

**ELACCA submission to the
Legislative Council Portfolio 3
Committee's *Inquiry into the early
childhood education and care
sector in New South Wales***



The Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA) welcomes the opportunity to submit our response to the New South Wales (NSW) Parliament Portfolio Committee's inquiry into early childhood education and care.

About ELACCA

The Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA) was established to promote the value of quality early learning and care as an integral part of Australia's education system. Our 18 CEO members include some of the largest early learning providers in the country, representing both not-for-profit and for-profit services.

ELACCA members operate more than 2,379 early learning service including 1980 long day care services, 316 preschool/kindergarten services and 83 OSHC services, covering every state and territory. They offer one-quarter of all the long day care places in Australia. Together, our members serve 360,870 children and their families, and employ more than 58,316 staff.

As well as promoting the value of quality early learning and the need for greater public investment, ELACCA advocates for the right of all children to access quality early learning and care, particularly children facing disadvantage. We do this by drawing on the knowledge and practical experience of our members and representing their views to decision makers in government, the media and the public.

Strategic context

As the peak body representing large providers of early learning and care — ELACCA represents 11 for-profit and not-for-profit organisations in NSW — we welcome this inquiry as an important opportunity to further strengthen outcomes and environments for young children. We note the importance of the inquiry considering the whole sector in its deliberations, including all sizes and operating models.

Our members deliver quality early learning and care across metropolitan, regional, and rural areas of NSW. With deep expertise, operational capability, and a shared commitment to continuous improvement, the early learning and care sector plays a vital role in supporting children's learning and development.

We note and support findings from recent comprehensive federal and NSW inquiries into our sector, including the:

- Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) inquiry into the price of childcare (2023),¹
- Productivity Commission (PC) inquiry into early childhood education and care and report to Government: *A path to universal early childhood education and care*,²
- Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) *Review of Child Safety Arrangements under the NQF*,³ and
- the *Review of Early Childhood Education and Care in New South Wales* conducted by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) in NSW in 2023.⁴

There are also important findings from inquiries in other states, notably South Australia's *Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care*.⁵

¹ ACCC (2023), [Childcare inquiry: Final report](#)

² Productivity Commission (2024), [A path to universal early childhood education and care](#)

³ ACECQA (2023) [Review of Child Safety Arrangements under the National Quality Framework Final Report – Findings and recommendations for the NQF and inter-related child safety mechanisms](#)

⁴ IPART (2023) [Review of early childhood education and care Final Report](#)

⁵ Government of South Australia (2023) [Royal Commission Early Childhood Education and Care | Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care](#)

We are committed to the National Quality Framework (NQF), as an internationally regarded system that assures quality and safety in the early learning and care sector. Ensuring consistent, quality early learning and care for children in every state and territory is vital for our sector, and adequate funding and policy in every state and territory, including NSW, is required.

One of the key outcomes of this inquiry we would value is a multi-partisan commitment from the NSW Parliament to the original objectives of the NQF, including additional resourcing to ensure services are regulated to the standard envisaged under the NQF.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute our knowledge and experience to this inquiry, to further improve the provision of quality, safe and inclusive early learning and care that leads to the best possible learning and development outcomes for children in NSW.

Response to Portfolio Committee inquiry

The following considers and responds to the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry set out by the Legislative Council Committee.

Our submission is focussed on early learning and care from the perspective of large providers in both long day care and preschool/kindergarten settings. We draw on the extensive experience of our members, large providers of early learning and care, that operate services in NSW. We have structured our response around the themes provided in the Terms of Reference.

1: A quality early learning and care sector for children in NSW

- Safety, health and wellbeing of children in early learning and care services
- Quality of early learning and care services and the educational and developmental outcomes for children
- The composition of the early learning and care sector and the impact of government funding on the type and quality of services

2: A safe and valued workforce

- Workforce pay, conditions and safety
- Training pathways and availability

3: Strong and visible regulation of NSW early learning and care services

- The regulatory framework
- The NSW ECEC Regulatory Authority
- The collection, evaluation and publication of reliable data in relation to ECEC services and the level of public knowledge and access to information made available about each ECEC service

4: A fair and inclusive early learning and care sector

- The experiences of children with disability, and their parents and carers

Recommendations

ELACCA recommends improvements to early learning and care in NSW, these are provided considering the whole sector. For the Portfolio Committee's consideration, and in relation to the Terms of Reference, we recommend:

