

Two years are better than one

Preschool programs in the Northern Territory

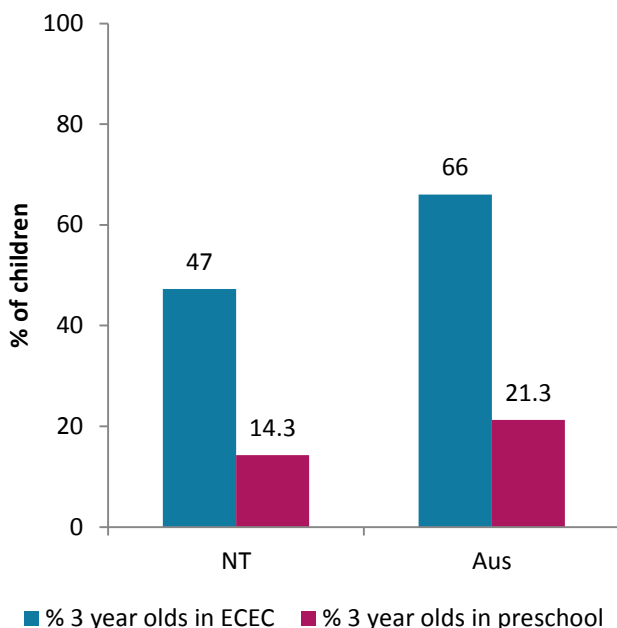
The Northern Territory has performed well in ensuring almost all 4 year olds are enrolled in a preschool program. Only half of 3 year olds are attending ECEC in the NT, considerably below the national average.

3 year olds enrolled in ECEC and preschool

In the NT, nearly half of 3 year olds are enrolled in ECEC programs, although the proportion attending a preschool program is lower than the national average.

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

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



Policy and funding for 3 year old preschool programs

The NT provides free preschool for all 3 year olds in remote and very remote communities.

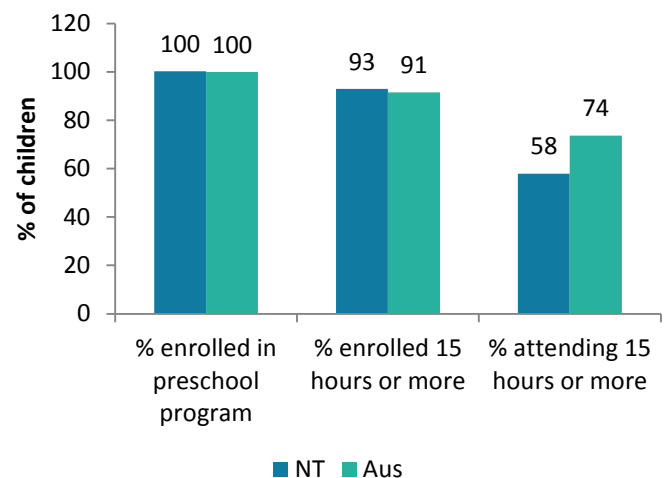
A key action in the NT's 'Great Start Great Future' strategic plan for early childhood is investigating options for expanding preschool for 3 year olds.

Progress towards Universal Access for 4 year olds

The NT is performing above the national average for the enrolment of children in preschool, although many children are not attending for 15 hours per week (noting data is collected in a reference week and is likely to underestimate actual attendance across the year).

- 100 per cent per cent of children are enrolled in preschool programs in the year before school
- 58 per cent are attending for 15 hours or more

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



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.

The NT uses the Department of Education’s student needs-based funding model to provide preschool funding to government, non-government and standalone preschools and long day care centres.

Strategies to boost attendance of priority cohorts

The NT provides per-child subsidies with additional loadings for remote services.

The NT also funds the Mobile Early Childhood Education program to boost access to preschool for children in remote and very remote areas.

The NT has focused on developing quality early childhood education delivery and curriculum models that are appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The NT Government also fund the Families as First Teachers program, which provides:

- Quality child-centred early learning experiences;
- Facilitated adult-child interactions through the evidence-based Abecedarian Approach;
- Adult learning opportunities;
- Nutrition, health and hygiene; and
- Linking families with support services and agencies.

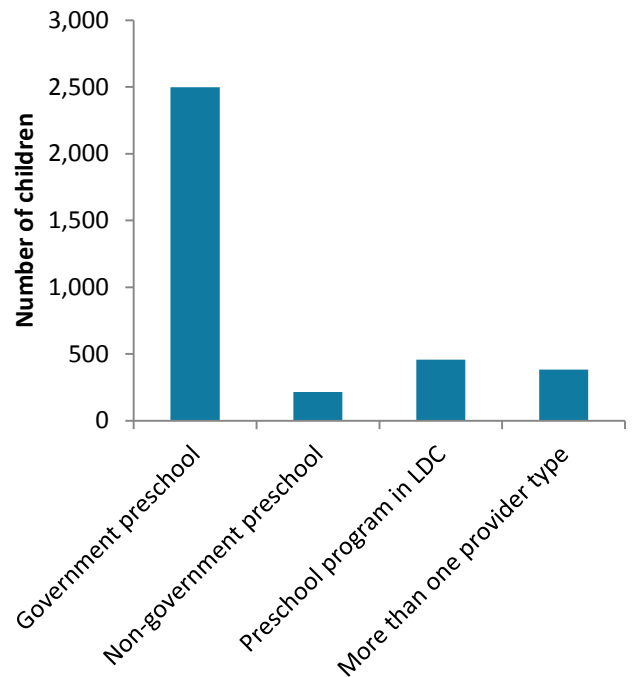
Nearly a quarter of Australian children arrive at school without the foundational skills they need to thrive. A child’s risk of being developmentally vulnerable is closely correlated with their socio-economic status, meaning that before they have even started school, these children's chances are more 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

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

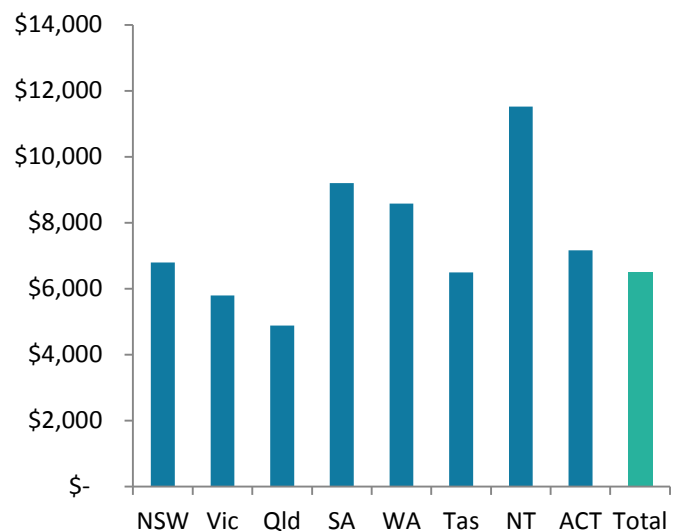


Universal Access funding

Total per-child expenditure in the NT is significantly above the national average, largely reflecting the cost of delivering high quality preschool in remote and very remote areas and the fact that most children attend government preschools.

Parents do not pay fees to access preschool in the NT.

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



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