



CCC, CELA and ELAA Select Committee on Work and Care Submission

SEPTEMBER 2022

A Joint Submission by:



Community Child Care Association



Community Early Learning Australia



Early Learning Association Australia

Acknowledgement of Country

Community Child Care Association, Community Early Learning Australia and Early Learning Association Australia acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of this nation and the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work. We recognise their continuing connection to culture, land, water and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

About Us



Julie Price
Executive Director
Community Child Care
Association

Community Child Care Association

Community Child Care Association (CCC) has been the voice of community owned and managed education and care services across Victoria for 50 years. Our 700+ service members rely on us for professional advice and support, and to keep them up to date with industry standards, best practices and the implementation of government policy. CCC is here to help services transform their vision into practice and we offer membership, quality training and consultancy services.

www.cccinc.org.au



Michele Carnegie
Chief Executive Officer
Community Early
Learning Australia

Community Early Learning Australia

Community Early Learning Australia (CELA) is a not for profit organisation with a focus on amplifying the value of early learning for every child across Australia – representing our members and uniting our sector as a force for quality education and care. Founded over 40 years ago, we represent over 1,600 early education and care services employing 21,000 plus educators. Our national influence is extended through publications and social media which have a circulation of 52,000 per week and our learning and development program which trains over 7,000 educators per year in quality practice and governance.

www.cela.org.au



David Worland
Chief Executive Officer
Early Learning
Association Australia

Early Learning Association Australia

Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) is a peak membership association. Our vision is excellence and equity in early childhood education and care. Our diverse membership base includes 630 service providers managing services at over 1,250 locations with more than 15,000 staff caring and educating 70,000 children. Our members are early years management organisations, independent kindergartens, local governments, long day care services, government and independent schools and out of school hours care programs.

www.elaa.org.au

Introduction

Peak bodies for the community sector, Community Early Learning Australia (CELA), Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) and Community Child Care (CCC) together represent nearly 4000 education and care services, around 20% of the market – employing over 50,000 teachers and educators. The bulk of our members are community-managed not-for-profit services.

Our sector experience and significant member representation across a wide variety of communities and settings, provides essential insight into the education and care sector. We know that the education and care sector underpin the capacity of parents to work, and for children to learn and develop.

Our submission is targeted at key issues at the intersection of work and care as they pertain to education and care. We would welcome the opportunity to present to the committee further information to support your deliberations.

Terms of Reference

A) The extent and nature of the combination of work and care across Australia and the impact of changes in demographic and labour force patterns on work-care arrangements in recent decades;

The capacity for parents to work is highly dependent on whether they can access education and care for their children. Families need to be able to access quality education and care in their local communities, and that suits their hours of work.

Not all families can access education and care services. Families in some locations, particularly those in lower socio-economic areas and rural and regional areas, have limited access to education and care.

A range of services provide education and care across Australia, including long day care services, preschools, kindergartens, family day care and outside school hours care. Each of these have different fees, hours and types of care¹. The sector is a mixed market, with around half of all services being not for profit or government managed. Although services are regulated under the National Quality Framework², services can be difficult for parents and carers to navigate³.

Demographically, the Education and Care sector is overrepresented by women, who make up 92.1% of staff⁴. The labour force is currently

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022, n.p.

² Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority, 2022, n.p.

³ Centre for Policy Development, 2021, p. 6

⁴ Department of Education, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2022, p. vii

experiencing workforce shortages.⁵ Experienced staff are leaving the profession, with 45 per cent of teachers aged 50 years and over intending to leave the profession in the next five years⁶. There is also low student enrolment for future staff⁷. Many Education and Care staff are lost to more competitively remunerated care work or to other higher paid sectors⁸.

Recommendations:

- That the Government ensures the provision of new community-managed service sites in low socio-economic and rural areas, ensuring that Education and Care deserts are rectified.
- That the Government explores funding models to deliver holistic education and care for 'thin markets' described above that provides a single funding model and provides continuity of education and care for a child's day in a centre
- That Education and Care teachers are paid wages and have conditions on parity with school sector conditions, as occurs for teachers only under The Victorian Early Childhood Teachers and Educators Agreement⁹ (VECTEA), to incentivise retention, and that educator wages sufficiently recompense staff skills and experience.
- To address immediate acute workforce shortages, that the Government funds a wage subsidy increase of up to 15% per hour for educators and teachers, while establishing a review of the Awards by the Fair Work Commission.