1. A quality early learning and care sector for children in NSW

- a. **The composition of the early learning and care sector and the impact of government funding on the type and quality of services** To ensure growth of quality provision in the sector, ELACCA recommends the following action from government in approving new services:
 - a requirement for a provider's existing service ratings to be rigorously reviewed when applying for expansion.
 - the provider must be able to clearly demonstrate their ability to deliver a quality service
 - the above criteria should be nationally consistent, transparent and co-designed with the sector
- b. **Safety, health and wellbeing of children in early learning and care services** With regard to improvements to child safety, ELACCA recommends, and will continue to advocate to the Australian Government for improvement to policy settings, and additional investment. We encourage NSW to join in our advocacy for the following:
 - Renegotiate, update or redesign the *National Partnership Agreement on the Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care* re-committing to funding and monitoring implementation of the Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations across jurisdictions.
 - Ensure state and territory regulators are funded to deliver targeted and timely assessment and rating of services under the NQF, with a renewed focus on building capability.
 - Implement a national educator database
 - Implement a National Working with Vulnerable People Check across all states and territories, for people seeking to work and volunteer in early childhood education and other human services care, based on risk that includes reportable conduct, not only convictions.
 - Fund a national research project into reporting behaviour, to examine and recommend improvements to ensuring time-critical reporting of breaches, incidents and complaints in ECEC, and support adoption of best practice reporting in all state and territories.
 - Develop and implement a national reportable conduct scheme (or, at a minimum, nationally consistent reportable conduct schemes).
 - Provide professional learning for educators to build sector capacity and capability in acceptable and appropriate reporting practice that ensures child safeguarding.
 - Fully embed contextual and nationally consistent safeguarding principles, child safe culture and the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations into the National Quality Standard.
 - Introduce nationally consistent publication and reporting on enforcement actions by ACECQA as detailed in the national law, with consideration of privacy and psychological safety of the workforce, families and children.
 - Implement strong and nationally consistent requirements for approved providers and persons with management and control to demonstrate capability, compliance and integrity in the provision and/or expansion of ECEC services, on a regular and ongoing basis.

2. A safe and valued workforce

- a. **Workforce pay, conditions and safety** Work with the Australian Government to establish pay parity for the early learning and care workforce with similar staff in government schools. This includes NSW considering support for an industrial agreement, such as a multi-employer agreement in NSW reflecting local conditions. (Noting the Victorian Government funds a multi-employer agreement).

- b. **Workforce pay, conditions and safety** Implement a recruitment campaign (for example, ELACCA's *Big Roles in Little Lives*) to attract and attract-back a workforce to what we know is a fulfilling and rewarding career.
- c. **Training pathways and availability** Continue to support Free TAFE qualifications and work with the sector to co-design and improve affordable and quality qualifications for current and prospective early learning and care professionals, including ensuring child safety is a component of all qualifications.
- d. **Training pathways and availability** Build on the current scholarship programs, and supported pathways for early learning and care professionals to upskill, like the ELACCA/University of Wollongong model.

3. Strong and visible regulation of NSW early learning and care services

ELACCA and our members strongly support the existing regulatory framework, including the National Quality Framework (NQF), as an effective mechanism for maintaining consistent standards of safety, quality, and accountability across the sector.

ELACCA supports transparency and accountability through nationally consistent collection, evaluation and publication of meaningful, reliable data relating to all early learning and care services.

- a. **The regulatory framework** Fully commit to the National Quality Framework, with appropriate resourcing for the NSW ECEC Regulatory Authority (RA) to undertake their role, including:
 - 3 yearly assessment and rating visits, at a minimum, for every service in NSW
 - 12 monthly assessment and rating visits for services rated as Working Towards, and intensive support for those rated as Significant Improvement Required
 - communication to families on the outcome of assessment and ratings of service/s their child attends in compliance with National Law and Regulations.
- b. **NSW ECEC Regulatory Authority (RA)** ELACCA recommends that additional funding is required for the NSW RA to:
 - ensure it can undertake assessment and rating of all services as outlined in 3.a, to build community confidence in the quality of services and safety of children.
 - continue to work with ACECQA for ongoing joint moderation role for Authorised Officer (AO) decisions
 - ensure AOs have enhanced and ongoing training in their role, and an early learning and care qualification, including how to manage any conscious/unconscious biases.
- c. **The collection, evaluation and publication of reliable data in relation to ECEC services and the level of public knowledge and access to information made available about each ECEC service** Build and maintain community confidence in the sector through strong and well communicated regulation:
 - better communication and transparency with the sector and the public, including families, regarding early learning and care services regarding rating outcomes, incidents, and breaches including:
 - building understanding / promoting adequate characterisation of compliance events based on risk or severity hierarchy. eg explaining what a breach is and what serious incidents are.
 - improving timeliness of notifications – outcomes should be delivered as close to the event as possible.

