2c FROM THE MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

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SUPPORTING THE BABY BOOM: INVESTING IN THE EARLY YEARS

Victoria’s young children and families will benefit from an additional $82.6 million over five years in the 2010 State Budget to provide the best possible early childhood services to cater for Victoria’s recent baby boom.

The Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, Maxine Morand, said the funding would deliver a comprehensive package to meet the growing demand for early childhood services across Victoria.

“The Brumby Labor Government is investing in vital services to support Victorian families now and to build a prosperous future,” Ms Morand said.

“We understand Victorian parents want the best possible start in life for their children, that’s why we are delivering more kinder places, increasing the skills of our early childhood workforce and building new and expanded facilities.”

Ms Morand said highlights of the 2010 State Budget early childhood investment included:

- **$63.1 million** over five years for an additional 3590 kindergarten places;
- **$14 million** for building and expanding kindergartens and children’s centres;
- **$3.5 million** over three years for early childhood workforce initiatives to lift standards; and
- **$2 million** over four years for the Maternal and Child Health Line and Parent Line.

Ms Morand said the Brumby Labor Government was providing the best possible facilities and services for our growing suburbs and regional towns that were driving Victoria’s baby boom.

She said the number of babies born in Victoria was more than 20 per cent higher – or about 12,000 more babies – than 10 years ago, with 71,000 Victorian babies born in 2009.

“Each of these new Victorians deserves the best start in life as they approach kindergarten age, so the Brumby Labor Government is delivering 3 590 extra kindergarten places, building on the 4 000 extra places we funded in last year’s budget,” Ms Morand said.

“This package will fund a place for every child enrolled in kinder in the year before school.

“Victorian parents are concerned about the future for their children and this funding boost is another example of how the Brumby Labor Government is investing in early childhood services so parents can access the services they need for their children.”

Along with the boost to kindergarten places, the Brumby Labor Government has committed $14 million to extend its successful four-year $38 million Children’s Capital program, which provides grants to support construction of integrated children’s centres and renovation and upgrades to existing community based early years’ facilities.

The Brumby Labor Government’s support of the early childhood workforce has also been strengthened with funding of $3.5 million over three years to support mentoring, leadership courses and professional development for early childhood professionals.

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This funding complements significant recent workforce reforms, including new workplace agreements which give Victoria’s graduate early childhood teachers salary parity with graduate primary and secondary school teachers.

“The Brumby Labor Government understands that a highly qualified early childhood workforce is an important way to ensure Victoria’s children reach their potential,” Ms Morand said.

“We are working to make early childhood a more attractive career choice and our actions are supporting thousands of early childhood professionals to upgrade their skills and qualifications.”

In another baby boom boost, the Brumby Labor Government has also increased funding to the Maternal and Child Health Line and the Parent Line by $2 million.

“The Brumby Labor Government understands that parenting can be challenging and parents want to be able to seek advice, so these confidential helplines provide information, advice and referrals for families," Ms Morand said.

“Parenting, particularly in the first year, can be daunting and stressful, which is why we fund these helplines to provide timely advice all Victorian families can access, regardless of their location.

“This is a significant funding boost for these services and will ensure they can meet increasing demand.”