

Annual Report 2025-26



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About ELACCA

Collective commitment to quality and strength

The Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA) promotes the value of high-quality early learning and care for all children, whatever their circumstances.

We contribute to the development of public policy for early learning and care, to build a strong and stable sector. We do this by drawing on the knowledge and experience of our members, who are embedded in communities across Australia.

When policy and regulation are designed to support high-quality early learning, our members are equipped to support great outcomes for thousands of children and families.



Snapshot: 2025-26

- 2,379 services across Australia, including 1,976 long day care and 308 preschool and kindergarten services.
- Educating and caring for 221,149 children.
- Employing 58,738 staff in metropolitan, regional and remote communities.
- A balance of not-for-profit and for-profit members, addressing common issues and pursuing sector-wide progress.





Our members



Co-Chairs' report

Meeting the moment for Australia's children

The last year was challenging for the early learning and care sector, and for everyone who cares about the wellbeing of young children.

Quality and safety sit at the heart of the early learning and care sector, driving both practice and regulation. We know that high-quality early learning and care services are enriching environments for children – places where they can flourish. We are proud of the contribution these services make to Australia, and to Australia's future.

Thousands of children attended safe, high-quality early learning and care services last year – but Australians were rightly horrified by cases of harm, including sexual abuse.

As a result, strengthening our system became the number one priority for governments and early learning and care providers in 2025-26.

Safety and quality for every child

In December 2025, ELACCA issued a *Statement of Commitment to Children*, recognising that protecting children requires more than good intentions or strong words. In making the Statement, ELACCA members affirmed that,

'Prioritising child safety is not optional. The safety, rights, and best interests of every child are our highest priority and our paramount consideration in operational decisions.'

ELACCA members pledged to:

- work with governments to implement evidence-based reforms
- deliver mandatory child safety training
- support educators to safeguard the children in their care
- build child-safe cultures in organisations
- place child-safety at the core of governance and strategy.

This work is not new for ELACCA members – but the pace of change has been unusually fast. Our members

are navigating rapid changes in legislative and regulatory frameworks, seeking to move quickly, but very carefully.

Our members have also sought to honour and reinforce the professionalism of their staff. Qualified, skilled early childhood educators are the key to quality and safety in our services, and their wellbeing matters enormously.

Through our response to the revelations of abuse – by being constructive and careful, and investing in our workforce – we can rebuild trust in the early learning and care system.

Policy ambition and reform

Bringing experience and evidence to policymaking has never been more important. ELACCA seeks to be a trusted voice in policy discussions, guided by its commitment to quality and equity in early learning and care.

Over the last year, ELACCA has liaised between its members, governments, public sector agencies and others, seeking to build alignment between policy and practice. This includes strong contributions to thinking about the cost of high-quality service provision; what a national commission could bring to the sector; and what it could mean for early learning and care to be 'universal' in Australia.

Policy ambition and reform – at national, state and territory levels – will continue to shape our sector and its trajectory. We share the goal of governments that want to create the best experiences, and the best futures, for Australia's children. As a peak body, our responsibility is to help governments make the best choices, to get us to that destination.

New leadership at ELACCA

After nearly 10 years as CEO of ELACCA, Elizabeth Death stood down in 2025. Arriving at a new organisation, Elizabeth built ELACCA from the ground

up, creating a trusted voice in the early learning sector.
We are grateful for her vision and dedication.

We welcomed Anne Hollonds AO as CEO for several months in 2026. We were also grateful to Sally Maddison for acting in the CEO role in 2025.

At the beginning of June 2025, Dr Amanda Walsh rejoined ELACCA, taking on the CEO role. Amanda brings sector experience and strong relationships with members and stakeholders. We look forward to her leadership in 2026-27 and beyond.

Finally, we thank our fellow Board members in 2025-26 for their wisdom and commitment: Dr Ros Baxter (CEO, Goodstart Early Learning); Nicole Jones (CEO, Gowrie NSW); Anna Learmonth (CEO, Only About Children); Annie Bryce (then CEO, Edge Early Learning), to December 2025; and Adam Lai (CEO, Nido Early School), from December 2025.

Pejman Okhovat

Co-Chair, ELACCA
CEO, G8 Education

Kay Turner

Co-Chair, ELACCA
CEO, SDN Children's
Services

CEO's report

Bringing evidence and experience to the table

Over the last year, ELACCA has provided advice to governments on meeting immediate challenges in our sector, and on pathways to a stronger, more stable future.

ELACCA's activity has been shaped by government reform agendas on child safety. Within these agendas (and alongside them), we have maintained a focus on the key factors that create quality and safety in early learning and care: a strong, stable workforce; and adequate funding, so that services are well-resourced and all children can participate.

Thinking deeply about reform

Not since the Covid-19 pandemic has ELACCA faced such a rapid pace of change. We have sought to contribute constructively to sector reform processes at national, state and territory levels. Despite the pace, ELACCA has tried to think deeply – and communicate clearly – about what it takes to uplift quality and safety in early learning and care services.

We participated in parliamentary inquiries established across jurisdictions, preparing submissions with our members and appearing at hearings. These included:

- Senate inquiry into the quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system
- Legislative Council inquiry into the early childhood education and care sector in New South Wales
- Select committee inquiry into the early childhood education and care sector in Victoria.

Through our membership of government advisory bodies, we have brought the insights of approved providers into discussions about child safety reforms, seeking to ensure that reforms are practical, effective and consistent across the country.

Getting the foundations right

ELACCA has also worked to inform government thinking on future directions for the early learning and care sector. This includes the Service Delivery Prices (SDP) project, which is examining the cost of delivery of high-

quality early learning and care services. Our role in the SDP Sector Reference Group has enabled us to explain the complexities of service provision, and the importance of getting the SDP right – particularly if it forms the basis of a new funding system.

Our work on service costs has drawn heavily on ELACCA's private datasets and our data analysis capabilities. This highlights the enduring value of our three strategic pillars, and the many links that run between them: advocacy and advice to governments; data and analytical insights; and strengthening the early learning workforce.

We continued to broker important conversations between policymakers and sector leaders, including through our annual parliamentary event in Canberra. In March 2026, the Parliamentary Friends of Early Childhood came together with our members to hear from guest speakers Professor Karen Thorpe (Laureate Professor and Group Leader, Queensland Brain Institute) and Penny Dakin (Executive Director – Communities, Minderoo Foundation). This was a great reminder of the deep knowledge within the early years sector, and the value of evidence in policymaking.

Throughout the year, the ELACCA team worked tirelessly to pursue good public policy; develop the next generation of educational leaders and teachers; and support our members. They deserve thorough thanks.

On a personal note, I was delighted to rejoin ELACCA in June 2026, taking on the role of CEO. After working across policy and workforce projects at ELACCA, I have a deep appreciation of the value that this organisation brings to the early learning and care sector.

ELACCA is unique, and I look forward to helping it continue to achieve and evolve.

Dr Amanda Walsh

CEO



Early Learning
& Care Council
of Australia

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