



Inquiry into the Quality and Safety of Australia's Early Childhood Education and Care System

On behalf of the **Australian Parents Council (APC)**, we welcome the opportunity to provide input to this important inquiry.

Parents across Australia have been deeply shocked and distressed by recent revelations of misconduct and sexual offences against minors in childcare centres. These events have shaken families' confidence in the system and highlighted the urgent need for stronger safeguards to ensure the safety and wellbeing of every child. We commend the decisive action already taken by the Minister for Education, the Hon. Jason Clare MP, in response to these matters and urge that further reforms follow to restore and strengthen community trust.

For parents and carers, nothing is more important than knowing their children are safe. Safety is the foundation upon which trust in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) system is built. Without it, families cannot fully participate in work, study, or community life with peace of mind.

We ask the Committee to give urgent consideration to the recommendations outlined in *A Path to Universal Early Childhood Education and Care (2024)*. That report provides a clear roadmap to improving quality, safety, and equity across the ECEC sector. Implementing its recommendations would not only strengthen safeguards against harm but also support the creation of an education and care system that prioritises the wellbeing, development, and future of every child.

Children deserve environments that nurture their growth, protect their rights, and ensure their voices are heard. Parents need confidence that when they entrust their children to early learning services, they are leaving them in the safest and most supportive settings possible.

Rebuilding trust in the childcare system is essential if Australian families are to confidently embrace and benefit from government promises such as three days of guaranteed childcare for all. Parents will only take up these opportunities if they have absolute confidence that their children are safe, well cared for, and nurtured in environments that meet the highest standards of quality and integrity. The Australian Parents Council believes that restoring and strengthening trust must be at the heart of any reform agenda—without it, the promise of universal access cannot deliver its full potential. Families must know that childcare is not only available, but also a safe and supportive place where their children can thrive.

Ensuring the suitability and flexibility of funding for early childhood education and care is vital to meeting the diverse needs of families across Australia, particularly those living in

rural and remote communities. These families often face unique challenges, including limited availability of services, greater travel distances, and fewer options for care that align with irregular work patterns common in agriculture, seasonal industries, and small business. A one-size-fits-all funding approach does not work in these contexts. The Australian Parents Council believes that funding models must be designed to adapt to local circumstances, providing equitable access to quality early learning regardless of postcode. Flexible funding arrangements, such as support for mobile services, mixed-delivery models, and culturally responsive care, are critical to ensuring rural and remote families can access the same opportunities as those in metropolitan areas. Without this adaptability, the promise of universal access risks leaving behind the very families who already face the most significant barriers to participation.

The Australian Parents Council (APC) believes that choice is paramount in any educational setting, including early childhood education and care. Families must be able to select the option that best suits their values, circumstances, and children's needs whether that be long day care, family day care, community-based services, or other models. Providing genuine choice not only empowers parents but also supports greater workforce participation, particularly for women, by enabling families to engage in work and study with confidence. In turn, this strengthens the economy through higher productivity, reduced barriers to employment, and improved long-term outcomes for children.

The Australian Parents Council (APC) considers fair pay, safe working conditions, and access to workers' compensation as central to the quality and safety of childcare in Australia. Parents know that when educators are valued, supported, and protected, they are better able to provide safe, nurturing, and high-quality care for children. The current challenges around low wages, high turnover, and work-related stress in the sector undermine both staff wellbeing and the stability of relationships that are so critical for young children's development.

APC believes that workers' compensation must be accessible and responsive for childcare staff, acknowledging the physical and emotional demands of their work. Strong protections reassure parents that staff are supported if injured or unwell and help sustain a committed workforce. Likewise, fair and competitive pay is essential to attracting and retaining skilled educators, reducing turnover, and ensuring continuity of care. By investing in the safety, financial security, and professional recognition of the workforce, government and providers not only improve the wellbeing of staff but also build a more stable, trusted, and higher-quality early childhood education and care system for families.

Recent research and media reporting clearly illustrate how underpayment, unpaid hours, and excessive workloads among early childhood educators are more than a workforce issue they are safety and quality issues, too. For example, a University of Sydney study found that more than 70% of educators reported doing unpaid work each week (averaging 7-9 hours) and that administrative, cleaning, and other "non-contact" duties are cutting into time spent with children. [ABC](#) A union survey of over 2,100 educators revealed that 77% of centres are regularly operating below minimum staffing levels; many reported children being left without emotional support or supervision, education standards compromised, or incidents increasing when staffing is stretched. [ABC](#) These problems are deeply concerning for APC, when educators are overworked and underpaid, that erodes stability, increases turnover, reduces the ability to enforce safety and quality standards, and undermines parents' trust in childcare services. APC therefore believes that ensuring fair pay, adequate staffing, proper workers' compensation, and realistic workloads isn't just a matter of workforce policy it's fundamental

to safeguarding children, restoring confidence among parents, and making sure that government promises like guaranteed three-day childcare are delivered safely and well.

The Australian Parents Council is committed to supporting reforms that achieve these outcomes. We stand ready to work with government, providers, and the broader community to build an ECEC system where the safety, dignity, and potential of every child always come first.

1. *A Path to Universal Early Childhood Education and Care* (Productivity Commission, 2024) — the final report setting out reforms for quality, safety, equity, and access in the ECEC sector. [Productivity Commission+1](#)
 2. Child Protection Australia 2022-23 (AIHW) — safety of children in care statistics and trends relating to abuse and neglect. [AIHW+1](#)
 3. “Safety of children in care 2020-21” — AIHW first national collection report on the safety and abuse of children in care. [AIHW](#)
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Recent Events & Media Coverage

1. Four Corners investigation: “*Private childcare whistleblowers’ disturbing experiences inside a sector putting profits before kids*” — exposed serious issues of misconduct, regulatory failure, and the experiences of parents and staff in for-profit centres. [ABC](#)
2. *Betrayal of Trust: Australia’s Childcare Crisis* — an ABC News / Four Corners piece on parental shock, safety gaps, and abuse in early learning settings. [ABC](#)
3. Article: “What is going wrong with childcare in Australia?” — highlights findings that many childcare centres are not meeting regulatory standards, especially among for-profit providers. [The University of Sydney](#)
4. “Australia’s childcare safety reforms are the ‘bare minimum’ parents ...” — commentary on current reforms and parental views that more needs to be done.

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