

# Two years are better than one

## Preschool programs in South Australia

South Australia has universal enrolment of 4 year olds in preschool. Enrolment rates in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and preschool for 3 year olds are slightly lower than the national average.

### 3 year olds enrolled in ECEC and preschool

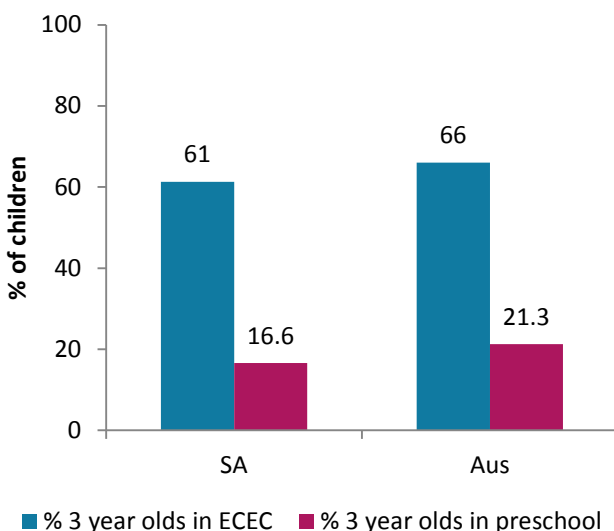
SA has a slightly smaller proportion of 3 year olds attending ECEC and preschool than the rest of Australia.

- 61 per cent of 3 year olds are enrolled in ECEC (in long day care, sessional preschool and family day care)
- 17 per cent of 3 year olds are enrolled in preschool programs

### Policy and funding for 3 year old preschool programs

SA is one of only three states and territories that provides subsidised or free preschool to some 3 year old children.

Figure 1: Proportion of 3 year olds enrolled in all ECEC and kindergarten (Preschool Education, Australia 2015 and ROGS 2016)



All Aboriginal children and children under guardianship of the Minister (i.e. in child protection) are funded to attend a preschool program once they turn 3.

All children are able to start their 'year before school' program one term, for one session a week, if they attending a government preschool. This is intended to provide an introduction to preschool.

Children with additional needs may access up to two terms of preschool prior to commencing in their eligible year of preschool if a preschool has the capacity within existing resources.

### Progress towards Universal Access for 4 year olds

All children in SA are enrolled in preschool and three quarters are attending at least 15 hours (noting data is collected in a reference week and is likely to underestimate actual attendance across the year).

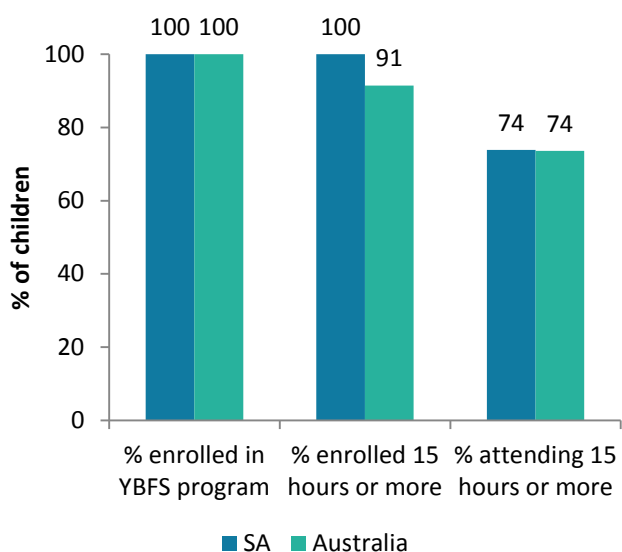
- 100 per cent of children are enrolled in kindergarten programs in the year before full time school
- 74 per cent are attending for 15 hours or more

Preschool is a play-based, learning-focused program.

In Australia, preschool programs are provided for children for 600 hours in the year before school (4-5 years) and are delivered by an Early Childhood Teacher.

