

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

*Tuesday 9 April 2019*

### **A nationally consistent school starting age is long overdue**

The Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) is calling on all parties to look at creating a nationally consistent school starting age and dedicate funding to three and four year old kindergarten/preschool.

Following a study of more than 100,000 NSW Kindergarten (first year of formal schooling) children published today in academic journal *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Mr Mondo says the data confirms what we already know anecdotally – more and more parents are holding their children back from starting school in terms of their state’s minimum school starting age.

The study led by Dr Mark Hanly at UNSW Medicine’s Centre for Big Data Research in Health, looked at student data from 2009 and 2012. It found that if parents were able to choose whether to send or delay - if their child turned five between January and July - half decided to delay.

“Families delaying school entry creates a huge age gap among the children in their first year of school, and this age gap remains throughout their whole school journey.” Mr Mondo explained.

“This situation is exacerbated in those states where children can start younger. For example, in New South Wales children can start school at 4 ½ years old, whereas in Tasmania children have to be 5 years and 1 month old before they can commence school.”

With families holding off on sending their children to school in the first year that their age qualifies them, the result can create an age gap of 18 months to two years between school children in the same class. The repercussions on the children and the teachers in terms of ensuring that the teaching styles and curriculum is delivered to meet the students’ learning needs is enormous.

“It’s a huge failure in educational policy that such an enormous discrepancy in age and developmental milestones has been overlooked by the Australian Government.” Mr Mondo said.

“Without a nationally consistent school starting age, it is extremely difficult (both in a practical and pedagogical sense) to implement funding and programs for the two years before school given the enormous variances in age and development milestones that the programs and funding would apply to.” Mr Mondo said.

“It also makes it a near impossible task to measure learning outcomes against global data on educational achievement.”

#### **Australian Childcare Alliance**

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#### **State Presidents**

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“A review of Australia’s school starting age at the federal level is long overdue.” Mr Mondo said. “It seems extraordinary that in 2019 there exists four different minimum school starting ages across the states and territories.”

ACA would like to see all sides of federal politics support a national requirement that children must be at least 5 years of age by 1 January in their first year of formal schooling.

“In this context, we’re also calling for the exemption of all families from the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) activity test for 18 hours per week. This includes their child’s two years before school. We’re also asking for additional funding that supports the delivery of high quality kindergarten/preschool programs for 3 and 4 year old’s in the long day care sector. Supporting these two policy initiatives will go some way to eliminating affordability issues for families as a reason for sending their children to school when they may not be ready” Mr Mondo explained.

“We welcome the opportunity to work with the government and the relevant stakeholders to ensure that **every child** in Australia has the **best start in life.**” Mr Mondo concluded.

## ENDS

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## BACKGROUND

*As the national peak body in the Australian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector, the Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) represents more than 2,500 members and approximately 360,000 families throughout Australia.*

*We work on behalf of long day care service owners and operators, to ensure families have the opportunity to access affordable, quality ECEC throughout Australia.*

*The ACA has existed in various forms for more than 30 years and has extensive experience in the fields of early childhood, education, training and management. Our experience means that we understand the critical role a quality ECEC program plays in the life of families and the importance of a viable long day care sector in preparing children for the best start in life and learning.*

*ACA’s national and state bodies work collaboratively with all levels of government, regulatory bodies and other stakeholders to ensure that families are supported into the future with a sustainable, affordable and viable sector, with a focus on the best interests of Australia’s young children.*

ACA’s pre-election **Policy Paper: Lets Give Our Children The Best Start In Life** is available at [www.BestStartInLife.org.au](http://www.BestStartInLife.org.au) .

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