- escalate enforcement actions consistently in cases of persistent and serial non-compliance, and ensure visibility of these across the sector to better deter unscrupulous behaviour of current or potential providers.
- work with the sector, including high-quality providers to model and promote a strong reporting culture.

4. A fair and inclusive early learning and care sector

- a. *The experiences of children with disability, and their parents and carers* Advocate to the Australian Government to implement inclusion recommendations from the PC inquiry articulated in *A path to universal early childhood education and care*, including for the Inclusion Support Program as an immediate priority.
- b. *The experiences of children with disability, and their parents and carers* Introduce a state-funded and managed inclusion program, similar to the Victorian Government's School Readiness Funding, Queensland's Kindy Uplift program or South Australian Preschool Boost program, but expanded to all children enrolled in early learning and care from birth the year before school, regardless of the setting.
- c. *The experiences of children with disability, and their parents and carers* Build the workforce capacity and capability to ensure appropriate support for all children and their families.

ELACCA's response to the inquiry

1. Safe and quality early learning and care services for children in NSW

Safety, health and wellbeing of children in early learning and care services

ELACCA notes complexity in balancing different objectives for early learning and care, but maintains a focus on children's quality learning, development and safety as the highest priority. We firmly believe that every child should have access to quality early learning and care in whichever setting best suits the needs of the child, and that of their family.

The early learning and care sector in NSW is a vital and dynamic part of the state's social infrastructure. It is underpinned by a highly skilled and dedicated workforce, a strong regulatory and quality assurance framework, and a deep commitment to supporting children's safety and wellbeing during the most critical years of their development. All approved providers of early learning and care, regardless of their location or business structure, are funded and regulated to deliver safe, inclusive, and developmentally rich learning environments for children.

Maintaining a focus on the rights, needs and safety of the child in all policy design, implementation and investment will maximise long term social and economic benefits for all Australians. ELACCA supports early learning and care policy and reform that is driven by the following principles:

- Child-centred in all facets of design and implementation
- High-quality and inclusive
- Culturally safe and informed
- Underpinned by a qualified, professional and highly regarded workforce
- Affordable, accessible, and equitable for all families and children
- Nationally consistent

Assuring children's safety is paramount across all parts of the sector and a vital consideration in setting policy and investment priorities. We are collectively driven by a zero-tolerance approach to child harm.

Quality of early learning and care services and the educational and developmental outcomes for children

ELACCA and our members support the internationally renowned National Quality Framework (NQF). Its multi-layered approach combines legislation, national standards, mandatory reporting and continuous oversight.

We will continue working with governments to identify and implement ways to further strengthen it, including supporting recommendations from the recent *Review of Child Safety Arrangements under the National Quality Framework* (NQF).

A high-quality early learning and care program is one that is delivered in accordance with the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), National Quality Standard (NQS) and Preschool Reform Agreement (PRA), by a qualified and valued workforce.

We look forward to the continued implementation of the Preschool Outcomes Measure as a national formative assessment tool to further teachers' and educators' understanding of children's learning and development against learning progressions.⁶

⁶ See: [Preschool Outcomes Measure - Department of Education, Australian Government](#)

The composition of the early learning and care sector and the impact of government funding on the type and quality of services

Our members reflect the mixed market that make up our early learning sector: for-profit and not-for-profit business models delivering sessional kindergarten, long day early learning and care, and out of school hours care.

As large providers, ELACCA members offer services supported by head office teams that help drive the delivery of quality learning and care, and investment in inclusion, workforce development and pedagogy.

