

Media Release

The Hon Lizzie Blandthorn MP

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Minister for Children

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DOORS OPEN AT NEW EARLY PARENTING CENTRE IN GEELONG

The Allan Labor Government is making it easier for new mums and dads across Geelong, the Bellarine and Surf Coast, to access the specialised support they need to care for their little ones closer to home.

The doors to the brand-new Barwon Early Parenting Centre (EPC) in North Geelong officially opened today with the facility operated by Barwon Health from the McKellar Centre at 45-95 Ballarat Road.

Designed to feel like a home away from home, the centre will support families with children up to four years of age, giving them the advice and care they need – including support with sleep and settling, feeding and extra care for babies and toddlers with additional needs.

Sleep and settling is one of the biggest challenges faced by new parents, with around half of Victorian parents who use EPCs reporting problems with their child's sleep. This cannot only lead to post-natal depression, isolation and stress for parents, but also affect a child's behavioural, mental and physical development.

Families are supported by a multidisciplinary team of health professionals including registered nurses, registered midwives, maternal and child health qualified nurses, enrolled nurses, psychologists/psychiatrists, play therapists, early parenting practitioners and social workers.

The North Geelong facility has 10 residential family units and four day-stay spaces, ensuring families of all sizes can access both short-term and week-long supports.

The EPC is also focused on strengthening partnerships and referral pathways with key local support services, including Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health services, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, mental health, LGBTIQ family support, disability and family violence support services.

The new centre has already started the important work of triaging families who require early parenting support, with day-stay programs to begin later this month and overnight stays from next month.

Families can access the Barwon EPC either through self-referral directly via Barwon Health, or through a referral from a general practitioner or maternal and child health nurse.

Barwon marks the eighth EPC operating in Victoria, with a ninth to open in Bendigo later this year. They are all part of a Labor Government investment – delivering 12 new and upgraded Early Parenting Centres as part of its \$148 million package to expand Victoria's early parenting service network.

Quote attributable to Minister for Children Lizzie Blandthorn

"We know how important it is for kids to get the best start in life – our EPCs are helping ensure the best health, wellbeing and developmental outcomes, while also supporting parents in the early days."

Quote attributable to Minister for Health Infrastructure Mary-Anne Thomas

"Entering parenthood is a wonderful time in someone's life, but it can also be stressful and difficult too – that is why we are supporting families across the Geelong region through the delivery of our new Barwon EPC."

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Quote attributable to Member for Lara Ella George

“We know that sleep and settling can be some of the biggest challenges for new parents to face – this new EPC run by Barwon Health will ensure more specialised support to local mums and dads closer to home.”

Quote attributable to Member for Geelong Christine Couzens

“The completion of this new Barwon Early Parenting Centre will be a lifeline for families across Geelong who need that little bit of extra support.”

Quote attributable to Member for Bellarine Alison Marchant

“With the inclusion of residential family units, the completion of the Barwon EPC will mean that parents who live on the Bellarine Peninsula or Surf Coast can access local support saving on travel time.”