

## MEDIA RELEASE

*Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> August 2017*

### **ACA TASMANIA VICTORY - SCHOOL STARTING AGE TO REMAIN AT 5 YEARS OLD**

The Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) Tasmania commends the Hodgman Government's recent decision to maintain the school starting age of 5 years of age, and their recognition of the importance of quality, play-based Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), in giving children the best possible start in life.

"This announcement follows ACA Tasmania's heavy engagement with the Tasmanian Government and the Members of the Legislative Council about this proposal, including a position paper expressing our deep concerns about lowering the school age to 3.5 years.

"We feared it would have a devastating effect on Tasmanian children. All the data indicates that 3.5 years old is way too young for children to start in a formalised school environment. Starting later is better for their emotional, educational and social development." Mr Mondo said.

"Our firm recommendation was to abandon the lowering of the school starting age and to instead prioritise increased participation in appropriate ECEC settings, citing models of effective integrated delivery in Long Day Care Mr Mondo said.

The Tasmanian Government has since announced that the funding previously dedicated to lowering the school age will be redirected to provide an additional year of free preschool education to Tasmania's 3 year old children from disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds. This additional year of access will be delivered in partnership with Tasmania's Early Childhood Education and Care sector, commencing in 2020.

"It is clear that the Education Minister has listened to our concerns along with feedback from the sector, Tasmanian families and Tasmanian businesses, and reconsidered his initial approach to this initiative" Mr Mondo continued. "This change of heart is a monumental victory for Tasmania's youngest generation."

"This is a great outcome for those families and children from disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds, who will not slip through the cracks and miss out on this important stage of early learning."

"We are pleased that the government did not lose sight of its underlying objective to improve educational outcomes, and has acted on advice from the sector to ensure that the implementation of the new act is in the best interests of Tasmania's children."

"If implemented effectively, this program has the opportunity to lead the country in directing funding towards children who would benefit most from ECEC. Most importantly this would be delivered in an appropriate play-based environment that fosters experiential learning. It also recognises the significant contribution of long day care in Australia's early education system."

ACA Tasmania extends its thanks and gratitude to ECEC sector stakeholders, service providers, families and the broader community for their support and ability to work together towards this positive outcome.

“We will continue to engage with the Tasmanian Government to understand this proposal and ensure that its implementation meets the government’s stated objectives for all stakeholders.” Mr Mondo concluded.

## **ENDS**

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## **BACKGROUND**

The Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) is the national peak member association for long day care services in Australia. We are a not-for-profit, member-funded organisation advocating for the future of Australia’s children, and supporting service providers in the delivery of high quality, affordable and sustainable early childhood education programs to Australia’s young children and their families.

In March 2017 ACA established ACA Tasmania, in response to the Hodgman Government’s intention to lower the school starting age by 6 months and the corresponding reduction in the voluntary Kindergarten starting age.

We were deeply concerned about the implications of this policy for Tasmania’s young children, and the education sector at large noting that, unlike most states, kindergarten programs in Tasmania would only be provided within the school environment.

ACA Tasmania opposed the government’s plan to do this on the basis that:

- It is not in the best interests of our young children and goes against best practice research about child development and school readiness.
- Many parents would be swayed by this new starting age and view it as an indicator for school readiness.
- It was estimated that many early childhood educators would lose their jobs, and many early learning services would be forced to close down, leaving parents with fewer childcare options for their 0-3 year olds.
- Early learning services would need to increase their fees considerably to balance the increased cost structures of providing education and care to the remaining younger group of children. This would inevitably increase the barriers to accessing services for families and their children resulting in reduction participation rates across Tasmania.
- It would require a huge investment of tax payers’ dollars into early learning infrastructure that already exists in our early learning services.