

# Early childhood: Fast facts

## Population

- In 2020, there were an estimated 3.17 million families with young children aged birth to 9 years in Australia.
- Children are most likely to live with two parents (82%), while 18% live in one-parent families<sup>1</sup>.
- 1 in 6 Australian children (under 15 years) live in poverty (17.7%). Proportionally, this is higher than any other age group, including 65+ years<sup>2</sup>.

## Access to early childhood services

- **1.3 million children** attended an approved early childhood education and care service in 2020<sup>3</sup>.
- The employment rate for partnered mothers whose youngest child was under 5 years was 63% in 2019, and for single mothers with the youngest child of the same age<sup>4</sup>, it was 39%.
- Child care costs are 23% of a couple's average wage<sup>5</sup>.

## Early childhood sector

- As on 30 September 2020, there were **16 139 early childhood education and care services** in Australia<sup>6</sup>.
- 49% of the operators are private for-profit and the remainder are not-for-profit, state or local government or independent schools.
- A third of the operators have just one service, a third have 2 to 24 services and a third are large providers with 25 services or more.
- Services are licensed and assessed against the *National Quality Standard* (NQS) by state/territory regulatory authorities. Ratings as on 30 September 2020 were:
  - 4426 'Exceeding the NQS' (30%)
  - 7845 'Meeting the NQS' (52%)
  - 2705 'Working Towards the NQS' (18%)
  - 12 'Requiring Significant Improvement' (<1%)
- In 2016, **194 994 people** were employed in early childhood education and care services (similar in scale to Mining or Media/IT/Communications)<sup>7</sup>.
- The majority of the workforce is female (91.1%).

## Why early education matters

- In the first 5 years of life, children's brains are wired to learn quickly. Early learning helps to amplify their natural skills and abilities.
- Young children learn best through play-based activities that are suited to their age. Trained early childhood educators support and extend play to maximise learning through exploration, inquiry and problem-solving. Educators also help families understand and support their child's development.
- **1 in 5 Australian children** and **2 in 5 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children** start school developmentally vulnerable.
- Children who attend early learning services are less likely (by 33%) to be developmentally vulnerable when they start school than those who do not attend early learning services.
- The *Lifting Our Game* report summarises the potential for high-quality early education delivering long-term education outcomes, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds<sup>8</sup>.

## Economic benefits

- Recent analysis commissioned by The Front Project demonstrates that our current system of early education offers a significant return on investment of 1:2. **For every dollar invested now, Australia receives \$2 back over a child's life**<sup>9</sup>.
- Australia's investment in early learning is below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average (0.7% of GDP). Australia is ranked 11th among 21 OECD nations.
- KPMG has recommended increasing investment in the Child Care Subsidy to realise economic growth by reducing workforce participation disincentives and increase benefits for children<sup>10</sup>.
- Analysis by the Grattan Institute estimates that an additional \$5 billion invested in the Child Care Subsidy would yield an **\$11 billion higher workforce participation dividend**<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> AIHW: [www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/household-and-family-projections-australia/latest-release](http://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/household-and-family-projections-australia/latest-release)

<sup>2</sup> Antipoverty week factsheet Sept 2020

<sup>3</sup> ACECQA: Child Care in Australia report March quarter 2020

<sup>4</sup> <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/how-we-worked>

<sup>5</sup> Benefits and wages - Net childcare costs - OECD Data

<sup>6</sup> ACECQA: NQF Snapshot, Q3, October 2020 – by service type: long day care (8112), outside school hours care (4499), family day care (503) and preschools/kindergartens (3052)

<sup>7</sup> DESE: [2016 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census](https://www.dese.gov.au/earlychildhood/2016-early-childhood-education-and-care-national-workforce-census), September 2017

<sup>8</sup> Pascoe & Brennan (2017) *Lifting Our Game*, <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/whats-happening-in-the-early-childhood-education-sector/lifting-our-game-report>

<sup>9</sup> The Front Project [www.thefrontproject.org.au/economic-analysis](http://www.thefrontproject.org.au/economic-analysis)

<sup>10</sup> KPMG (2020) <https://home.kpmg/au/en/home/insights/2020/09/child-care-subsidy-increased-support-caregivers.html>

<sup>11</sup> Grattan Institute (2020) *Recovery Book* <https://grattan.edu.au/report/cheaper-childcare/>



