

Future generations will thank the Productivity Commission if it ‘gets it right’ on early childhood

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All Australian children do not have equal access to early education.

Despite a wealth of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) service providers and funding models across Australia, not every child and family can access what they need to thrive. Indeed, the current system is overly complex and difficult for families to navigate.

In its submission to the Australian Productivity Commission, Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) has asked that the Government prioritise access and participation by simplifying systems and supporting families to enrol in ECEC.

“Our submission to the Productivity Commission includes recommendations spanning the next five years but three key activities are a priority over the next 12 months,” said ELAA Acting CEO, Megan O’Connell.

“Those three priorities are enabling access to the Child Care Subsidy to kindergartens and preschools for hours of delivery outside of funded preschool programs to greatly increase the number of providers available in ‘childcare deserts’; removing the parental Activity Test that determines whether a child can access subsidised ECEC; and co-investment in educator and teacher wages by state and federal governments.”

The ELAA submission provides background and recommendations across four key areas including:

Improving access and participation – through a more simplified funding regime; centralised enrolment; and equity funding that supports outreach, translators and co-located ECEC services providing support for vulnerable children and children with additional needs from the time of enrolment.

Addressing thin markets - ensuring that services are available in all locations and operate the span of hours families need with a focus on areas with ‘childcare deserts’. Key initiatives such as extending access to Childcare Subsidy funded hours to kindergartens and greater investment in service infrastructure are essential. See parent comments at the end of this release.

Targeting funding to drive outcomes – taking a lead from the current ACCC inquiry provides the opportunity for government to examine and re-orient the funding model for ECEC providers to ensure that funding matches the cost of quality delivery.

Lifting quality across the system - through market management (with New Zealand as a model); conducting regular and consistent reviews against the National Quality Standards; and investing in workforce training and remuneration.

“Research clearly demonstrates that children who consistently access quality early childhood education for two years perform better throughout school. We know that nearly half of the children that start school behind stay behind, and that they are less likely to complete year 12 and go on to further education and employment,” said Ms O’Connell.

‘Further, they are likely to suffer the ill effects of this throughout their lives through higher welfare payments, chronic disease, mental health issues, housing issues and are more likely to be incarcerated.

“Equity comes at a cost and we encourage the Productivity Commission to be ambitious in its recommendations. If more children can start school developmentally ready, they are more likely to reach major education milestones and transition to work and contribute economically. This has a flow on effect on future generations.”

Parent comments and case studies

“If CCS covered extended care this would mean an added \$900 added back into our annual household budget. It would mean that it would increase our food budget or perhaps go towards the kinder child accessing an extracurricular activity like swimming lessons.” – Amelia (regional / rural parent)

“At the moment with the rising cost of living the extended hours fee is something we have to carefully budget for and make reasonable adjustments to fit it in.” – Nelly (regional / rural parent)

Case study interviews with early childhood providers and parents can be arranged.

For more information on the ELAA Submission to the Productivity Commission arrange an interview with ELAA Acting CEO, Megan O’Connell, by contacting James Gardener at jgardener@elaa.org.au or 0413483182.

To view ELAA’s full submission to the Productivity Commission [CLICK HERE](#)

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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