



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

**OUR
VISION:
EVERY
YOUNG
CHILD IS
THRIVING
AND
LEARNING**

MEDIA RELEASE

Friday 24 November 2023

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION'S DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS PRESENT A RARE OPPORTUNITY TO RE-CONCEPTUALISE AUSTRALIA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) welcomes the Productivity Commission's draft report, 'A Path to Universal Early Childhood Education and Care', which puts young children and families at the centre of future reforms.

The sense of purpose within the early childhood education sector has always centred on the benefits to children—both in terms of education and development outcomes, as well as laying the foundations for lifelong wellbeing. At the same, early childhood education and care enables parents, particularly women, to participate in economic activity—paid employment, running a farm or starting a business. This dual purpose has not always been reflected in government policy and funding models, but the Productivity Commission's recommendations are cause for optimism.

'The draft findings and recommendations in the Productivity Commission's report present a rare opportunity to re-conceptualise an early childhood service system that centres children's outcomes while also delivering for families and supporting employers; it's very exciting,' says ECA CEO, Samantha Page.

The Commission has acknowledged the problems with the current model of financing; the lack of a planned approach to service provision; and challenges in the areas of quality regulation, workforce development, inclusion and flexibility. There are no surprises in the report because these are all issues well known to people who work in early childhood education and care; nonetheless it is reassuring to know these issues will be addressed in the final recommendations from the Inquiry.

'ECA has consistently argued that the current Child Care Subsidy, while an improvement on previous funding approaches, is much too complicated and difficult to navigate,' Ms Page says.

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'We have previously recommended changes to the Activity Test, better access to additional subsidy for vulnerable cohorts of children, and a closer connection between subsidy rates and the cost of service delivery.

'ECA welcomes draft recommendations to simplify the Child Care Subsidy, relax the activity test, review the rate of subsidy and increase financial support to lower income families. ECA believes that some of these recommendations, including changes to the activity test, should be implemented straight away - there is no need to wait until the final Productivity Commission report next year.'

ECA is particularly pleased to see a draft recommendation to give children and families an entitlement of up to 30 hours per week of early childhood education and care, which is equivalent to three days of long day care or more days in shorter programs. This would go a long way to ensuring that the children who would most benefit from accessing early education don't miss out. It would put the onus on governments (both federal and state/territory) to address barriers to access beyond affordability, such as planning services, monitoring supply and growing the workforce.

'ECA supports the proposed National Partnership Agreement to coordinate early childhood policy and programs across federal and state/territory governments as well as an ECEC Commission,' Ms Page says. 'We are also pleased to see recommendations relating to strengthening quality, inclusion, cultural responsiveness and community ownership.

'We look forward to providing a detailed response to the Commission's requests for information and working with the Albanese Government to reform the early childhood education and care sector so that every young child is thriving and learning.'

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ECA CEO Sam Page is available for comment. For interviews, contact ECA Media team on 0475 554 999.

For a downloadable PDF version of the media release, click here: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/media/

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