ELACCA supports consistent stewardship of finance, planning, data transparency and workforce sustainability to deliver on quality, affordable and inclusive early learning and care for all children and families. A stronger stewardship role at a national level, as recommended by the ACCC and the PC, should lead investment in early learning market growth so it is directed to quality provision and to communities and geographical areas where it is most needed. Strong stewardship, investment and support across all three levels of government – federal, state and local – is required to ensure the system in NSW operates as effectively as possible for the communities they serve.

2. A safe and valued workforce

Workforce pay, conditions and safety

The single biggest contributor to high quality in early childhood education and care services is the education and training of early childhood educators and teachers, reinforced with ongoing professional development.⁷ A skilled, knowledgeable, and stable workforce is essential for supporting children's safety and wellbeing, learning and development.

The early learning and care sector has been facing chronic workforce shortages over a number of years, and as found by the recent Jobs and Skills Australia Workforce Capacity Study in the Early Childhood Education and Care, a substantial uplift in workforce levels is required to meet current and future demand.⁸ The PC also found that workforce challenges, including pay and conditions, needed to be addressed to ensure the expanding availability of early learning and care.⁹

The recent negative media footage portraying graphic incidents of child harm in early learning and care, has had a distressing impact on educators, families, providers and community. Our members collectively hold a zero-tolerance approach to child harm and are gravely concerned for the psycho-social and physical safety of the majority of the dedicated and professional early learning and care workforce. Anecdotal reports highlight negative public opinion and action, threatening the morale, wellbeing and ultimately, retention of early learning professionals in the workforce.

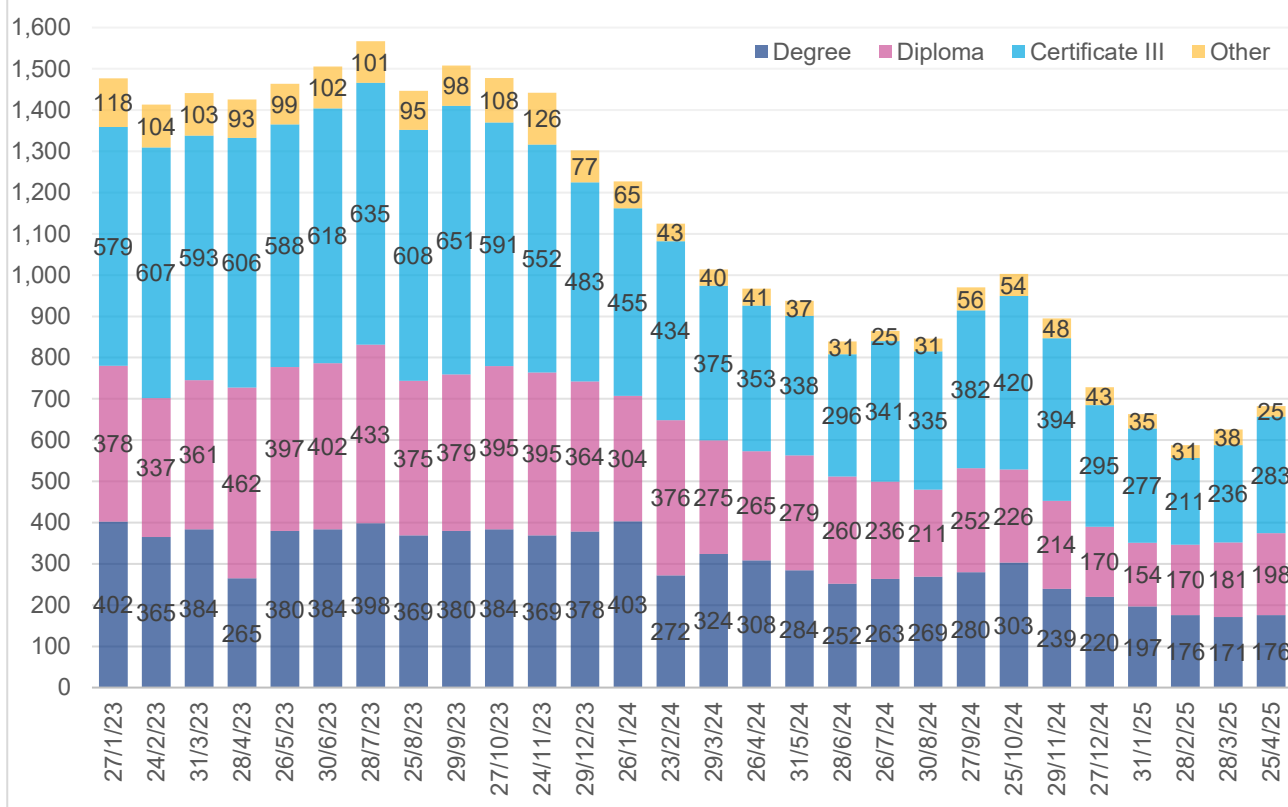
The Chart on the following page shows vacancies across ELACCA members' services in NSW (representing approximately 25% of sector). We are starting to see a concerning increase in workforce vacancies and will monitor this over coming months.

