

Media Release

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Speech Pathology Australia Welcomes National Early Childhood Initiative

Speech Pathology Australia congratulates the Government on rolling out the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) to all primary schools. This tool will provide valuable information which will allow communities to support and develop children in their early years.

“Early childhood development sets the path for social, educational and emotional well-being later in life. In particular oral language development plays a crucial role in ensuring that children are able to reach their educational and social emotional potential,” said Dr Cori Williams, President of Speech Pathology Australia.

“Links between language disorders and later academic failure are well-established. Children who enter school with poorly developed language are at risk of literacy and numeracy difficulties, behavioural problems and difficulty participating in group activities. Language disorders impact across all aspects of a child’s education because children have difficulty in using the primary tool of learning; that is language,” said Dr Williams.

Speech pathologists play an important role in ensuring that children are able to reach their language potential. They work with students who have speech disorders (problems with producing sounds in words), language disorders (difficulty understanding and/or expressing themselves through spoken and written language) and literacy difficulties.

“The findings from the AEDI will be very useful in identifying children whose language skills need further monitoring, assessment and improvement.

“Our recent research has found that across the primary and secondary years, language and communication disorders affect as many as 12-13% of Australian children.

“We believe it is essential that teachers and speech pathologists work together, to ensure teachers possess the knowledge and skills to identify children with possible speech and language delay and are able to refer children for appropriate speech pathology intervention. Many students will continue to have ongoing language learning needs, so an ongoing collaborative approach is essential.

“As speech pathologists, we know only too well that academic success is a protective factor against a range of issues including truancy, poor school retention rates, substance abuse, juvenile offending and later employment difficulties,” said Dr Williams.

“We hope the findings are used to better target and develop support and services that can help children in their first five years of language development.

“Speech Pathology Australia acknowledges the commitment of the Government to improving literacy outcomes for Australian children. The Association therefore urges the government to adopt a national policy which mandates the provision of an appropriate level of speech pathology services for all children.

“Such a policy, when linked to the National Curriculum, would reduce the social, emotional, educational and employment disadvantage borne by this group of children, and would result in long term economic benefit to the community,” said Dr Williams.

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Speech Pathology Australia is the peak body for more than 4,000 members who specialise in working with people of all ages who have communication or swallowing difficulties. For further information visit www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au

Interviews:

- Dr Cori Williams, President, is available for interview to discuss the impact of the government's new Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) in relation to speech and language development and speech pathology services.

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