



nsw commission for
children & young people

The Hon Wayne Swan MP
Treasurer
C/O Budget Policy Division
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Dear Mr Swan

I am writing in response to your call for submissions for the Federal Government's 2009-10 Budget.

There is significant evidence of the economic and social benefits to countries that make an investment in children and young people. Investing in children and young people can improve their well-being and long term development, and, in turn, the nation's productivity. I consider there are two priorities that the Government should focus on in the 2009-10 Budget.

1. Introduce a universal paid parental leave scheme

I recommend the introduction in the 2009-10 Budget of the paid parental leave scheme recommended by the Productivity Commission.

As the Productivity Commission's draft Inquiry Report shows, there is strong evidence that the kind of care that an infant receives, and the relationships they have, in their first years play a crucial role in how connections in the brain are made. These connections are the foundation for the brain's wiring and shape how a child controls their emotions, solves problems, communicates, thinks logically and reacts to the world. The successful development of these abilities is one of the most significant impacts on children's long-term mental and physical health.

When an infant is involved in positive ongoing interactions with their parents the connections in the brain are strengthened. To provide these ongoing interactions that infants need, we need to find ways to better support parents to stay at home during the first year of their child's life. An investment in a universal paid parental leave scheme is the most cost effective, and beneficial, way to provide this much needed support to families.

Investing in paid parental leave can benefit Australia economically through reducing the long term costs of later interventions such as adult literacy programs or crime prevention strategies, as well as increasing the productivity of individuals. This investment early on will improve children's long term mental and physical health and their development of skills such as literacy, so that as adults they will have the skills to participate in social and economic life.

Australia's long term economic strength depends on the productivity of our future workforce. In the current economic climate an investment in paid parental leave is likely to be the most important investment the Australian Government will make in Australia's future economic success.

2. Establish an Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People

I recommend the establishment of an Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People to advocate for children and young people's well-being.

There are over 4.8 million children and young people under 18 years in Australia, more than one-fifth of the total Australian population. Despite making up a substantial segment of the population, these children and young people do not have the same democratic rights or opportunities, in terms of political participation and representation, as the rest of the Australian community.

Currently advocacy on children and young people's behalf at a national level is haphazard. The states and territories have made a start and all have independent advocates on behalf of children and young people, but there is no national advocate operating at the highest level of government. Children and young people are not only affected by state issues but by national issues such as taxation, income support, industrial relations, climate change and infrastructure. In foreign affairs children and young people's interests are also not represented, despite international issues such as the current economic situation and climate change impacting significantly on their lives and futures.

The Australian Government needs to provide an advocate that will represent children and young people's interests free from other interests. The Australian Labor Party has recognised the importance of a national advocate for children and young people and has committed, in the *ALP National Platform and Constitution April 2007*, to the establishment of a National Commissioner for Children and Young People. A modest annual investment of \$2 per child will achieve this. I have attached a document which proposes a structure and role for a National Commissioner.

Investing in children represents one of the most beneficial and cost-effective applications that we can make of our current knowledge about children's development. The costs of not doing anything are much greater, both for children's well-being, and our society.

I would be pleased to discuss my submission further. If you would like to do so please contact me on 9286 7278 or by email at gillian.calvert@kids.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Gillian Calvert
Commissioner
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