⁷ Pascoe, S & Brennan, D. (2017). *Lifting our Game*, pp. 62-63.

⁸ Jobs and Skills Australia (2024), *The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession*

⁹ Productivity Commission (2024)

Chart 1: NSW centre-based workforce vacancies at the last Friday of the month



Retaining and upskilling our existing workforce, and attracting back qualified, quality early learning professionals are important components in ensuring quality of service delivery, while we continue to work with governments to build a strong skills pipeline and future workforce.

It is clear higher remuneration levels would improve the attractiveness of a career in early learning and care, workforce retention and promote better career progression.¹⁰

ELACCA values the skills and dedication of our workforce and we welcomed recent federal government investment in their wages via the \$3.6b Worker Retention Payment (WRP). We continue to advocate for greater, ongoing government investment in our workforce to recognise, attract and retain skilled and quality early childhood professionals, including government investment to support preliminary decisions from the Fair Work Commission recent gender undervaluation case¹¹. Appropriate remuneration for our sector equates to pay parity for early childhood teachers with primary school teachers, and early childhood educators with primary school support staff. NSW could consider a similar investment for early childhood teachers and educators as is in place in Victoria, through the Victorian Early Childhood Teacher and Educators Agreement¹², as a way of assuring appropriate salaries and conditions for the workforce in NSW.

The availability and affordability of quality training institutions for early childhood education qualifications

Ongoing support to build and maintain a growing pipeline of skilled, quality workers should be a priority action. Further, Governments both State and Federal must continue to invest in skills and support access to tertiary and vocational qualifications in early childhood education and care.

¹⁰ Jobs and Skills Australia (2024)

¹¹ See: Fair Work Commission - [Gender-based undervaluation – priority awards review](#)

¹² See: <https://elaa.org.au/news/vectea-2024-your-essential-guide/>

Clearly, the cost of training is a factor in career choices, for both school-leavers and career-changers. Continuing and extending free TAFE and fee relief programs would remove financial barriers and enable more Australians to choose a career in early learning.

We note the growth of Free TAFE federally and in some states, including NSW, and we welcome the inclusion of early learning and care qualifications in the offering. We also look to the recently established TAFE South Australia Centre of Excellence in Early Childhood Education and Care, for national leadership to inform how all jurisdictions can bring together early learning employers, unions, universities, training providers, advocacy and representative groups to drive meaningful change.

In addition, constructive partnerships between the sector and tertiary institutions can be part of the solution. For example, ELACCA's partnership with the University of Wollongong to deliver an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Boost initiative – offering an accelerated (intensive) four-year degree for eligible, affording diploma-qualified educators the opportunity to attain a Bachelor qualification, with targeted wrap-around support.

Government support for both the co-design of these degrees, and scholarships to enable educators to study is a welcome and worthy investment.

ELACCA supports ACECQA's role as the appropriate body to determine and publish lists of approved courses under the NQF approved qualifications.

The establishment of Registered Training Organisation (RTO) standards by Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), and a growing focus on continuous improvement by ASQA, are positive improvements and demonstrate growth in training quality in our sector.

We note that early learning and care VET courses are different from traditional VET qualifications, with a larger focus on theory and written work than many other qualifications. One result of this is that people are steered into the qualifications at Certificate III level with poor understanding of the requirements of the study needed to gain the qualification.

ELACCA would welcome a sector-informed, Government-funded national induction program for all early learning and care graduates prior to commencing in their roles. This would support the preparedness of new members of the early learning and care workforce, understanding their obligations under law and equip them with every opportunity to succeed in their new role.

