

AFFORDABLE, QUALITY AND ACCESSIBLE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Expensive and inaccessible child care and early childhood education is holding our country back from its potential. Our current system hits women in the middle of their careers the hardest. It limits career opportunities for primary carers (overwhelmingly women) and places financial stress on the entire family.

We can afford to provide 80 per cent of Australian families with free child care and extend universal access to early childhood education to 24 hours a week for all three and four-year-olds for just a fraction of the cost of the government's top-end tax cuts. This is the Australian Greens' vision of a future for all of us.



THE GREENS WILL:

- Ensure **universal early childhood education for 3 and 4 years olds**
- **Make child care fee free for most families** and abolish the activity test
- Work to **Close the Gap for First Nations children**
- **Support educators and carers**
- **Reduce waiting lists**

UNIVERSAL EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR THREE AND FOUR-YEAR-OLDS

Early childhood education plays an important role in children's development and provides valuable support to families with young children. The Greens believe that anyone who wants their child to participate in early education should have that right, while both the Labor and Liberal parties treat child care and early education merely as a way to encourage people into the workforce.

The Greens will extend universal access to early childhood education to 24 hours a week for all three and four-year-olds. Our commitment to extending the National Partnership Agreement for Universal Access to Early Childhood Education on an ongoing basis will genuinely ensure every child, everywhere in the country, has optional access to 24 hours a week of a quality, play-based learning program, staffed by qualified professionals and resourced to give them the best possible start in life.

Under our plan, there will be no barriers for your child to access pre-school: it doesn't matter what you earn, where you live, or how much you work or study, your child will get the care and education they need.

MAKE CHILD CARE FEE FREE FOR MOST FAMILIES

To make this a reality for Australian families, the Greens will:

- Abolish the activity test for access to the Child Care Subsidy;
- Make child care fee-free for families with a combined income of up to \$171,958, and;
- Raise the rate of subsidy for all other families with a combined income of less than \$351,248.

This increase in the annual income test will ensure that four out of five families will become eligible for entirely free child care.¹

Australia's current public funding into early childhood education and care is the second worst in the developed world.² We expect families to pick up more of the tab,

¹ Based on household income distribution as published in Australian Bureau of Statistics, Catalogue 6523.0 - Household Income and Wealth, Australia, 2015-16. 13 September 2017. Incomes are uprated to 2019-20.

² OECD (2016), Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators, Table C2.3

across the board - and as a result, primary carers (who are overwhelmingly women) are having to give up work and career opportunities and not go back to work, because child care is simply too expensive when combined with the loss in child care subsidy.

A fair child care subsidy ensures that families don't face barriers returning to work. It combines what's best for the child with what's best for the parent or parents - and it's better for the economy, too. One recent report from PwC found a demonstrable benefit to expanding access to child care subsidies - thousands of people who want to work are working, and the economy is billions of dollars stronger than it would otherwise be.³

The Child Care Subsidy will apply as follows:

Combined annual family income	Child Care Subsidy rate of fees charged
Up to \$171,958	100% of fees
\$171,959 to \$251,248	Stepped reduction from 100% to 50%
\$251,249 to \$351,248	Stepped reduction from 50% to 10%

Subsidy rates would step down by equal reductions for each \$3,000 increase in family income.

CLOSING THE GAP FOR FIRST NATIONS CHILDREN

The Community Child Care Fund provides grants to child care services to help improve access in disadvantaged, regional and remote communities.

It also targets areas with a limited supply of places, to ensure families get access where and when it's needed.

To ensure access in areas of high First Nations populations and high levels of disadvantage, the Greens will allocate a proportion of the Community Child Care Fund (CCCF) for quality community-controlled and culturally safe integrated early years services.

³ "Child care changes could boost economy, modelling shows - ABC." 3 Feb. 2016, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-02-04/child-care-changes-could-boost-economy-by-3b-modelling-shows/7138248>. Accessed 18 Apr. 2019.

SUPPORTING EDUCATORS AND CARERS

The significant contribution early childhood educators make to our children's lifelong learning is not reflected in their pay packets. It is well past time for the people who educate and care for our children to have the professional pay and conditions they have long deserved.

The Greens will:

- Support the United Voice "Big Steps" campaign for fair pay for early childhood educators.
- Develop and implement a workforce strategy with the early learning sector and unions to achieve professional pay and better working conditions for workers.
- Make TAFE and university free so that those studying to be early childhood educators and carers will not be saddled with enormous debts that take decades to pay off.
- Address the gender pay gap through legislative, workplace and economic reforms to eradicate the root causes of women's income inequality.

REDUCING WAITING LISTS

The Greens will establish a \$200 million grants fund targeted at reducing waiting lists in areas of high need. The grants will be available for community and non-profit, including local government run, child care centres to increase the amount of spaces they're offering.

Under the Greens' fund, child care centres could apply for grants to assist with capital works or hiring additional staff, depending on the specific needs of individual centres.

HOW WE WILL PAY FOR IT

The government's tax cuts for the top-end of town take billions out of public revenue that should fund quality public services.

We can pay for the Greens' plan for preschool and child care by scrapping the Coalition government's tax cuts for top income earners.

We have a choice. Tax cuts for the highest income earners, or free child care for 80% of Australia's young families.

