



MEDIA RELEASE

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Not Good Enough—Federal Government’s Support Package for Early Education and Care

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) has expressed disappointment at the Federal Government’s ‘support measures’ announced today, which treat early learning and care services, their staff and children differently from the school sector.

ECA CEO Samantha Page said ‘The package does not go far enough to support the viability of services and the jobs of educators and teachers and we are calling for more support—urgently.

‘While many schools will close to students tomorrow, early learning and care services are expected to keep operating as usual, unless they are forced to close on the advice of health authorities. This is confusing, unfair and inadequate.’

‘As the Prime Minister said yesterday, early education is critical to children’s future educational outcomes and we cannot afford to lose these vital services or the educators and teachers that deliver them,’ Ms Page said. ‘It is also important that services can continue to support children whose parents need to keep working through this crisis.’

ECA is concerned that it means Australia’s youngest citizens and their educators and teachers are being treated differently from those in the school sector where closures are likely from tomorrow (March 24) until at least Term 2 in May. (Announcements have been made in NSW, VIC and the ACT; other jurisdictions are likely to follow suit).

‘We need a support package that protects both children and educators/teachers from unnecessary exposure to the coronavirus while also ensuring that we can return to normal as quickly as possible once the pandemic is over’ said Ms Page.

ECA understands that many parents will be at home with school-aged children and will withdraw their younger children from services. Under the government’s package, only services forced to close by health authorities due to COVID-19 will continue to receive Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and are not required to charge parents or carers a gap fee. Early learning services that close because of decreased enrolments or unavailability of educators, will not be entitled to CCS payments—this is a gap that needs to be addressed urgently. Current arrangements for

Community Child Care Fund are not adequate to meet the shortfall and some early learning services may fold before arrangements are in place.

All services need to cover ongoing costs—crucially the wages of educators and teachers as well as rent and utilities. Even those closed early learning services that continue to receive CCS will struggle to cover their ongoing costs from CCS only which, on average, covers only 60% of fees.

Outside school hours services and preschools/kindergartens operating on school grounds may be told to close as part of state and territory and Catholic/Independent school closures. ECA has asked Education Departments to provide clarity in their announcements on schools in this regard.

ECA recognises that many professionals in early childhood education and care will find this confusing. It also sends a confusing message to families who may have older children at home.

We are working with Governments at all levels to provide more consistent advice that is inclusive of all education settings.

The second element of the Government's package extends allowable absences that each child can accrue for the financial year, beyond 42 days, without need for a medical certificate.

'We are seeking urgent information on how this extension mechanism will work' said Ms Page.

This package is *not* what ECA or other sector peaks have asked for.

The Federal Government must keep making CCS payments to all services that close due to COVID-19, whether because of infection, a collapse in enrolments or inability to staff the service.

'The reason for closure is irrelevant: a service that closes because parents have cancelled their enrolments is no less worthy of support than a service closing due to a diagnosed case of COVID-19.

If early learning and care services are to be treated as 'essential services' in a time of national crisis, they need to be provided with adequate support. Once the period of critical emergency has passed, the Australian economy will not recover if early learning and care services have gone broke, and families cannot enrol their children and return to work.

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Early Childhood Australia is the peak advocacy body for children from birth to eight years, their families and early childhood professionals.