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Greens child care policy promises reform that is child-focused

Australia's largest childcare and early learning provider has welcomed the Australian Greens' commitment to support the proposed overhaul of Childcare Subsidies and their insistence that the reforms need to increase children's access to early learning.

Goodstart Early Learning, a national not for profit, said the Greens' childcare policy was an ambitious blueprint for reform that would give Australian families a 'world's best practice' childcare and early learning assistance system.

Goodstart Early Learning Advocacy Manager John Cherry said the Greens support for moving from a complex array of subsidies to a single Childcare Subsidy moved the reform one step closer to passing both houses of parliament.

"Goodstart has been a strong supporter of the Coalition's proposal to move to a single, means tested Childcare Subsidy, but has been concerned that the Coalition's proposed activity test would reduce access to early learning for the children of many low and middle income families," he said.

"The Greens policy picks up the best elements of the Coalition's reform and fixes the worst element by giving all children access to at least 24 hours of means-tested subsidy.

"That equates to two days of early learning in a long day care environment, which the international evidence shows is the minimum required to make a difference to children's development.

"Research by the Melbourne Institute and from the USA shows that children who attend at least 15 hours of early learning generally have better learning and social outcomes than those attending for shorter periods of time.

"The Government's proposal to offer just 12 hours of access to early learning for children for low income families is not enough to make a difference to children's developmental outcomes.

"Goodstart also welcomes the Greens' proposals for capital grants to increase childcare places in areas of high need," he said.

The childcare and early learning sector is calling on all major parties to respond to five key policy priorities:

1. Commit to **invest at least an additional \$3.1 billion** in reforming childcare assistance to make childcare more affordable, and decouple that funding from family payments measures;
2. Ensure that all children (birth to five) are able to **access at least 2 days of subsidised early learning**, especially children who need it most.
3. Increase **participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children** in early learning.
4. Provide **immediate relief** by increasing Child Care Benefit and the Childcare Rebate cap from 1 July 2017.
5. Commit to ongoing funding for **universal access to preschool programs** in the year before school.

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Notes for editors: Goodstart Early Learning is a not for profit social enterprise that is the largest provider of early learning and child care in Australia with 643 centres servicing over 60,000 families. More info: www.goodstart.org.au.