

## Starting Better: A Guarantee For Young Children and Families

- [Starting Better](#) report proposes a decade of reforms to create a Guarantee for Young Children and Families
- The Guarantee includes three days a week quality early education to school age, greater community & health support for families, more paid parental leave shared between partners
- The Guarantee will return a triple dividend of a healthier, more prosperous population, a more equal workforce for women and rewarding, secure jobs in the early childhood sector

**22 NOVEMBER 2021** – Australia has the opportunity to institute a Guarantee for Young Children and Families to provide every child and their family with tools they need to flourish through their lives.

The *Starting Better* report released today by the Centre for Policy Development recommends a decade of reforms across all levels of government to establish the Guarantee.

The Guarantee includes universal access to a minimum three days a week of free or low cost quality early education and care from birth to school age, including two years of preschool, up to 25 visits from maternal and child health nurses for new parents, and more paid parental leave shared between partners to give babies more time with parents in the crucial early months of life.

The Guarantee will simplify and integrate a currently confusing and expensive array of services and schemes, sharing information, tracking progress, and putting the needs of children and their families at the centre of Australia's early childhood system.

Delivering the Guarantee will return a triple dividend of setting children up to thrive, better work-life balance for families and more secure, rewarding jobs in the early childhood sector.

Financially, the Guarantee would require an estimated initial annual investment of \$2 billion, rising to \$20 billion by 2030. It would generate returns from higher wages, increased workforce participation, savings on health and crime, and job creation for early childhood professionals. It is projected to be cost neutral when fully implemented in 2030 and to deliver a net economic return of \$15 billion annually by 2045.

This aligns with the broad consensus among researchers in Australia and globally that investment in early childhood and development has a positive long-term economic impact.

The *Starting Better* report is the culmination of the first 12 months of work in the Centre's Early Childhood Development Initiative. It draws on the work of the Centre's informal intergovernmental Early Childhood Development Council comprising senior officials from all jurisdictions, ECD experts and sector leaders.



**Centre for Policy Development CEO Travers McLeod** said Australia had the opportunity to build on social guarantees like primary and secondary schooling, and Medicare, by implementing the Guarantee for Children and Families.

“Early childhood is the launchpad for life. By delivering this Guarantee over the next decade we can make Australia the best place in the world to be a child, and to raise one,” Mr McLeod said.

“Right now we are not delivering for young children and their families. Too many children and families start behind and never catch up. Early education is expensive and hard to access. Parents don’t have enough time with their children in those crucial early months, and support is often hardest to access for families who need it most.”

“Committing to the Guarantee for Young Children and Families would be a transformational opportunity for Australia. Our children will flourish, families will more comfortably balance work and home, and we will create rewarding, secure careers in the early childhood sector.”

**Centre for Policy Development Fellow and ECD Council co-chair Leslie Loble** said that the Guarantee for Young Children and Families was an ambitious and necessary reform program that would underpin Australian prosperity in the 21st Century.

“The Guarantee for Young Children and Families articulated by *Starting Better* represents the foundations of a more prosperous, fair and flourishing Australia in the decades to come,” Ms Loble said.

“It is the kind of nation-building reform that requires a committed consensus of policymakers, industry leaders and early education experts working together to reshape a nation so it more perfectly reflects the aspirations of its citizens and the best ambitions of its leaders.

“As the co-chair of the Council for Early Childhood Development I believe the path towards a future where all children in our country are supported to thrive has been laid out in *Starting Better*. If the Guarantee for Children and Families becomes part of the fabric of Australia it will deliver social, economic and educational gains for many decades to come.”

**MEDIA CONTACT:**

Lachlan Williams

[lachlan.williams@cpd.org.au](mailto:lachlan.williams@cpd.org.au)

+61 447 682 027

**About the Centre for Policy Development**

The [Centre for Policy Development](https://www.cpd.org.au) is one of Australia’s leading independent policy institutes. Our core model is threefold: to create, connect, and convince. We create ideas from rigorous, evidence-based, cross-disciplinary research at home and abroad. We connect experts and stakeholders to develop these ideas into practical policy proposals. We then work to convince governments, businesses and communities to implement these proposals.

