

Media Release

Ingrid Stitt MP

Minister for Workplace Safety
Minister for Early Childhood



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EARLY LEARNING SUPPORT EXPANDED FOR CHILDREN IN NEED

The Victorian Government is helping vulnerable three-year-old children to fully participate in kindergarten by expanding a successful early intervention program that supports families, educators and services.

Minister for Early Childhood Ingrid Stitt today announced providers in 16 local government areas will deliver the Access to Early Learning program (AEL) with more than \$15.1 million from the Victorian Government.

The expansion will allow the program to be set up at sites in Maroondah, Mitchell, Greater Shepparton, Latrobe, Frankston, Swan Hill, Greater Bendigo, Greater Geelong, Horsham, Melton, the Mornington Peninsula, East Gippsland, Yarra, Central Goldfields, Whittlesea and Colac-Otway.

The evidence-based program has already proven effective in nine local government areas including Ballarat, Wodonga, Hume, Melbourne, Knox, Yarra Ranges, Casey, Dandenong, and Mildura.

The program has contributed to a significant increase in the number of vulnerable three-year-old children attending kindergarten with 1,954 three-year-old children known to Child Protection participating in 2020 compared to only 433 participating in 2014.

The core of the program is its outreach service which involves experienced and degree-qualified facilitators visiting families on a weekly basis to encourage and support in-home learning with tailored, practical activities as well as addressing any barriers to help strengthen the home learning environment.

Research has shown the program is effective in sustaining high levels of early learning participation in children with significant levels of vulnerability and disadvantage.

The AEL program received \$3.8 million in the *Victorian Budget 2020/21* and a further \$11.36 million across four years in this year's Budget.

Making Victoria the Education State starts with the early years. That's why, in an Australian-first, the Government is investing almost \$5 billion this decade to provide three-year-old children with access to 15 hours of a funded kindergarten program.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Early Childhood Ingrid Stitt

"We are ensuring all children across Victoria — no matter where they live or what their circumstance — have the support and access to fully participate in early education."

"We know that a great early childhood education can set children up to be happy, healthy and resilient for life, which is why we're providing high quality programs for vulnerable children because no child should be left behind."