



MINISTER FOR EARLY EDUCATION

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Mr Gerry McInally
Committee Secretary
Education and Employment References Committee
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Dear Mr McInally

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission for the inquiry into the quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system (the Inquiry).

At this time, the Northern Territory (NT) Government will not be providing a written submission for the Inquiry.

I would like to impress upon the Committee that the complexity and challenges of the NT context cannot be underestimated. The NT experiences disproportionately high levels of poverty, vulnerability, disadvantage, and population mobility. These factors contribute to the highest per capita cost of service delivery in Australia, yet the NT receives the lowest level of funding relative to its population.

This significant disparity underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of the NT's unique circumstances. Any future reforms must be carefully considered to address these challenges and ensure equitable access to quality services for all children and families, regardless of their location or circumstances.

The NT Government remains committed to working with all governments to implement the national actions to strengthen child safety and quality, as agreed by Education Ministers at their 22 August 2025 meeting, as well as broader reforms in early childhood education and care (ECEC).

The current overlap of early years funding and responsibility nationally is challenging to navigate, with varying levels of support provided to services and families across jurisdictions and in different service settings. Increased expectations for regulators to oversee compliance in a growing sector with a comprehensive reform agenda requires adequate funding and resources to support this work.

Severe workforce shortages continue to present a significant barrier to achieving sector reform, with the inequity of pay and conditions within the sector further inhibiting the ability to attract and retain staff. Although the Australian Government's 15% wage initiative is a significant investment, it is time limited, and not all educators are necessarily benefiting from this initiative. Further advocacy is needed to universally increase wages across the sector, alongside greater investment in workforce initiatives, professional learning, and development.

I encourage you to consider, as part of this inquiry, how we can holistically support the needs of thin markets, geographically dispersed populations, and communities experiencing high levels of disadvantage. Our goal must be to ensure greater equity in access to quality ECEC services for all families. This requires significant improvements to national policy settings and funding levers, enabling us, as system stewards, to better support a more affordable, accessible, equitable, and high-quality ECEC system.

Yours sincerely

JO HERSEY

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