B) The impact of combining various types of work and care (including of children, the aged, those with disability) upon the well-being of workers, carers and those they care for;

Families access a variety of education and care services in order manage the care arrangements for their children, but this can be a challenge and can compromise on children's learning and development. Further, as more families seek to access education and care, workforce shortages are further impacting educator wellbeing.

Worker and educator wellbeing is impacted by family vulnerability (referred to in section f), lack of access to education and care and workforce shortages.

Changeable work requirements, like shift work, mean that families require flexible education and care environments for their children. We know that quality is a key to children's learning and development outcomes, and part of

⁵ Community Care Association, Community Early Learning Association, Early Learning Australia, 2022, p. 13.

⁶ Department of Education, 2022, p. 4.

⁷ Department of Education, 2022, p. 7.

⁸ Department of Education, 2022, p. 9.

⁹ Community Care Association, Community Early Learning Association, Early Learning Australia, 2022, p. 13.

this rests on children having stable, trusted relationships with educators¹⁰. This is difficult to achieve when children need to attend multiple service settings.

Some children in particular lack access to any education and care. A review of the Child Care Subsidy shows that many families with children with disabilities and higher needs are turned away from services as the service cannot meet their children's needs¹¹. These families as a result face greater barriers accessing work and care.

Educator wellbeing is also impacted by current workforce shortages. Numerous surveys¹² have highlighted pressures on the workforce including head office staff needing to work as educators and teachers, staff working additional hours and an inability to access breaks and holidays due to a lack of a casual workforce. COVID and influenza have compounded pre-existing workforce pressures. The level of overseas born educators and teachers sourced through skilled migration diminished during COVID and has not recovered which adds to these pressures¹³. Services at times need to limit numbers of children to meet workforce availability, which further adds to family stress due to unpredictable of education and care.

Recommendations:

- That the Government's Early Years Strategy and associated work seeks to support families to access education and care services that fully meet family needs including ensuring continuity of care for children and families.
 - That the government urgently enable overseas qualified skilled educators and teachers access to Australian workplaces.
 - That introduction of changes to the rate of Child Care Subsidy be delayed until immediate workforce shortages are addressed.
- Better integration and consistency of state and federal inclusion strategies to ensure all children (including those with disabilities) can access education and care services

D) the adequacy of current work and care supports, systems, legislation and other relevant policies across Australian workplaces and society;

Our education and care system is built on a quality framework that provides parents with assurance of the safety and quality of service provision. Despite workforce shortages it is imperative that this system remains so that children's safety and learning and development is not adversely affected. Research demonstrates that low-quality education and care can negatively impact children's longer-term outcomes.

¹⁰ O'Connell, Fox, Hinz and Cole, 2016, p. vi

¹¹ Bray et al., 2021, p. 202

¹² Big Steps & United Workers Union, 2022, p. 3; Community Early Learning Australia, Early Learning Association Australia, Community Child Care Association, 2021, p. 8

¹³ Department of Education, 2022, p. 8.

The National Quality Framework outlines key requirements for service operation including educator to child ratios. Educator to child ratios are calculated across the service (not by individual rooms) and are based on the youngest child in care. This approach provides flexibility to more effectively respond to the needs of children. The ratios provided under the National Quality Framework are required to be met under national law – Section 169¹⁴.

In order for ratios to be followed adequately, services must adjust their enrolments to coincide with their employee numbers. As there have been ongoing staffing shortages and an ever-growing workforce shortage, services are increasingly having to ask families to keep their child home when they cannot find enough staff to meet ratio.

Current ratios are in place so that children receive high-quality education and care. Current ratios also mean that staff are given adequate support, work hours, and workloads. Maintaining ratios is essential to both child wellbeing and staff job retention¹⁵.

Government supports are inadequate to meet the needs of families whose income is precarious; those who most need stability, are currently not receiving it due to requirements around the Activity Test and eligibility for the Child Care Subsidy. Families who are seeking work, or working casually, may not meet the activity test and be unable to access sufficient education and care. This causes stress for families, particularly those in vulnerable circumstances, meaning children may not have continuity of education and care and further entrenching disadvantage.

Recommendations:

- Retain ratios and qualification requirements to retain standards in education and care.
- Address the workforce issue, by developing strategies to mentor and support students to enter the Education and Care workforce and retain their ongoing employment. This will allow for ratios to be met and for quality and care standards to be improved for children and employees.
- Amend the activity test at a minimum, so all families have access to a minimum of 2 days of education and care.

