

## MEDIA RELEASE

*Monday 29 May 2017*

### **TASMANIAN GOVERNMENT 2017-2018 BUDGET A HUGE DISAPPOINTMENT TO THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION & CARE SECTOR**

The Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA)'s Tasmanian state body has expressed its extreme disappointment in the recent 2017-2018 budget announcement, in light of Tasmanian Government's plans to lower the school age to 3.5 years under the Education Act.

"ACA strongly opposes the plan to lower the school age to 3.5 years in Tasmania. We believe it will create a crisis for Tasmania's young children, along with the early childhood education and care sector", ACA's National President Paul Mondo explained today.

"This goes against best practice research from Australian and around the world. All the data indicates that 3.5 years old is way too young for children to start in a school environment. Starting later is better for their emotional, educational and social development. Children need a play-based curriculum to become motivated learners." Mr Mondo said.

ACA Tasmania predicts that this new approach to early learning will have devastating consequences for the local economy and working families with young children.

"With up to half of Tasmania's Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services expected to become unviable and potentially close down, working families will have less access to quality care, impacting some parents capacity to remain in the workforce. Also, for those services who are able to remain open, the increase in fees for children between 0-3 will significantly impact affordability for those families" Mr Mondo said. "Many early childhood educators will lose their jobs and many other businesses and suppliers to the ECEC sector such as training providers and cleaning suppliers will also be economically effected."

"In terms of the budget announcement, the Tasmanian Government has recognised that many of the 119 long day care services in Tasmania, of which numerous are local small businesses, will be disadvantaged by their proposed lowering of the school age for children" Mr Mondo said.

"To address this significant impact on the Tasmanian economy, they have announced an allocation of \$5.3 million to be made available for over two years, to provide a transitional support to the ECEC sector" Mr Mondo said.

"The Department of Education has not explained how this allocated figure was calculated or on what basis the Department has estimated the overall impact or reduction in demand for ECEC services."

“We believe this funding amount is grossly inadequate, and will not address the flow on effect of service closure in rural areas of Tasmania, where families will be left without child care options.”

“At the same time the government plans to invest millions of taxpayers’ dollars to replicate early learning facilities on site at schools, which already exist in early childhood education and care services.”

“We believe this would be an enormous waste of tax payers’ dollars, and not in the best interests of Tasmania’s young children” Mr Mondo said.

In early May ACA Tasmania set up an online petition urging the Tasmanian Government to reconsider their plan to lower the school age, which does not put the needs of children first. The petition, which is still open via ACA Tasmania’s webpage at [www.childcarealliance.org.au/tasmania](http://www.childcarealliance.org.au/tasmania), has already received over 640 signatories.

ACA Tasmania calls upon the Members of the Legislative Assembly to push back on the key provisions of the Education Act that will effectively lower the school age.

ACA Tasmania also urges the Tasmanian Government to release the two reports presenting the feedback from consultation with the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector:

- the report produced by Michael White, Director of MW Group Consulting; and
- the report prepared by KMPG Australia concerning the economic and social impact of changes to school starting ages.

“We stand ready to work with all parties to ensure that the Tasmanian Government invests in the future of its young children through a financially responsible and pedagogically sound approach to early learning.”

## **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 are 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 are presently only provided within the School environment due to Tasmanian’s funding restrictions.

ACA Tasmania opposes the government’s plan to do this on the bases 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 will be swayed by this new starting age and view it as an indicator for school readiness

- It may cause many Early Childhood Educators to lose their jobs, and many early learning services to close down, leaving parents with fewer childcare options for their 0-3 year olds
- Early learning services will 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 will inevitably increase the barriers to accessing services for families and their children resulting in reduction participation rates across Tasmania.
- It requires a huge investment of tax payers' dollars into early learning infrastructure that already exists in our early learning services