

7<sup>th</sup> April 2004

## Media release

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### **Early childhood: Government ignores its own consultation**

The Howard Government's latest strategy on early childhood education and care has ignored its own consultations among parents and educators.

"The Government spent six months consulting parents, educators, and peak bodies about its national agenda for early childhood. But its agenda, released today, fails to address parents' concerns about the affordability and availability of child care," said Dr Michael Flood, author of a forthcoming report for the Australia Institute.

"We've known for close to two years that there is a national crisis in child care availability. Parents need 40,000 more places than are available, and many parents report that they cannot access early learning programs and child care because they are too expensive. Yet in today's announcements, parents are offered a measly 1,200 new places in in-home care programs and 1,000 new places in long day care programs. And there are no measures to help parents with the cost of care."

"The Government's report on its consultations acknowledged that many parents cannot access early learning programs and child care because they are too expensive or no places are available. But since this report was released in October 2003, the Government has done little to address the affordability or availability of early childhood education and care programs," said Dr Michael Flood.

"Even if the Government does announce additional child care places in the May budget, this will not stop poorer parents being priced out of child care for their children. Over 30,000 children miss out on child care because it is too expensive for their parents."

"Parents and educators also told the Commonwealth Government during its national consultation that a free, quality early learning program should be available to all children in the year before school. The evidence is that preschool programs have a key role in improving school outcomes among children. But the Government has shown no interest in funding the provision of preschool on a national basis or tackling the disparities in access and funding across the states," said Dr Michael Flood.