



MEDIA RELEASE

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ECA CEO REPRESENTED THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SECTOR AT THE SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE HEARING

Ms Samantha Page, CEO of Early Childhood Australia (ECA), gave evidence at today's Senate Select Committee on Work and Care, which has been appointed to explore the impact that combining work and care responsibilities has on the wellbeing of workers, carers and those they care for.

At the public hearing, Ms Page called for measures that build equity into the early childhood education and care (ECEC) system to support children's outcomes and women's workforce participation, balance work and care responsibilities, and address critical shortages in the workforce.

Talking about the need to improve equitable access to early childhood education, Ms Page said, 'Australia lags behind other countries in terms of access to early childhood education and care for children at the age of three.' Sharing ECA's recommendations to improve equitable access to early childhood education, Ms Page called for:

- developing and adopting a new funding model for remote and complex environments
- adopting the three-day guarantee proposed by the Centre for Policy Development
- extending the Preschool Reform Funding Agreement to children from the age of three
- firmer commitment on lifting the participation rates for vulnerable cohorts.

Responding to the committee, Ms Page also said, 'A lot of state governments are paying attention to expanding access to early childhood education as they realise how patchy provision is, particularly in rural and outer suburban areas.'

'We are dependent on the market for provision of early childhood services. The market does not even know where there are services that are half full or where there is demand coming in terms of new housing developments, or where there will be more young families. Therefore, currently provision of services is more about real estate availability, and return on investment rather than addressing oversupply or undersupply.'

Ms Page also spoke at length about the workforce issues in the ECEC sector, especially low wages being the most common reason for people leaving the sector. She called for some immediate short-term interventions to stabilise the workforce, in addition to the implementation of long-term strategies highlighted in ACECQA's National Workforce Implementation Plan.

On behalf of ECA and the sector, Ms Page also supported lifting the maximum rate of Child Care Subsidy to 90%, but without amending the activity test to increase the minimum hours, to avoid exacerbating existing inequity and widening attainment gaps for children in families with low incomes and insecure work. Ms Page said, 'We should not be treating workforce participation as a prerequisite (to encourage workforce participation) but should be seeing ECEC as an enabler.'

Other key recommendations she discussed at the hearing included improving professional recognition, pay and conditions for women working in the ECEC sector; extending the length and increasing the rate of paid parental leave besides adding superannuation to the payment to reduce retirement inequities; and introducing community education campaigns on the importance of early childhood education and care.

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ECA CEO Samantha Page is available for comment. For interviews, please contact ECA Media Officer Reshma Jayesh on 0475 554 999.

For a downloadable PDF version of the media release, please click here:

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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.