## **Endorsements for *Starting Better***

*It's time to make children our national priority. We need a vision and a plan to accelerate change so that Australia can be the best place to raise a child and to be a child. Our existing fragmented and ineffective services are failing our children. Affordable improvements can be achieved by action based on the evidence, but we need to start now.*

*"Starting Better" offers the evidence and the inspiration of a promise to our children and their families. There is no purpose more compelling than the development and wellbeing of our children and a better future for us all.*

- Anne Hollonds, National Children's Commissioner, **Australian Human Rights Commission**

--

### **A message to the youngest Australian citizens:**

*You, little child, put in the imagination and curiosity and we, the adults of this nation, guarantee enthusiastic, focussed and coordinated effort to ensure that you thrive to reach, and leap beyond, your potential into a bright future. This is our guarantee to you and your family. As young as you are now, you are our leaders of tomorrow. Together we all thrive.*

- Mary-Ruth Mendel, Co-Founder, Co-Chair and Executive Director, **Australian Literacy & Numeracy Foundation**

--

*Our children are our future leaders, the custodians of our stories, our histories, our cultures and our languages. It is incumbent upon us all to develop a coordinated national system that empowers capable, positive communities to engage children and families with genuine support and opportunities to create a future of hope, inquiry, understanding and achievement.*

*Education is a powerful determinant for health and social well being as well as contributing to the productivity, economy and overall well being of the nation. The entrenchment of the Starting Better early childhood guarantee will be welcomed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.*

- Professor Tom Calma AO, Chair, **Living First Language Platform Company**, Co-Chair, **Australian Literacy & Numeracy Foundation**, Chancellor, **University of Canberra**



*Our goal as a nation should be to have a world class early years childhood development system. The Federal Government recently made changes to the childcare system which is a positive step in the right direction but our current system remains overly complicated and no longer meets the needs of modern Australian families.*

*The Business Council of Australia strongly supports transforming the early years' service system. From increasing paid parental leave entitlements to minimum access to early childhood education and care and preschool, an 'early childhood guarantee' puts children at the centre of policy development and will help ensure each child can develop to their full potential. This is a significant reform opportunity, the benefits of which to our society and our economy are immeasurable.*

- Tim Reed, President, **Business Council of Australia**

--

*With its recent report Starting Better: A Guarantee for Young Children and Families, the Centre for Policy Development challenges us to do all we can to help Australia's children grow and flourish.*

*Ambitious national investments in participation and productivity are very much needed. And the place to start is with a guarantee covering early childhood development and education, supporting all of Australia's children and their families.*

*These investments will pay dividends – in opportunity for those who would otherwise be facing lives of disadvantage; in higher incomes and better jobs; and in a stronger national budget.*

- Dr Ken Henry AC

--

*Early Childhood Australia supports the call for a guarantee for young children and their families to ensure that every child, in every community, regardless of their circumstances, can access the services they need to thrive and learn the foundation skills for lifelong learning.*

*High quality early education and care sets children up for a lifetime of engagement in education, the benefits are long lasting across education achievement, employment outcomes, healthy relationships as well as wellbeing and mental health well into adulthood. This is the best investment we can make to improve life outcomes for all Australian children.*

- Sam Page, CEO, **Early Childhood Australia**

--

*Australia needs a conversation about early education and the support we provide young children. We all know we can and should do better – for children, for families, for the workforce and for the community. This report frames the conversation as a promise. Children understand promises and their importance. Let's not let them down.*

- Helen Gibbons, Executive Director, Early Education, **United Workers Union**



*The wellbeing of Australian children is of paramount importance to us all. With nearly one in four children starting primary school without the foundations of literacy and numeracy, it's clear that we must do far better to address this matter.*

