

Three things we can do to make early childhood education and care fairer

Date

Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) has appealed to the Australian Government to make access to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) fairer by doing three things:

1. removing the Child Care Subsidy Activity Test of a parent or carer's hours of work, study or volunteering for all First Nations families and extending the additional hours of education and care available under the test to all other vulnerable Australian children
2. investing in infrastructure to reduce 'childcare deserts' in Australian suburbs and regions
3. co-funding fair wages for the ECEC workforce.

These three key actions form the core of ELAA's 2023-24 pre-Budget Submission to the Australian Government.

"The evidence on the value of children having access to high quality Early Childhood Education and Care is clear," said ELAA CEO, David Worland. "Australia will benefit from the resulting reduced government expenditure, higher parental workforce participation, and importantly, improved school results leading to a workforce capable of managing the demands of the future."

A fairer Activity Test

Given Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are twice as likely as non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to be developmentally vulnerable (The Front Project, 2022), ELAA proposes that the activity test should be removed entirely for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

"We also want to see the additional hours of care available under the Test extended to at least two days a week for other vulnerable Australians like families who work casually and are unable to predict their work hours in advance. We know these families cannot afford more hours of care if they're not subsidised," said Mr Worland.

Fairer infrastructure investment

Research shows Australian parents struggle to access quality ECEC care for their children, with 35.2% of the population living in regions that the Mitchell Institute has referred to as 'childcare deserts'.

"To reduce the access barrier that families face, we're asking the Australian Government to budget to address access to ECEC, based on location, infrastructure needs and workforce supply," said Mr Worland.

"This would be a fundamental step in allowing children in affected areas to receive quality early education and care and ensure that they are not falling behind in their development.



EARLY LEARNING ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIA – THE VOICE FOR PARENTS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

“A boost in ECEC infrastructure and workforce will also translate into a boost in female employment, especially considering that ECEC is made up of a majority female workforce (over 92.1%).

Fairer wages

The workforce shortage crisis in the ECEC sector remains an ongoing issue. Paying wages on parity with schools would help remediate the crisis. However, this is not possible without services increasing their fees and that would mean costs would be passed on to parents already struggling with soaring costs of living.

“Victoria could offer a solution here,” said Mr Worland. “The Victorian State Government subsidises wages for kindergarten teachers covered by the Victorian Early Childhood Teachers and Educators Agreement 2020 (VECTEA).

“This means that staff in a service with the same qualification can earn tens of thousands of dollars more if they teach in a state government funded kindergarten room than if they teach in the adjacent Commonwealth funded toddler room. To illustrate, experienced full-time teachers in Victorian sessional kindergarten can earn more than \$100,000 per annum under the VECTEA, compared to wages between \$63,000 and \$88,000 under the Educational Services (Teachers) Award 2020.

“To address the workforce crisis and to maintain the quality of care provided within not-for-profit ECEC services, we encourage consideration in the 2023-2024 budget for the Federal Government to co-fund wages similarly to the Victorian State Government.

“We urge the Albanese Government to address the policy priorities outlined our pre-Budget submission to ensure a better future for all Australian children.”

For more information or to arrange an interview with ELAA contact James Gardener 0413 483 182.

ENDS

ELAA is the national peak body for not-for-profit providers of early childhood education and care. Our vision is Excellence and Equity in Early Childhood Education and Care. www.elaa.org.au