There is no national preschool program for 3 year olds, but some children attend programs delivered by an Early Childhood Teacher.

Figure 2: Proportion of children enrolled in year before school preschool programs (Preschool Education, Australia 2015). Note: totals have been capped at 100%



### Policy and funding for 4 year old preschool programs

In SA, preschool is offered across a range of settings. It is integrated with school provision in some places, and is also offered in government-funded child and family centres and Long Day Care services.

The SA Government uses its National Partnership Agreement funds to make sure all children can access at least 15 hours of preschool, and funds children regardless of where they access their preschool program.

Subsidy rates are linked to the socio-economic status of the service's location, with additional subsidies for children with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children of families holding health care cards.

### Strategies to boost attendance of priority cohorts

SA invests resources to provide additional subsidies for priority cohorts. Government preschools have access to additional staffing, funding and targeted programs for vulnerable and disadvantage children.

These include the Inclusive Preschool Programs for children with disabilities and the Aboriginal Family Literacy Strategy to support 3 year old Aboriginal children and their family's engagement in preschool education.

The Targeted Child Subsidy for Long Day Care services provides around an additional \$1,700 for:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- Children on a Health Care Card
- Children on humanitarian visas

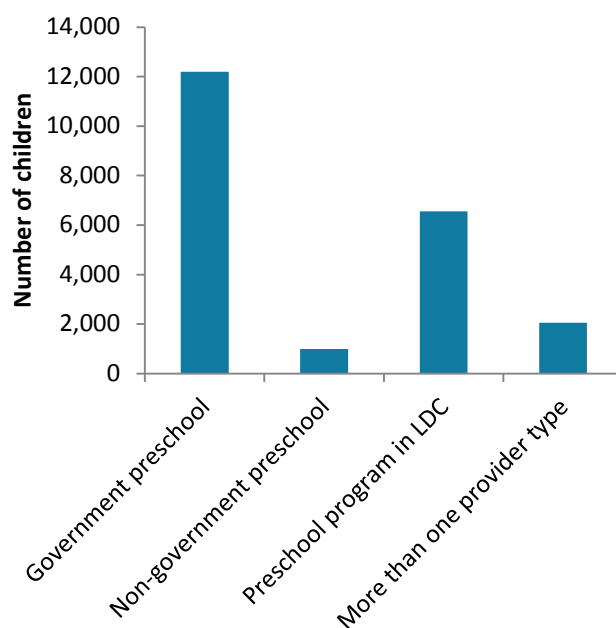
Children with a disability receive around \$2,800 to support their participation in preschool.

The SA Government also provides funding for early childhood leadership positions on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands.

### Who provides preschool?

The majority of children attend in government school-based preschools in SA, although a high and growing proportion are attending preschool programs in long day care.

Figure 3: Number of children attending kindergarten per sector (Preschool Education, Australia 2015)



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## Universal Access funding

Total per-child expenditure in SA is considerably higher than the national average. Fees paid by families vary depending on the setting where the preschool program is being delivered.

Fees for government provided preschools are set by their governing councils and are very low when compared nationally.

Higher fees may apply in other settings, often reflecting longer hours available in Long Day Care settings.

Figure 4: Estimated per-child expenditure on preschool (combined Australian Government, state and territory government and parent contributions) 2012-13 (Productivity Commission 2015)



Nearly a quarter of Australian children arrive at school without the foundational skills they need to thrive. A child's risk of being developmentally vulnerable is closely correlated with their socio-economic status, meaning that before they have even started school, these children's chances are more influenced by where they were born than by their own innate abilities. These inequalities often increase as children progress through school.

Access to a high quality preschool program is one of the few proven strategies for lifting outcomes for all children, and evidence suggests that two years has more impact than one, especially for the children most likely to be developmentally vulnerable.

Mitchell Institute's new report, *Two Years are Better than One*, makes the case for preschool programs for 3 year olds.

The report is available at:

[www.mitchellinstitute.org.au](http://www.mitchellinstitute.org.au)