



Universal childcare won't happen in a 'click of the fingers' but there's something we can do right now

11 July 2023

The Federal Minister for Early Childhood Education, Dr Anne Aly, was correct when she recently said that creating universal childcare system was "... not something that I can just click my fingers and happen overnight."

Achieving this essential goal is a large and complex policy undertaking but there is one thing that could get the ball rolling now on tackling the problem of 'childcare deserts', especially in Australia's rural and regional areas.

A simple change to one line in legislation could be key to unlocking access to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and ensure all families can benefit from the recent changes to the Child Care Subsidy.

"With the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Early Childhood Education and Care currently reviewing submissions and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) Interim Report into Childcare Pricing out, we have a real chance to make a difference for those families and their children who live in areas where getting the best start through early learning currently isn't an option," said Megan O'Connell, Acting CEO at Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA).

Providers of kindergarten or preschool programs currently cannot access Child Care Subsidy (CCS) for those programs, it's only available for the long day care component of their services if they provide long day care too. By adjusting the Child Care Subsidy to fund extended hours of education and care outside of kindergarten or preschool programs, we could see over 3000 services become available in a relatively short space of time.

"This would create far more options for regional and rural families. Suddenly, attending kindergarten would become logistically and financially viable, meaning more regional and rural children could benefit from ECEC and more parents would be able to devote full days to taking on more employment.

"At a recent roundtable, I heard from farmers who travel an hour and a half each way to drop a child at kinder. This isn't feasible if sessions are only five or seven hours long, so children miss out."

Families, particularly in rural areas who have limited access to service, have been calling for this expansion in access for some time, citing the difference it would make to their cost of living.

"If CCS covered hours outside of funded kindergarten 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," said Amelia, a parent with a child in a rural kindergarten.

"There is an enormous evidence base proving that access to quality ECEC is one of the best ways to increase equity, and we know at the moment children in rural and remote areas are less likely to get access, and more likely to start school behind. A change to funding will bring these services to more children. This must be our priority," said Ms O'Connell.

Media Release



EARLY
LEARNING
ASSOCIATION
AUSTRALIA

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

To learn more about how Australia can fast-track the process to a quality-driven and equitable Early Childhood Education and Care system read ELAA's full submission to the Productivity Commission [HERE](#).

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

To arrange an interview with ELAA Acting CEO, Megan O'Connell, contact James Gardener at jgardener@ela.org.au or 0413483182.

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.ela.org.au