*Starting Better shows us how we can give all children and their families the tools they need to flourish and reach their full potential, and build a fairer, more sustainable and more prosperous country for every Australian.*

- Charles Goode AC, Chair, **The Ian Potter Foundation**

--

*Australia can judge its performance as a nation on how well we equip our children to be kind, capable, productive and resilient.*

*The early years of our children's lives are where Australia can make the biggest difference — for them, their families and for the nation.*

*Right now, we are letting children and families down.*

*For the first time in my two decades of advocacy on early childhood, Starting Better provides a concrete, comprehensive and measurable path to long-term solutions through the 'Guarantee for Children and their Families'.*

*When this Guarantee is enacted it will support generations of Australians to thrive for decades to come.*

- Dr Nicola Forrest AO, co-founder, **Minderoo Foundation**

--

*At the core of Starting Better is a guarantee of service and support for young children and their families. Recognising the complexity of policy implementation, change is proposed through a stepped program – expanded paid parental leave, a focus on material and child health, wrap around services including universal early childhood education and care, 2 years of pre-school and, finally, integration of early childhood services in primary school.*

*This roadmap shows a better way to 2030, with long-term benefits for young Australians, their families and the entire community.*

- Professor Glyn Davis AC, CEO **Paul Ramsay Foundation**

*Tackling developmental vulnerability is important for all Australian children, but particularly in rural and remote communities where one in five are developmentally vulnerable and services and outcomes frequently inequitable. Healthy development lays the foundation for a healthy life. Early intervention is key and this is where access to good quality childcare, no matter where you live, is imperative.*

- Jacqui Emery, CEO, **Royal Far West**

--

*Starting Better's proposal of a guarantee for young children and families is what working parents in our country need.*

*Right now an inability to access affordable, quality early childhood education and care is forcing thousands of women into an impossible choice between their profession and their family.*

*Providing a universal entitlement of three days free or low cost quality early education and care, alongside enhanced paid parental leave scheme shared between partners in line with global best practice, will set Australia on a course to a more prosperous, equitable future where family and work are shared between partners, where early childhood education and care is a rewarding and secure long-term career, and where children are given the opportunity to thrive regardless of their income postcode or family circumstances.*

*That is the kind of country we want to become.*

- Sam Mostyn AO, President, **Chief Executive Women**

--

*I am convinced the 'early childhood guarantee' work being done in this dialogue will be a game changer in clarifying, simplifying and then amplifying public expectations around the early years.*

- Senior government official, member of the **Early Childhood Development Council**

--

*At a time when one in five children starts school developmentally vulnerable, we urgently need a long-term policy pathway towards a country where every child and their family can thrive.*

*Starting Better, overseen by a coalition of the key stakeholders, interest groups and decision-makers from across the early childhood policy spectrum, provides that pathway in its Guarantee for Children and Their Families.*

- Adjunct Professor Michael Hogan, Paul Ramsay Foundation Fellow, **Queensland University of Technology**



*The Parenthood welcomes a new guarantee for young children and their families to ensure that every child in Australia has an opportunity to realise their potential and thrive. The extent to which too many children miss out in Australia is not widely known. There is an assumption that as a nation we prioritise the wellbeing, development and education of young children which isn't the case. Between the critical years between 0-5 every child needs support to thrive, and support for children begins with supporting their parents and caregivers. By implementing the Starting Better guarantee we would profoundly improve the lives and wellbeing of children and in doing so we would transform the future of Australia.*

- Georgie Dent, Executive Director, **The Parenthood**

--

*Quality schooling, healthcare and savings for retirement make Australia a great place to live. But we are failing to provide adequate support for parents and children in the years before school, to ensure they thrive. Starting Better sets an ambitious goal and a clear pathway for our promise for the future; to make Australia the best place in the world to be a child, and to raise one.*

- Troy Verhagen, Head of Commercial Strategy, **Officeworks**