

**MEDIA RELEASE: Embargo 8 September 2021**

**Did you know that Australia does not have a national strategy to support children's language and literacy before they get to school?**

**Why isn't the development of our children's language and literacy skills a national priority?**

On International Literacy Day, Wednesday 8 September, a national coalition of Australia's peak early language and literacy bodies is calling on the Australian government to adopt a national strategy to ensure Australian children get the best start in life.

According to Sue McKerracher, Chair of the National Early Language & Literacy Coalition (NELLC), research shows that 1 in 5 Australian children are developmentally behind in their language skills – before they even start school.

"Alarmingly", she says "Research shows that children who start school behind their peers, often stay behind. The consequences of this may be seen years later in the workforce and in poor health outcomes."

Associate Professor Tanya Serry, language and literacy expert from La Trobe University agrees, "The risk of having difficulties learning to read is six times greater for children who haven't met their language milestones before they start school and many children remain behind throughout their schooling and beyond."

Studies show that 44% of Australia's adult population do not have the sufficient literacy skills they need to cope with the demands of everyday life and work. Individuals with low literacy are 1.5 to 3 times more likely to experience poorer health outcomes.

Unlike other major western countries such as the US, UK and Canada, Australia does not have a national early language and literacy strategy, supported by the state and territory government, in place for 0-5-year-olds.

Professor Tom Calma, Co-Chair of The Australian Literacy & Numeracy Foundation says, "All Australian children, from all walks of life and from all postcodes, deserve equity of access to quality early years learning environments that include and celebrate their families, communities, home languages, their cultures and their uniqueness. The pre-schoolers of today are the youth and leadership of our future. Every parent wants their children and the children of Australia to be literate, well educated and great communicators. They want them to realise their full potential. A coordinated national strategy will create the systemic cohesion necessary for every child to benefit during those sensitive formative years before entering formal schooling."

Over the past three years the National Early Language and Literacy Coalition (NELLC), a body of 10 key organisations, together with the support of the Ian Potter Foundation, and input from government departments, agencies and interested parties, have developed a proposed national strategy that they want the government to review and prioritise.

The proposed strategy sets out the scale of the issue; describes what is happening on the ground, in different communities, and puts forward a framework for action. It is condensed into four essential priority areas – family support within communities; early education and transitions; specialist support, and knowledge production and dissemination.

The National Early Language and Literacy Coalition (NELLC) will lobby Commonwealth, state and territory governments to adopt this proposal and call on all educators, parents, and community members to add your voice to lend your support and get behind the initiative by signing up to the [NELLC petition](#) The full proposed strategy will be available from 8 September at [www.earlylanguageandliteracy.org.au](http://www.earlylanguageandliteracy.org.au)

## Media release continued...

### Editors Notes:

#### Sources:

1. Australian Early Development Census 2018: Data Explorer. <https://www.aedc.gov.au/data/data-explorer>
2. Catts, H. W., Sittner Bridges, M., Little, T. D., & Tomblin, J. B. (2008). Reading achievement growth in children with language impairments. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 51, 1569-1579.
3. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013). *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia, 2011–12*. 4228.0. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/programme-international-assessment-adult-competencies-australia/latest-release>
4. DeWalt, D. A., Berkman, N. D., Sheridan, S., Lohr, K. N., & Pignone, M. P. (2004). Literacy and health outcomes. *Journal of general internal medicine*, 19(12), 1228–1232

#languageandliteracy #NELLCnationalstrategy

<https://earlylanguageandliteracy.org.au/>

The National Early Language and Literacy Coalition (NELLC), is comprised of the following members:



Funding partner



#### Spokespeople are available for interview.

*Sue McKerracher, Chair of the National Early Language & Literacy Coalition (NELLC) & CEO of the Australian Library and Information Association.*

*Associate Professor Tanya Serry, language and literacy expert from La Trobe University*

*Professor Tom Calma, Co-Chair of The Australian Literacy & Numeracy Foundation*

*Also supporting the campaign are best-loved authors and Inaugural and Current Australian Children's Laureates, Alison Lester and Ursula Dubosarsky.*