$13.6 million investment in the future of Victoria’s children

In the last decade Victoria has experienced a significant and sustained increase in the number of births. The 2009-10 State Budget builds on the Brumby Government’s significant investment in early childhood services with an additional $13.6 million investment in Early Childhood Services to meet the unprecedented demand created by a 19 per cent increase in births over the past 10 years.

This investment will create a brighter future for Victoria’s children by improving their opportunities through even better services.

The Brumby Government understands the importance of participation in a year of kindergarten prior to starting school, and that is why this Budget sees a significant increase in kindergarten funding.

This Budget also builds on recent Early Childhood Intervention Service (ECIS) initiatives and investments, recognising the importance of providing additional support to preschool aged children who have a disability or developmental delay and their families.

Kindergarten

$13.6 million will be provided in this Budget to fund an additional 4000 places at kindergartens across the state and to effectively maintain free places for eligible low-income families. More Victorian children will now have a funded place at kindergarten in the year before school.

A structured kindergarten program, whether in an integrated children’s centre, long day care centre or stand alone kindergarten, is a vital part of children’s development, setting them up for a successful transition to school.

Early Support for families and children with disabilities

$9 million will be provided to improve the early childhood intervention and ongoing support services for children and young people with disabilities or developmental delay and their families. This will drive key reforms in early childhood intervention services (ECIS) and in supporting children and young people with a disability or a developmental delay.

Early Intervention

The Brumby Government will develop and implement a plan to progress the ECIS reform agenda in partnership with key stakeholders, including Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Victorian Chapter), the Association for Children with a Disability, Autism Victoria and National Disability Services.
The plan will concentrate effort on three key areas including system improvement, partnerships with parents and communities and workforce reform.

Linking families living with disabilities or developmental delay to quality services is critical. Families need to feel confident that the services and supports they need are delivered by highly skilled professionals who know how to work with families and understand what interventions are known to make a difference.

That is why $5 million over four years from this Budget has been provided to strengthen the quality of the existing early childhood intervention services right across Victoria.

To improve the service system, a quality assurance framework will be developed incorporating revised program standards, best practice guidelines for workers and an evaluation and performance monitoring system to support accountability in ECIS.

An expanded workforce strategy will continue the investment in the ECIS workforce. Building on the statement of ECIS competencies being developed by Early Childhood Intervention Australia – Victorian Chapter, accredited training modules will be delivered to ensure ECIS staff have access to up to date knowledge and skills that they require to deliver high quality services.

This funding builds on the commitments the Brumby Government has already delivered, such as last year’s announcement of funding for an additional 1000 early intervention places.

**Supporting children with disabilities or developmental delay**

$4 million over four years will be provided in a package of reforms to support children and young people up to 18 years of age who have a disability or a developmental delay.

This will include strengthened regional planning bringing together early years services, government and non-government schools and disability services to drive reform at the local level.

This approach will improve co-ordination and planning for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay at critical points of transition.

A common approach to assessment will be introduced so that families do not have to repeat information and to reduce duplicate assessments.

A new data collection on outcomes for children and young people with disabilities or developmental delay will be developed.

This will enable the monitoring of trends and planning of services to better meet the needs of children and their families.

This $9 million investment in Victorian’s children builds on existing services by providing better resources and ensuring effective delivery of necessary services earlier for children who need more support.

**Support for families who have children with autism**

The Brumby Government is continuing to support Victorian families who have pre-school or school children with autism in the Budget with $4.1 million over four years for autism support and programs, as part of an $8.27 million state-wide autism plan.

100 scholarships will be provided for teachers and Student Support Services Officers in schools to undertake a Vocational Graduate Diploma in Autism.

More specialist autism training, mentoring and resources will be developed to support the early childhood workforce.

Regional Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) networks will be further resourced with coordinators to develop regional plans, identify training needs of the early childhood workforce – including transition to school – and strengthen linkages with parents and other professionals working with children.