F) The impact and lessons arising from the COVID-19 crisis for Australia's system of work and care;

COVID-19 lockdowns put significant pressure on parents and children, particularly those experiencing any type of vulnerability. Victoria experienced lengthy lockdowns which impacted access to Education and Care services. Women were particularly impacted by care and education responsibilities, which continues to impact their workforce participation¹⁶. If parents cannot find quality care for children, they are not able to work.

¹⁴ Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority, 2022, p430

¹⁵ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2022, p. 5

¹⁶ Wood, Griffiths and Crowley, 2021, p. 3

Sector staff were put under significant strain due to increased staff absences, an in-demand casual workforce, lockdowns, pandemic rules and regulations, and reduced migrant intake into the sector¹⁷.

Some children experienced greater vulnerability during COVID, including those who needed to access allied health and early intervention¹⁸. COVID exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities in the workforce and children's developmental challenges¹⁹

An ongoing impact of COVID has been the increase in child vulnerability, which has been seen through the Australian Early Development Census²⁰, literature from organisations like UNICEF and ARACY²¹ and in literature around the impact of COVID on pre-natal stress and child outcomes. More children and families are vulnerable than prior to COVID and this is impacting educators, who are challenged to meet the additional health and developmental challenges.

Recommendations:

- That targeted support is provided to ensure screening and diagnostic services are available for all children, and that children who need it can access allied health and ancillary support to thrive in education and care.
- That educators receive training and support to educate children with developmental vulnerabilities, including time to liaise with other services.
- Review of inclusion funding to better integrate and make consistent the programs and funding so that all children are included.

G) Consideration of gendered, regional and socio-economic differences in experience and in potential responses including for First Nations working carers, and potential workers;

Education and care is impacted by an array of gendered, locational, socio-economic and cultural differences, as well as differences in representation of First Nations children and the First Nations workforce. These all impact the capacity to provide quality education and care that meets community needs.

Gendered differences: Women make up 92.1% of staff in childcare²².

Regional differences: Regional and rural locations are far more likely to face unequal access to education and care²³, as are low socio-economic communities. The extent of accessible education and care is highly dependent on location, with rural and regional children particularly

¹⁷ Department of Education, 2022, pp. 6, 8-9.

¹⁸ Bray et al., 2021, p. 202

¹⁹ Centre for Community Health, 2022, p. 2

²⁰ Australian Early Development Census, 2021 p. 25

²¹ ARACY & UNICEF, 2021, p. 14

²² Department of Education, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2022, p. vii

²³ Hurley, Matthews and Pennicuik, 2022, p. 23

disadvantaged: 61.3% of people living in outer regional areas and 85.3% of people living in remote areas are in childcare deserts²⁴ and impacted by low-quality services.

Socio-economic differences: Low socio-economic locations are less likely to have access to high quality education and care²⁵.

First Nations differences: The teaching workforce is not as diverse as the student population, in gendered, location, and socio-economic strata but also in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation (6% of children compared to less than 1% of teachers)²⁶. The latter is also underrepresented at an Education and Care student level. With a Closing the Gap target to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's development across all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census by 55%²⁷, organisations such as SNAICC (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care) have been advocating that achieving these targets will reduce the high rates of Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander children removed from families²⁸.

As outlined in our joint federal election submission: "The Australian Government's Inclusion Support Program assists families and services by delivering vital support that ensures children with additional needs can fully benefit from quality education and care services. There is significant unmet demand for this program, meaning we are missing opportunities to give children the best start in life."²⁹

Recommendations:

- Focused incentivisation to boost and retain workforce members representing diverse experiences, as well as long-term supports to identify and rectify reasons for reduced representation.
- Provision of cultural sensitivity training, and opportunities for children and their families to include culture into activities.
- Service and industry requirement to champion diversity and difference at all levels of work and care.
- Fund unmet demand for the Inclusion Support Program [S. 7](#).
- Investing in prevention and early support services for families through a new national program for ACCO-led integrated family support services.
- Planning and investment to build the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce for child and family service delivery across the country.

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²⁴ Hurley, Matthews & Pennucik, 2022, p. 14

²⁵ Mitchell Institute, 2017, p. 2

²⁶ Department of Education, 2022, p. 9.

²⁷ The Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations & Australian Governments, 2020, p. 20

²⁸ Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, 2022, p. 1

²⁹ Community Childcare Association, Community Early Learning Australia & Early Learning Association Australia, 2022, p. 11

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