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**EARLY LEARNING AND CARE 'ESSENTIAL SERVICE' ON THE BRINK OF MASS NATIONAL CLOSURES**

The early learning and care sector are on the brink of mass service closures across Australia from as early as next week if the Australian Government does not fast track further funding so services can keep their doors open.

Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA) CEO, Elizabeth Death said ELACCA members appreciated the Government initiatives for the sector thus far but, it is just not enough to mitigate impending mass service closures.

"More than 80% of Australia's early learning and care services are facing closure in the very near future and Australia wide we are looking at the potential of 150,000 job losses across the sector.

"In simple and immediate terms that means people on the frontline, those that are working tirelessly to help Australians get through the COVID pandemic will not have care for their children.

"Our services have been trying to stay open so they can do what they do best, educate and care for our children in a safe, secure, supportive and hygienic environment, however it is at a critical point where it is no longer viable to remain open," Ms Death said.

Ms Death said that many parents will be forced to put their children into care with older relatives and people who are deemed vulnerable to COVID-19 which completely counteracts the consistent message by Government to keep attending early learning as a safe place for children and families.

"We urge the Australian Government to further consider the disastrous impact closure of early learning services across the country will have on families now and in the future when we commence economic recovery and business resumes.

"Many of the hundreds of services that will close will not reopen and there is the potential of a critical shortfall in services and places for the 845,000 children who are currently enrolled Australia wide, not to mention the job losses for our skilled early years workforce.

"We have engaged with Government on a viability package and urgently need more detail and timelines on how this is being considered so we can preserve the service and the employment of our workforce," Ms Death said

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