

## Media Release

Wednesday 31 August 2011

### **SPA welcomes new National Party speech pathology policy**

Speech Pathology Australia (SPA) welcomes the National Party's policy commitment to the provision of speech pathologists in all primary schools as a positive step forward for the more than 20 per cent of Australian four to five year old children with a speech or language impairment.

The policy, passed at the National Party's Federal Council held over the weekend, supports a federal-state agreement to assist in funding the provision of speech pathologists in all schools to ensure learning difficulties are detected and addressed early in a child's education.

SPA National President Christine Stone congratulated the National Party on a policy decision that will have far-reaching benefits for Australian children and said she looks forward to collaborating with the National Party to further develop the program.

"Currently, one in four Australian preschool children have difficulty with speech or language and fewer than half receive the specialist speech pathology intervention that they require upon entry to school."

"Oral language underpins all learning and literacy development and early speech pathology intervention is crucial to ensure children are able to understand what they learn. If children are unable to understand what they hear or form words and sentences, there is little chance they will be able to access an education."

"Speech pathologists in the education system are the best way to ensure that children receive the early intervention services they need and it's great to see a major Australian political party take this type of issue seriously and give it the attention it deserves."

"We look forward to working with the National Party to develop this policy and urge the Liberal Party to adopt a similar forward-thinking policy to their coalition partners."

Early speech pathology intervention is highly effective for young children prior to and in the first few years of primary school, however the lack of universal federal or state legislation means that services for children within schools is inconsistent, fragmented or non-existent depending on the state in which they live. Even where speech pathologists are employed in schools, the number is often insufficient to meet the needs of children requiring services.

Research also shows that early intervention has a significant impact on a child's long-term quality of life and later economic productivity through increased ability to participate in the future workforce and SPA has long lobbied for mandated speech pathology services for children in schools.

For more information, visit [www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au).

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**Speech Pathology Australia** is the national peak body for more than 4,500 members.

The Association supports and regulates the ethical, clinical and professional standards of its members and lobbies and advocates for Australians living with communication and swallowing difficulties.

