

**Submission for the *Productivity Commission*  
*Review into Early Childhood and Care***



**Woden Valley Early Learning Centre  
Canberra**

This submission has been drafted by the Woden Valley Early Learning Centre Committee on behalf of Woden Valley Early Learning Centre, May 2023.

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## **List of Recommendations:**

### **Recommendation 1 – Access to Affordable Health Care**

*Recommendation 1.1 - We recommend that the early Childhood Education and Care Sector be deemed as high risk to exposure of infectious diseases and therefore be entitled to a Health Care card and other health care related concessions despite them earning on average slightly above the current salary limit set by the government to be eligible for the Health care concession card.*

*Recommendation 1.2 - We recommend that all Early Learning Educator (Educator) be entitled to Covid-19 leave and subsidised sick pay for other infectious illnesses which have a mandatory exclusion period (gastroenteritis, chickenpox etc) to preserve staff's limited sick leave.*

### **Recommendation 2 – Wage Increase**

*Recommendation 2.1 - We recommend a wage increase for the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector.*

*Recommendation 2.2 – We recommend that the wage increase continues every year until the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector is in line with teaching wages.*

*Recommendation 2.3 – We recommend an increase in the Government Child Care Subsidy (CCS) support the sector-wide wage increase.*

### **Recommendation 3 - Access to Rent Assistance**

*Recommendation 3.1 – We recommend the expansion of access to the Rent Assistance scheme to all Early Learning Educator (Educator).*

### **Recommendation 4 – Increase migration to address Early Learning skills shortage**

*Recommendation 4.1 - We recommend that Early Learning be added to the list of priority sectors or skills Independent List for migration purposes.*

*Recommendation 4.2 – We recommend migration eligibility be reviewed to attract more Early Learning Educator (Educator) to Australia to address the skills shortage faced by the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector and ease of application burden for employers.*

*Recommendation 4.3 - We recommend widening the current acceptance and acknowledgment of overseas acquired qualifications.*

### **Recommendation 5 - Universal Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and mandatory preschool for 3 – 4 year olds**

***Recommendation 5.1 – We recommend the Commonwealth Government introduce universal Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC);***

***Recommendation 5.2 - We recommend the Commonwealth Government and state and territory governments introduce and mandatory preschool for 3 – 4 year olds across Australia in the next 3 years.***

## Recommendation Descriptions

### Recommendation 1 – Access to Affordable Health Care

Early Learning Educators (Educators) are exposed to infectious diseases at a higher rate compared to most professions. Being exposed to many infectious diseases on an ongoing basis requires Educators to go to General Practitioners for healthcare (approximately \$90 per appointment) at a high rate. Furthermore, Educators are required to be excluded from work for periods between 24 and 48 hours after a diagnoses of an infectious disease (Staying Healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services, 2013). The cost of Health Care and the reduction of work hours is a huge financial burden on an Educator's income. It also means staff are away from work for longer periods if they don't have access to affordable health care, which has a knock-on effect on the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) centres ability to provide early childhood education and care or meet regulatory ratio. If Educators have no sick leave available they are currently given very little choice other than to return to work whilst still unwell or take unpaid leave, which is not affordable for the educators.

***Recommendation 1.1 - We recommend that the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector be deemed as high risk to exposure of infectious diseases and therefore be entitled to a Health Care card and other health care related concessions despite them earning on average slightly above the current salary limit set by the government to be eligible for the Health care concession card.***

***Recommendation 1.2 - We recommend that all Early Learning Educator (Educator) be entitled to Covid-19 leave and subsidised sick pay for other infectious illnesses which have a mandatory exclusion period (eg gastroenteritis, chickenpox etc) to preserve staff's limited sick leave.***

### Recommendation 2 – Wage Increase

Currently, the average wage of a full-time Educator is approximately \$850 per week, before tax. This low-wage often requires Educators to seek secondary employment. Currently, Educators are paid less than many professionals in the hospitality and retail sectors (which require less qualifications than Educators). Educators have a large responsibility of educating, caring, nurturing children, whilst keeping them safe and happy. Educators are not remunerated sufficiently for the work that they do, and the responsibilities that they have in their jobs.

Educators are responsible for teaching children from the ages of newborn through to 5. The role of an early childhood educator is to support the implementation of an approved learning framework, and support children's wellbeing, learning and development (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2023a). Depending on the setting, 'educators may work under direct supervision or on their own within a team' (Department of Social Services, 2023).

