

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

**SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
2008-09 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING**

Outcome 1

DEEWR Question No. EW728_09

Senator Siewert provided in writing.

Question

Early Childhood Education

Can you report on the increase in early childhood services and programs?

Answer

The Australian Government is working with the State and Territory Governments under the Council of Australian Governments to implement the commitment to ensure universal access to quality early childhood education in the year before formal schooling by 2013. Australian Government funding of \$520m over four years was announced in the 2008-09 budget to support the states and territories in the reform process required to achieve universal access to early childhood education by 2013. This will involve working with each jurisdiction to reduce the barriers to access, according to different starting points in early childhood education provision. Funding arrangements with the states and territories will be finalised under new State and Commonwealth funding relations under the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) by the end of 2008.

Additionally, on 3 July 2008, COAG agreed in principle to a National Partnership with joint funding of around \$547.2 million over six years to address the needs of Indigenous children in their early years.

The Australian Government is already providing \$10 million of funding nationally to improve access to early childhood education programs, between June 2008 and 30 April 2009. This funding has been allocated based on the number of Indigenous four year old children in each state and territory and the number of four year olds in the lowest 10 per cent of socio-economic areas in Australia in each state and territory.

The Government has also committed to the establishment of up to 260 Early Learning and Care Centres by 2014 to increase the supply and access to integrated high quality, accessible and affordable child care and early childhood education programs in the year before school.

The initiative is being implemented in two phases. In phase one, the Government has allocated \$114.5 million over four years in the 2008-09 Budget for the establishment of the first 38 additional early learning and care centres in priority locations. The funding includes both the capital costs and the ongoing costs to the Government of establishing additional child care places, including Child Care Benefit and Child Care Tax Rebate. In phase two, the remaining 222 centres will be progressively rolled-out by 2014 and delivered as part of new State and Commonwealth funding arrangements under COAG. The key considerations for locating these services are

that they be located in an area of unmet demand for child care and, wherever possible, be located on school grounds, TAFE, university or other community sites.