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MEDIA RELEASE

Early Years Initiative an unprecedented commitment to youngest West Australians

Minderoo Foundation and the Telethon Kids Institute are proud to partner with the Western Australian Government on an unprecedented \$49.3 million commitment to child development.

The Early Years Initiative (EYI) represents a landmark effort to make Western Australia a global leader in early childhood care, drawing from local and international expertise. The initiative was announced today by Premier Mark McGowan.

Despite significant government investment, the developmental gap between the least and most disadvantaged children in Western Australia has widened since 2009.

Telethon Kids and the Minderoo Foundation, working together as CoLab, will partner with Government to improve these development outcomes for children from conception to age four. The unprecedented research and community consultation project will span 10 years, four communities, and thousands of children.

The Minderoo Foundation, the Forrest family's philanthropic organisation, is investing \$24.65 million in the project, matching the State Government's funding.

Minderoo Foundation Chief Executive Officer Nicola Forrest said the initiative was an opportunity to bring long-term thinking and innovation to an important social challenge.

"Today Minderoo is making a commitment to invest in our children and deliver the state a significant generational dividend in the future," Mrs Forrest said.

"Research shows that the first five years of a child's life create a platform for their future success: this is the time where there is expansive psychological growth, a blossoming of emotional intelligence, and rapid brain development.

"The Early Years Initiative will concentrate on this critical period to arrest disadvantage and ensure we have a system that enables healthy, happy and thriving children who enter the schooling system with the highest potential.

"This type of long-term investment is exactly the role philanthropy can and must play."

Telethon Kids Director Professor Jonathan Carapetis said the initiative would be one of the biggest and most ambitious early years approaches ever undertaken in Australia.

"We will work with communities to empower them to develop their own solutions to problems they see affecting the lives of their young children and families," Professor Carapetis said.

“With the 10-year commitment given by the McGowan Government, this is a real opportunity for Western Australia to enhance its status as a centre of research excellence and innovation for child development and learning outcomes.

“Through CoLab and drawing on the expertise of the Telethon Kids Institute, we will provide the communities with the best available evidence of how we can improve child development. Having researchers partner with Government and philanthropy represents a remarkable opportunity to ensure every child has the best possible chance to thrive.”

The EYI will trial, test and evaluate community-led, evidence-informed approaches to child development in four priority communities across metropolitan, regional and remote Western Australia, which will be identified in coming months. Community selection will be influenced by local interest and draw on comprehensive data about child development outcomes.

In Australia, one in every five children is considered developmentally vulnerable. These are children whose health, social competence or language skills are at a level that makes them less likely to join their peers ‘school ready’.

The EYI will link communities with renowned researchers, including the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, to provide the best available evidence on approaches to improving child development and to help communities shape these approaches to suit the needs of their families.

The community will then develop and implement their own evidence-informed strategies to help improve child development and learning outcomes. There will be no one-size-fits-all approach as the initiative will evolve in response to the needs identified by the communities and the priorities of families involved.

Researchers will work with communities and service providers to rapidly assess what works and then share evidence with stakeholders across the state to improve early childhood care in every community.

ENDS.

About CoLab

CoLab is a partnership between Telethon Kids Institute and the Minderoo Foundation which unites the expertise of families, policymakers, clinicians, educators, practitioners and researchers, to work together to improve the learning and development of children and reduce inequality.

About the Minderoo Foundation

Minderoo was established by Nicola and Andrew Forrest in 2001 based on the mandate to give a hand up, not a hand out. Since establishment the Foundation has committed \$645m to a wide range of causes – from ending modern slavery to improving the lives of Australian children - and worked with over 250 partners in Australia and beyond.

About the Telethon Kids Institute

The Telethon Kids Institute is one of the largest, and most successful medical research institutes in Australia, comprising a dedicated and diverse team of more than 500 staff and students.

We've created a bold blueprint that brings together community, researchers, practitioners, policy makers and funders, who share our vision to improve the health and wellbeing of children through excellence in research.

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