3. Strong and visible regulation of NSW early learning and care services

The regulatory framework

It is acknowledged that the NQF is an internationally regarded framework. In its application within NSW, the framework has provided the foundation for quality assurance, with the integration of national standards and state-based oversight offering clarity and consistency for providers and families. The framework's emphasis on continuous improvement, child safety, and educator capability aligns well with the values and operational priorities of our members. However, there remains considerable scope to enhance its effectiveness through appropriate resourcing of the RA, a relational regulatory posture and nationally consistent regulatory interpretation, reporting and publication of compliance actions. ELACCA has consistently called for more timely assessment and rating of services.

It is essential that families can rely on the RA and providers to assure that their children are safe, experience consistently quality education and care within a regularly assessed and rated service. An improved rating and assessment cycle, coupled with regular compliance visits, in conjunction with systemic support for services assessed and rated as 'Working Towards' the NQS would significantly and rapidly uplift quality.

The NSW ECEC Regulatory Authority

ELACCA has a productive relationship with the NSW ECEC Regulatory Authority (RA), and welcomes consistent, strong and effective regulation of member services, and all services in NSW, regardless of their size, operating/governance structure or location.

ELACCA members have varying levels of dialogue with the regulator at senior official level, and value the opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions for improvement. Issues from members that we have surfaced include:

- Need for improved training and recruitment onboarding for authorised officers, ensuring strong knowledge of the sector, and capacity to identify and overcome conscious and unconscious biases
- Lack of consistency across interactions, and a focus on more minor breaches, which can direct resources unnecessarily.
- Time between visits, and ensuring all providers including those who underreport are visited and assessed regularly.
- Need for improved consistency and communication in the recording and notification of breaches.
- Need for better understanding from AOs and the RA on the various and sometimes competing legislation when dealing with complaints and allegations, and competing government agencies, including the NSW Department of Education, NSW Police, and the Office of the Children's Guardian.
- Issues stemming from a lack of national consistency and harmonisation.

The NSW Regulatory Authority plays a critical role in upholding the integrity of the quality framework, and we acknowledge its ongoing efforts to engage more openly with the sector and improve communication and effectiveness. Initiatives such as the publication of compliance guidance materials, regular provider forums, and support during assessment and rating processes will strengthen the Authority's impact.

To further improve effectiveness, we recommend additional investment in professional development for authorised officers (AO) to ensure consistent decision-making, as well as a greater focus on proactive engagement with services. We attest that a regulatory system that combines accountability with support will help lift quality across the board and reinforces public confidence in early learning and care in NSW.

The collection, evaluation and publication of reliable data in relation to ECEC services and the level of public knowledge and access to information made available about each ECEC service

Nationally, the PC recommended enhanced public access to data to promote transparency and accountability. It encouraged the use of data to inform decision-making at all levels of the system from service providers to government agencies.

A lack of consistency across jurisdictions in how enforcement actions are published under the National Law and Regulations is also of relevance. Although most jurisdictions publish Compliance Notices and Emergency Actions at the individual service and provider level, with historical data available over time, ELACCA notes that data for NSW is only provided as a high-level summary. Individual service or provider level data for NSW is not easily found through our desktop exploration.

There is advice on the NSW Department of Education's website¹³ which provides: *"Not every enforcement or compliance action taken against a service is published. Families wishing to see a comprehensive record of a service's compliance should request to see the record of service's compliance history, which is required to be kept under regulation 167 of the National Regulations"*. ELACCA would support this burden being removed from families, and for it to be provided in a more accessible manner. We would welcome Commonwealth leadership to ensure consistency and transparency of data and practice across all jurisdictions.

4. A fair and inclusive early learning and care sector

The experiences of children with disability, and their parents and carers

Effective and adequately funded inclusion support has been a significant issue for families and children requiring additional support, and for early learning and care services seeking to meet their needs. Access to inclusion support should be seamless and accessible for every family, and not be determined by postcode, family background or capacity to navigate the system.

The NDIS Review¹⁴ recommended there should be a connected system of supports that includes mainstream services such as early learning and care settings and schools, availability of foundational supports for children and families and a new early intervention pathway in the NDIS for children with the highest level of needs.

There is an urgent need for targeted, ongoing federal funding to improve inclusion and the Inclusion Support Program (ISP), by implementing the inclusion recommendations from the PC report, and working closely with the sector. The sector requires fully funded, demand-driven inclusion support to meet the needs of children and families while providing our educators with essential knowledge and support.

