

## ABOUT EARLY LEARNING

The first five years of life are crucial to children's cognitive, social and emotional development. When children have inclusive, positive and rich early learning experiences, they are more likely to go on to become successful learners, with high levels of wellbeing. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is one important way of providing learning experiences, especially for children experiencing disadvantage or vulnerability.

### Snapshot of Australia

- Children who attend early learning services are less likely (by 33%) to be developmentally vulnerable when they start school than those who do not attend early learning services.
- The number of children (aged up to 5 years) using early learning services has risen over the past 10 years, from just below 35 per cent in 2009 to nearly 45 per cent in 2018.
- There is inequity in access to early learning services. Children living in remote areas, children from Indigenous backgrounds, children from non-English speaking backgrounds, and those with a disability are under-represented in early learning services.
- Between 2010 and 2017, there was an increase (of 16.3%) in early childhood educators' qualification levels.
- Australia's investment in early learning is below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average (0.7% of GDP). Australia is ranked 11th among 21 OECD nations.

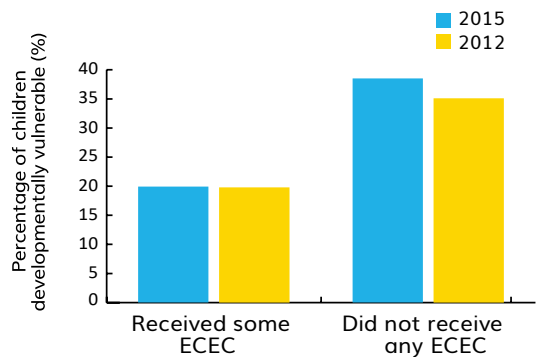


Figure: Developmental vulnerability in one or more domains by preschool attendance (2015, 2012) (Productivity Commission data).

The goal of fully realising the benefits of early learning for all children in Australia has not yet been reached. To make better progress, we need to:

- grasp the **benefits** of early learning for children, families and the wider community
- address unequal **access** to early learning by targeting the barriers to participation
- stabilise government **funding** for early learning and ensure that cost is not a barrier for families
- build the early learning **workforce**, in terms of numbers, qualifications and skills
- ensure the delivery of **high-quality** early learning and care, regardless of service type or location.