places where families need them. Community and not-for-profit services will be prioritised, along with areas where vulnerable or disadvantaged children do not have adequate access to early education.

We will also make grants of up to \$50,000 available to expand up to 1,200 Outside School Hours Care services in areas of high demand, investing \$63 million over three years from 2017-18.

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Labor's plan will also include:

- **Cracking down on unjustified price increases** – New transparency and accountability standards, along with extra powers to investigate unjustified price increases and stop price gouging.
- **Supporting flexible Family Day Care** – Investing an additional \$50 million to support improvements to the Family Day Care system, including flexible options for families and enhancing the education, investigation and compliance programs.
- **Better services for Indigenous children and children in remote areas** – Increasing support for children in Budget Base Funded Services by 15 per cent, in line with the increase to the Child Care Benefit. This will allow services to limit costs to families, expand places where needed and improve quality. Labor will also provide \$25 million for capital and quality improvements at Indigenous Budget Base Funded services and commit \$6 million to expanding mobile services into areas that do not currently have access to early education. Labor will also provide \$57 million so Indigenous Children and Family Centres can continue to operate, expand the number of places and provide more wrap-around services.
- **Valuing our early education workforce** - \$150 million investment towards developing the early education workforce – developing a new Early Years' Workforce Strategy and establishing a national Educator Professional Development Program. This will support the continued implementation of the National Quality Framework. Importantly, Labor will also make submissions to the Fair Work Commission proceedings in support of professional wages for early childhood educators.

Supporting a professional early education and care workforce

A Shorten Labor Government will urgently develop a new Early Years Workforce Strategy, which will:

- Value early childhood educators and their work.
- Support increased professionalism of the workforce.
- Enable the full implementation of the National Quality Framework.
- Treat the development of the early childhood workforce as seriously as the school workforce.

The strategy will be developed taking into account the results of the latest Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census and in partnership with educators, experts and the sector.

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A fair Paid Parental Leave scheme

In 2011, Labor delivered Australia's first national Paid Parental Leave scheme. Since then, more than 730,000 families have been given extra support to spend more time at home in the critical early months of their child's life.

Last year on Mother's Day – the Abbott-Turnbull Government announced huge cuts to Labor's Paid Parental Leave scheme, which would force parents to choose between returning to work early and missing out on time with their newborn, or staying at home and having their living standards drastically reduced.

A Shorten Labor Government will retain existing Paid Parental Leave entitlements to give eligible new parents 18 weeks' pay at the National Minimum Wage in addition to any employer provisions. Under Labor's policy, each year 80,000 families with new babies will be as much as \$11,800 better off than they would be under the Liberals.

This is a modest and affordable scheme that appropriately targets assistance to women on low and middle incomes. About 75 per cent of parents receiving Labor's Paid Parental Leave scheme are on incomes of between \$10,000 and \$70,000 a year.

Protecting children in immigration detention

Labor's immigration policy is centred on a humane and compassionate approach, while maintaining appropriate deterrents to prevent people smugglers preying on some of the world's most vulnerable people. A Shorten Labor Government will stand firm on maintaining a policy of offshore processing to keep this perilous boat journey shut.

Labor will focus on removing people from detention as soon as possible, in particular children and their families.

Labor believes in a compassionate approach to asylum seekers which enables refugees to progress their claims safely and securely. Labor will also empower the Commonwealth Ombudsman to provide independent oversight of Australia's onshore detention network and will continue to ensure that those working in the immigration system enjoy the benefit of whistleblower protections to speak out about any maladministration and corruption.

A Shorten Labor Government will also appoint an advocate, independent of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, backed by the resources and statutory powers necessary to pursue the best interests of those children, including the power to bring court proceedings on a child's behalf.

This will not reduce the Minister's obligations in relation to unaccompanied non-citizen children or the ability of other interested parties to take court action against the Minister. The Independent Children's Advocate will have access to all unaccompanied minors in detention and in the

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community to ensure their rights and interests are protected. Labor will also legislate to impose mandatory reporting of child abuse in all offshore and onshore immigration detention facilities.

Finally, Labor will restore fast and fair processing of asylum claims for those people already living in Australia. This will see us reinstate references to the UN Refugees Convention in the Migration Act to reverse the Turnbull Liberal Government's retrograde efforts to undermine international law. We will reinstate access to the Refugee Review Tribunal and abolish the Independent Assessment Authority established by the Turnbull Government.

For more information on Labor's plan for early education and care visit http://www.100positivepolicies.org.au/investing_in_early_education_care

Yours sincerely,

ALP Information Services Unit

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