



## AUSTRALIA URGED TO INVEST MORE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD YEARS TO AVOID CRISIS

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The first major national study into the benefits and opportunities from 'early intervention' has called for an overhaul of government policies to ensure at-risk children receive vital support services at a much earlier stage.

**'How Australia can invest in children and return more'** found hospitalisations for mental health, youth unemployment, obesity and out-of-home care had skyrocketed in the past decade. The report found these late intervention services were costing Australian taxpayers \$15.2 billion every year.

The detailed report card calls for a smarter and targeted evidence-based approach to early intervention. This would mean effective support services are provided earlier to children and families, before problems begin or are magnified to crisis point.

The study is the product of a unique partnership between five philanthropic, business, not-for-profit and research organisations - CoLab (Collaborate for Kids - a partnership between Telethon Kids Institute and Minderoo Foundation), Early Intervention Foundation UK, Woodside Energy and The Front Project.

The ground-breaking research sheds light on the human and economic cost of not stepping in early to provide support to Australia's children and youth.

Report partner, Nicola Forrest, co-founder and director of the Minderoo Foundation, said there was an "immediate opportunity and urgent need to start a conversation about the benefits of early intervention".

"On one level, early intervention can be a singular service, such as speech therapy, provided as soon as difficulties emerge in a child so they have a better chance of coping at school. At another level, it can involve critical 'wrap-around' support for struggling new parents to prevent children entering out-of-home care," Ms Forrest said.

Woodside CEO Peter Coleman said the early years were crucial for building a happy, healthy and productive future workforce.

"We know there will always be a need for intervention services but acting before problems arise is a wise investment in stronger individuals, families and communities and can avoid costs later," he said.

Of the \$15.2 billion annual cost to Australian governments in 'late intervention' supports, the report identified 39 per cent is going to child protection services, including for the 45,000 children in out-of-home care. The cost of dealing with youth crime accounts for 18 per cent while payments for unemployed young people accounts for 13 per cent of this national tally.

The report also reveals a more than 25 per cent rise in the number of young people hospitalised with mental health issues in the past decade, while there has been an alarming 34 per cent increase in young people living in out-of-home care over the same time.

"Our young people deserve every effort to lead healthy, fulfilled lives," Ms Forrest said. "Early intervention offers up a fantastic opportunity for this nation to deliver better outcomes for some of its most disadvantaged and vulnerable children and families."

For more information: [www.colab.telethonkids.org.au/investinchildren](http://www.colab.telethonkids.org.au/investinchildren)

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**'How Australia can invest in children and return more'****About the Partnership**

Five organisations from the not-for-profit, research, philanthropy and business sectors have come together to produce the study - **'How Australia can invest in children and return more'**. Through a shared view, children are the foundation of a cohesive society, a strong economy and a prosperous Australia, the partnership are deeply motivated by the opportunity early intervention presents Australian children and young people.

**About the Partners**

- **CoLab (Collaborate for Kids)** is a partnership between the **Telethon Kids Institute** and the **Minderoo Foundation's** mission is to combine evidence with policy and practice to improve the development and learning of children experiencing adversity. CoLab does this by collaborating with families, clinicians, educators, policy makers, practitioners and researchers.
- **Minderoo Foundation** is a modern philanthropic organisation taking on tough, persistent issues with the potential to drive real social change. Its *Thrive By Five* initiative is focused on partnerships with research institutions, investments at a community level, and engagement with policy makers to help build the case for change so all Australian kids have the best start to life.
- **The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF)** is an independent UK charity with a mission to ensure effective early intervention is available and used to improve the lives of children and young people at risk of poor outcomes.
- **Woodside Energy** is an Australian company, operating 6% of global liquefied natural gas supply and the largest Australian natural gas producer. The Woodside Development Fund is a 10-year commitment to supporting programs and organisations working to decrease developmental vulnerability and improve outcomes for children aged birth to eight years.
- **The Front Project** is an independent national enterprise working to improve quality and create positive change in Australia's early childhood education system. It works with government, business, and the early education sector to improve outcomes for children and in turn increase the short- and long-term gains for Australia.

**Partner Quotes:**

- *"We know that it's possible to provide children and young people with a much better chance of living healthy, happy and productive lives. We can stop serious life difficulties from escalating if we step in earlier. And now we have a strong economic story about the opportunity to invest earlier and more wisely. If we don't change how and when we provide support, we will see rates of homelessness, youth suicide, youth justice and mental health issues continue to rise."*  
**Jane Hunt, CEO of The Front Project**
- *"We know that the costs of late intervention can never be reduced to zero – there will always be a need for acute services to deal with unexpected and serious problems. However, this analysis provides a useful illustration of the scale of the potential of early intervention in Australia, to reduce the frequency of problems requiring high-intensity, expensive public services, and their impact on young people's lives."*  
**Tom McBride, Director of Evidence at Early Intervention Foundation, United Kingdom (EIF)**
- *"One in five children in Australia starts school with a developmental vulnerability. Research shows the first three years of a child's life are crucial to their development and provide the foundation for a happy, healthy future. This report provides the Australian community the catalyst it needs for a renewed focus on how we can all make a difference to children from the early years. We can't keep waiting until children reach the point of crisis and require homelessness, health or welfare services."*  
**Jonathan Carapetis, Director, Telethon Kids Institute**