



# regional rural remote EARLY CHILDHOOD FORUM

*brought to you by Early Childhood Australia*

## Day 1—Thursday 26 March 2026

## PROGRAM

Time (AEDT)	Session		
8.00 am – 9.00 am	Registration		
9.00 am – 9.10 am	Welcome to Country		
9.10 am – 9.30 am	Welcome and program overview—Sam Page, CEO, Early Childhood Australia		
9.30 am – 9.40 am	Welcome messages		
9.40 am – 10.20 am	<b>Keynote address</b> <b>Leading with purpose</b> Dr Belinda Mawhinney, BM Consultancy		
10.20 am – 11.00 am	Morning tea		
11.00 am – 11.50 am	Shearwater/Currawong Room	Osprey Room	Opals Room
	<b>Building strong foundations: Nutrition, movement and body image in the early years</b> Alison Walton, NSW Health and The Embrace Collective	<b>National Best Practice Framework for Early Childhood Intervention and its application in regional, rural and remote communities</b> Denise Luscombe and Dr Kerry Bull, PRECI	<b>Understanding and navigating employment obligations: The National Employment Standards (NES), modern awards in the ECEC sector, and enterprise agreements</b> Victor Lin, Australian Federation of Employers & Industries (AFEI) and Leanne Cruden, Australian Industry Group (AIG)
11.50 am – 12.00 pm	Room change		
12.00 pm – 12.50 pm	Shearwater/Currawong Room	Osprey Room	Opals Room
	<b>Inclusive practice through sensory play: Exploring ECA's Sensory Tool and Equipment Library in the NT</b> Janet Williams-Smith, Early Childhood Australia	<b>Conversation on how to implement the framework for early intervention</b> <i>Follow-on from previous session</i> Amy Shine, Sophie Christie-Johnston and Courtney Hodge, Forbes Preschool	<b>Finances to support services: Regional funding mechanisms</b> Conversation facilitated by Sam Page with Anita Kumar, ECTARC and Zac Hatzantonis, Right Lane Consulting
12.50 pm – 1.50 pm	Lunch		
1.50 pm – 2.40 pm	Shearwater/Currawong Room	Osprey Room	Opals Room
	<b>Beyond best practice: Designing quality that adapts</b> Kristy Hyndes, Hayley Canobie and Jessica Turnbull, Gilgandra Preschool—2025 HESTA Award Winner for Outstanding Service	<b>Empowering early childhood services: ECS's role in building cultural inclusion in regional NSW</b> Dina Petrakis, Ethnic Community Services (ECS)	<b>The Fair Work Commission's Gender-Based Undervaluation Review, the Children's Services Award 2010 and the worker retention payments: What are the changes and when do they apply?</b> Victor Lin, Australian Federation of Employers & Industries (AFEI) and Leanne Cruden, Australian Industry Group (AIG)
2.40 pm – 2.50 pm	Room change		
2.50 pm – 3.40 pm	Shearwater/Currawong Room	Osprey Room	Opals Room
	<b>Embedding risk management to empower play: Safety that makes space for possibility</b> Bec Burch, Bush Kindy Australia	<b>Consultation on Professional Learning priorities and practices</b> with Shae Haylen and Siobhan Wong, Early Childhood Australia	<b>Teacher accreditation: Early childhood teachers and the broader teaching profession</b> Merise Bickley, NSW Education Standards Authority
3.40 pm – 4.10 pm	Afternoon tea		
4.10 pm – 5.00 pm	<b>Conversation on thriving services in rural and regional communities facilitated by Dr Melinda Miller with:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bridget Isichei, Northern Rivers Preschools</li> <li>• Judy Radich, Cooloon Childcare</li> <li>• Katherine Wilson, Circle Early Learning</li> <li>• Rachael Phillips, Birrelee MACS</li> </ul>		
5.00 pm – 6.00 pm	Networking function		



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## Day 2—Friday 27 March 2026

## PROGRAM

Time (AEDT)	Session		
9.00 am – 9.10 am	Welcome back—Sam Page, CEO, Early Childhood Australia		
9.10 am – 9.50 am	<b>Keynote address</b> Mattering matters: How leaders and educators can 'be' mentors or 'find' mentors—fostering inclusion and diversity Professor Fay Hadley, Macquarie University		
9.50 am – 10.30 am	<b>ECA Child Safety Reforms Consultation</b> Dr Amy Birungi, NSW Department of Education		
10.30 am – 11.00 am	Morning tea		
11.00 am – 11.50 am	Shearwater/Currawong Room	Osprey Room	Opals Room
	<b>Children's images: Ethical dilemmas for leadership and practice</b> Dr Melinda Miller, Melinda Miller Consultancy	<b>Consultation on flexible models</b> with Sam Page and Dr Sarah Wight, Early Childhood Australia	<b>Managing employment: Performance, discipline and termination</b> Victor Lin, Australian Federation of Employers & Industries (AFEI) and Leanne Cruden, Australian Industry Group (AIG)
11.50 am – 12.00 pm	Room change		
12.00 pm – 12.50 pm	Shearwater/Currawong Room	Osprey Room	Opals Room
	<b>A mental health and wellbeing lens on planning for natural disasters and community trauma</b> Paola Mercado, Be You	<b>Connected Beginnings</b> Indi Buckskin-James and Johannah Wright, SNAICC – National Voice for our Children	<b>Consultation on systems reform</b> with Dr Amy Graham, Minderoo Foundation
12.50 pm – 1.50 pm	Lunch		
1.50 pm – 2.40 pm	<b>Keynote presentation</b> Strengthening professional identity and educator wellbeing Emma Rattenbury in conversation with Sam Page		
2.40 pm – 2.45 pm	Closing remarks—Sam Page, CEO, Early Childhood Australia		
2.45 pm	Close of forum		
2.45 pm – 3.45 pm	Afternoon tea, networking and farewell		