



Early learning advocates come together to help design national standards for early childhood services in Australia

2 June 2021 – The Mindereroo Foundation's Thrive by Five, Goodstart Early Learning, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) and Early Childhood Australia (ECA) have made submissions to the Review of the National Quality Framework (NQF) Review for early learning and school age care asking for additional resources and funding to ensure high quality early learning for all Australian children.

Currently, almost one in six early learning centres do not meet early learning quality standards and advocates believe that this is just not good enough.

The organisations provided very similar feedback saying that there should be absolutely no diminution of the current national quality standards and that any changes must not exacerbate the current workforce crisis for the sector.

They maintained that qualification requirements should stay as they are and not be watered down so that more early childhood services can meet National Standards; and that any regulatory changes must not put additional pressure on already overworked educators and potentially increase the costs for parents. Educators need to focus on what really matters – children and their early years development.

Jay Weatherill, CEO of Thrive by Five, said the Federal Government's significant investment in early learning as part of the Federal Budget was a start but should also ensure a high-quality learning environment for future generations.

"Increasing the childcare subsidy and lowering the cost of childcare doesn't directly address the need for quality standards improvement. It might even mean added pressure for them instead. We know children have the best start in life through high quality early learning and childcare and educators and centre operators are calling for support for this essential service," he said.

"It's important to get all sides of the debate so that we can end up with an early learning system that benefits all Australians." he said.

ECA CEO Samantha Page agreed saying that there is still a long way to go in recognising the vital work of educators and the early education and care sector in children's development and wellbeing.

"Decades of research shows the importance of the early years. Educators need to be valued and we must support them with better pay, training and the creation of national workforce plan," she said.

"We need high quality standards in early childhood education and care services, and we need them to meet those standards. We hope that our submission will go some way to help with this."

Goodstart Early Learning CEO Julia Davison said Goodstart and the sector were strong supporters of the National Quality Framework which has raised standards and driven improved quality of early learning and care for children.



"We want to see the NQF continue to raise quality, but we also want to ensure that the early childhood workforce is supported to deliver that with an effective and well funded national workforce strategy," she said.

ARACY CEO Penny Dakin said that improving regulatory frameworks would mean a better future for children.

"We strongly support strengthening alignment between the related regulatory frameworks that support the wellbeing of our youngest citizens – embedding a child safe organisational culture across our whole service system is essential. We also renew our call for a holistic early childhood strategy to support the wellbeing, learning, development and safety of all children in Australia," she said.

All organisations believe:

- Standards – there should be no diminution of the standards to make it easier for compliance. For example, qualification requirements should be maintained, and providing further exemptions to requirements does not address the longstanding workforce issues.
- Costs – changes cannot be made that increase regulatory burden, and therefore increases staff worktime and subsequently drives up cost.
- Workforce – no changes should be made that result in an increased workload for staff; and hence worsens the current crisis in the early childhood sector
- Recommendations:
 - Amend the National ECEC Regulations and associated guidance to address the identified gap between the Child Safe Principles and the National Quality Standards
 - Modify National Quality Standards to better suit After School Hours Care

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