A program like the Victorian Government's School Readiness Funding,¹⁵ Queensland Government's Kindy Uplift program,¹⁶ or South Australian Government's Preschool Boost program (commencing July 2025)¹⁷ would be a useful tool for the NSW Government to consider. The program objective is to address educational disadvantage, by building the capacity of educators and families to respond to children's learning and development. In Victoria, a menu of evidence-informed programs and supports is available to services that address the 3 priority outcome areas of Communication (language, literacy and numeracy), Wellbeing (social, emotional and executive function) and Access, Inclusion and Participation. In South Australia, preschool services can use Preschool Boost funding to purchase allied health services and other quality programs from the Preschool Boost menu across all Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) domains. It is tailored to meet the needs of 3- and 4-year-old children, their families and communities.

As the universal platform, or back-bone, for children in their early years, early learning and care services should be supported by governments to embed a systemic approach to equitable access and outcomes through foundational supports and broader inclusion. Designing a truly inclusive, mainstream early learning and care system requires significant, multi-level ongoing investment from government at the child, service and community level.

¹³ See: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/regulation-and-compliance/published-enforcement-and-decision-actions> (accessed June 2025)

¹⁴ Commonwealth Government of Australia (2023), *Working Together to deliver the NDIS*

¹⁵ See: Victorian Department of Education (accessed June 2025) [School Readiness Funding program](#)

¹⁶ See: Queensland Department of Education (accessed June 2025): [Kindy Uplift program](#)

¹⁷ See: Government of South Australia (accessed June 2025) [Preschool Boost for early childhood services | Office for Early Childhood Development](#)

ELACCA advocates for streamlining services and support to ensure families with high or complex needs are not required to tell their story on multiple occasions, and can access support when it is needed (without delay). The experience of children and families currently accessing or seeking to access early intervention and inclusion support can be confusing, delayed and disparate. This results in children who may vitally need support missing out at the most crucial time in their development.

A streamlined approach to inclusion should include:

- a 'no wrong door' approach rather than a single-entry point to the system
- simplified funding applications, removing any burden on families and service providers to unnecessarily re-apply for funding entitlements, particularly where circumstances remain unchanged.
- a nationally consistent approach to funding and policy, built on evidence-based best practice.

Families and carers are often faced with a complex, disconnected network of services, with multiple application processes and funding streams before they can even access early intervention supports. System navigation support of both the early learning and care system, foundational supports and the NDIS should be funded and readily available to families to ensure they understand and can access required support.

Early childhood teachers and educators play a vital role in children's lives. Every effort should be made to harness the expertise of this workforce, and their unique relationships with children and families, and build their capacity to support the provision of foundational supports. This includes being adequately funded to have dedicated time off the floor, to plan, critically reflect, develop inclusion strategies and work with allied health professionals, including early childhood intervention specialists.

Targeted, evidence-based and ongoing training for staff in how best to support children with additional needs in early learning and care is vital for the quality of experience of the child, for the wellbeing of the educator, and the relationship between the child, educator and family. Inadequate training and support for the workforce provides a risk for the child and the service, most significantly being an inability to meet the needs of the child in their safety, learning and development.

Ensuring optimal support in early learning and care settings requires adequate and targeted investment in our workforce, to:

- build service / community-level capacity and capability, ensuring it is appropriately resourced
- build cultural safety awareness and understanding for early learning and allied health professionals including co-designing with relevant organisations.
- equip teachers and educators with the skills to refer or provide necessary supports for children with identified additional needs (with and without diagnoses) to ensure all children experience the full benefits of early learning and care
- develop and implement workforce strategies for early intervention and allied health to complement other existing early learning and care workforce strategies
- support the sector to work with training providers and universities to ensure the best practice guidelines for early childhood early intervention model is an essential part of their curriculum
- provide regular professional development for early learning and care staff in best practice for early intervention.

Governments must ensure that all early childhood education services have ongoing capacity building funding to support foundational supports and inclusion. Capacity building is particularly important in this period of transition of NDIS arrangements, to ensure services can provide targeted management strategies for individual children and families, that are connected to local services. Building relationships and understanding the role and expertise of local allied health professionals and services, including early childhood intervention specialists, in an important cog in the capacity-building process.



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