The minimum qualification required for an Educator is the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care (Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority, 2023b), this can be attained through a traineeship, and a mixture of on-the-job training and formal assessment through an education provider.

Once an Educator has completed entry-level training, they are ready to work independently in an early childhood setting, and will be responsible for:

- ensuring the health and safety of children
- providing care for children
- promoting and providing healthy food and drinks
- providing care for babies and toddlers
- developing positive and respectful relationships with children
- using an approved learning framework to guide your practice
- supporting the holistic development of children in early childhood
- providing and planning experiences and programmes to support children’s play and learning
- using information about children to inform practice
- identifying and responding to children and young people at risk
- providing emergency first aid
- working within a legal and ethical framework (Department of Social Services, 2023).

The above responsibilities are not recognised by the current insufficient wage levels across the Childhood Education and Care Sector.

***Recommendation 2.1 - We recommend a wage increase for the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector.***

***Recommendation 2.2 – We recommend that the wage increase continues every year until the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector is in line with teaching wages.***

***Recommendation 2.3 – We recommend an increase in the Government Child Care Subsidy (CCS) support the sector-wide wage increase.***

### **Recommendation 3 - Access to Rent Assistance**

The current rental crisis is having a catastrophic effect on Educators lives. Educator’s wages are not increasing in line with market-wide rental increases. According to a report commissioned by Everybody’s Home, *Priced Out: An index of Affordable Rentals for Australia’s Essential Workers*, Educators are spending around two thirds of their income on housing. Additionally, the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute estimates that across Australia Educators are spending 68 per cent of their weekly wages on rent. The percentage is much greater in capital cities, where Educators are spending 79 per cent of their weekly wages on rent (Australian Housing and Urban Institute).

***Recommendation 3.1 – We recommend the expansion of access to the Rent Assistance scheme to all Early Learning Educator (Educator).***

## **Recommendation 4 – Increase migration to address Early Learning skills shortage**

‘The Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) visa allows skilled workers, who are nominated by their employer in regional Australia, live and work in Australia permanently’ (Home Affairs, 2023). Many Educators come to Australia on this visa, especially to our service in Woden, Canberra. This requires our centre to nominate/sponsor the Educator, which is becoming increasingly laborious.

A review of migration eligibility and further recognition of overseas acquired qualifications is required with the purpose of attracting more Educators to Australia to address the skills shortage faced by the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector.

***Recommendation 4.1 - We recommend that Early Learning be added to the list of priority sectors or skills Independent List for migration purposes.***

***Recommendation 4.2 – We recommend migration eligibility be reviewed to attract more Early Learning Educator (Educator) to Australia to address the skills shortage faced by the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector and ease of application burden for employers.***

***Recommendation 4.3 - We recommend widening the current acceptance and acknowledgment of overseas acquired qualifications.***

## **Recommendation 5 - Universal Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and mandatory preschool for 3 – 4 year olds**

In Denmark, Iceland and Sweden the majority Early Learning Education and Care (ECEC) is provided publically, whilst continuing to regularly top UNICEF’s global rankings of child-care (UNICEF, 2023). Quebec, Canada has universal Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), it has been found that the quality of care in Quebec is higher compared to private care, whilst offering higher wage and consequently retaining high quality Educators (Hurley, 2023).

Research has found that when Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is universally funded and provided by government, there are clear standards for curriculum, higher wages, and greater and easier access to training and support for Educators. All of these factors contribute to greater life outcomes for Educators, easier recruitment and retention, and higher quality of care (Hurley, 2023).

Universal Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) can ensure regional, rural and remote and disadvantaged communities gain access to essential Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), which is currently not available in many communities across Australia.

Introducing mandatory preschool for 3 – 4 year olds, as a part of the existing education system would expand the reach of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and preschools so that every child can access this essential educational requirement. This would allow for any child, anywhere in Australia to be able to access Early Childhood Education and



Care (ECEC) and preschool, giving all children the best chance to be ready for primary school.

Universal Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC); and mandatory preschool for 3 - 4 year olds, will address structural needs:

- improve and equalise quality of care and education for kids
- improve wages;
- improve working conditions for Educators; and
- improve access for children in regional, rural and remote communities, and disadvantaged communities.

***Recommendation 5.1 – We recommend the Commonwealth Government introduce universal Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC);***

***Recommendation 5.2 - We recommend the Commonwealth Government and state and territory governments introduce and mandatory preschool for 3 – 4 year olds across Australia in the next 3 years.***

## **References:**

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