# Early Childhood Australia

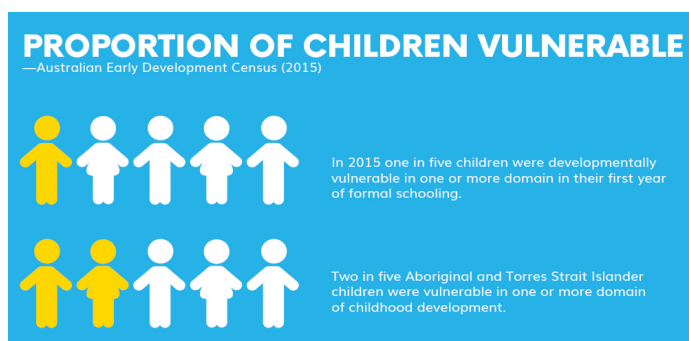
A voice for young children

## Useful sources of information and statistics

- *ABS Preschool Education, Australia. Statistics about preschool education, including enrolment, attendance, fees and service providers*  
[www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/preschool-education-australia/latest-release](http://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/preschool-education-australia/latest-release)
- *Productivity Commission Report on Government Services Part B Child care, education and training (includes early childhood education and care, school education, vocational education and training)*  
[www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services](http://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services)
- *ACECQA Snapshot Reports*  
[www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/snapshots](http://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/snapshots)
- *Australian Early Childhood Development Census*  
[www.aedc.gov.au/](http://www.aedc.gov.au/)

## How you can support early learning

- Request a briefing for you and your team.
- Visit a range of early learning services and ask providers and educators how they are supporting children and families.
- Get involved in **Early Learning Matters Week 2021**. Date TBC. ECA will be in touch with details.
- Follow Early Childhood Australia on Facebook (@earlychildhoodaustralia), Twitter (@EarlyChildAust) or Instagram (@earlychildaust).
- Read more at:  
[www.thespoke.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au](http://www.thespoke.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au).
- Write to us at: [policy@earlychildhood.org.au](mailto:policy@earlychildhood.org.au)



## Key contacts

- Finding education and care services:  
[www.childcarefinder.gov.au](http://www.childcarefinder.gov.au)
- Child Care Subsidy inquiries: Services Australia – 13 61 50 (for parents) Department of Education, Skills and Employment (for providers) – 1300 667 276
- Choosing an education and care service:  
[www.startingblocks.gov.au](http://www.startingblocks.gov.au)
- Quality ratings search: [www.acecqa.gov.au](http://www.acecqa.gov.au)
- Parenting support and tips: [www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)
- Current health advice: [www.healthdirect.gov.au/kids-health](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au/kids-health)
- For concerns about the safety or welfare of a child, contact the relevant child protection agency:  
[aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/cfca-resource-sheet/reporting-child-abuse-and-neglect](http://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/cfca-resource-sheet/reporting-child-abuse-and-neglect).
- Work Health and Safety advice:  
[www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/early-childhood-education](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/early-childhood-education)

## Complaints

Complaints about early learning and school-age care services should be made to state and territory regulatory authorities, listed below.

<b>ACT</b>	<a href="mailto:ceca@act.gov.au">ceca@act.gov.au</a> 02 6207 1128
<b>NSW</b>	<a href="mailto:ececd@det.nsw.edu.au">ececd@det.nsw.edu.au</a> 1800 619 113
<b>NT</b>	<a href="mailto:Qualityecnt.det@nt.gov.au">Qualityecnt.det@nt.gov.au</a> 08 8999 3561
<b>Qld</b>	<a href="mailto:ecec@qed.qld.gov.au">ecec@qed.qld.gov.au</a> 13 7486
<b>SA</b>	<a href="mailto:ESB.EarlyChildhoodServices@sa.gov.au">ESB.EarlyChildhoodServices@sa.gov.au</a> 1800 882 413
<b>Tas.</b>	<a href="mailto:ecu.comment@education.tas.gov.au">ecu.comment@education.tas.gov.au</a> 1800 816 057
<b>Vic.</b>	<a href="mailto:licensed.childrens.services@education.vic.gov.au">licensed.childrens.services@education.vic.gov.au</a> 1300 307 415
<b>WA</b>	<a href="mailto:ecru@communities.wa.gov.au">ecru@communities.wa.gov.au</a> 08 6551 8333

**About ECA:** Early Childhood Australia (ECA) is a not-for-profit organisation that has been a voice for children since 1938. We have a federated structure with branches in every state and territory in Australia and our membership includes individual professionals, early childhood services and schools, as well as public, private and not-for-profit organisations that share a commitment to young children. Our vision is that every young child is thriving and learning. To achieve this, we champion the rights of young children to thrive and learn at home, in the community, within early learning settings and through the early years of school.

**Contacts:** Samantha Page, CEO ([spage@earlychildhood.org.au](mailto:spage@earlychildhood.org.au)) or Sarah Swain, General Manager, Policy and Government Relations ([sswain@earlychildhood.org.au](mailto:sswain@earlychildhood.org.au)) or call our Canberra office on 02 6242 1800.