

**Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace
Relations**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates 2011-2012**

Outcome 1 - Early Childhood Education and Child Care

DEEWR Question No. EW1007_12

Senator Nash provided in writing.

Question

Universal Access for Early Childhood Education initiative

"Refer to ICPA letter to Minister for Early Childhood Peter Garrett dated 27/10/11 (copied to Senator Nash) regarding difficulty parents experience in accessing early childhood programs under the Universal Access for Early Childhood Education initiative. The ICPA states parents are financially disadvantaged due to the high costs incurred in accessing these early childhood programs due to distance and travelling costs. It is also discouraging families from participating.

• Has the govt/dept considered more flexible attendance and funding arrangements in rural and remote areas to lessen travel disincentives as called for by the ICPA?"

Answer

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring all children, including those living in rural and remote areas of the country have access to quality early childhood education by 2013.

The Australian Government is providing \$955 million directly to states and territories over five years, to ensure that every child will have access to affordable, quality early childhood education in the year before full time schooling, by 2013. All state and territory governments have also committed to this universal access goal, through the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education.

State and territory governments are responsible for ensuring the delivery of preschool education in their jurisdiction. Under the National Partnership, each state and territory government has an agreed strategy for achieving universal access, as outlined in bilateral agreements agreed with the Government. Implementation of these strategies is well underway in all jurisdictions.

The Government is encouraging states and territories to provide innovative and flexible delivery to ensure early childhood programs are accessible despite geographic isolation. A number of pilots have successfully demonstrated flexible and innovative delivery to meet parent's needs.

In additional, at the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs meeting on 14 October 2011, Council agreed to consider preschool distance education programs as meeting the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education objectives.