Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

OUR VISION: EVERY YOUNG CHILD IS THRIVING AND LEARNING

MEDIA RELEASE

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ECA Welcomes a Proposed Entitlement Approach to Early Childhood Education

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) welcomes the release of the final report from the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Early Childhood Education and Care, announced this morning by the Education Minister Jason Clare at the opening of ECA's National Conference in Brisbane. With over 2,200 early childhood educators, leaders and policy makers in the room, the Minister named the three pillars of the Report as Access, Quality and Inclusion. The Commission submitted the final inquiry report to the Australian Government on 28 June 2024.

At the Conference, Minister Jason Clare said, "*We are building a bigger, better, fairer system where more children and families can benefit. It's the culmination of 16 months work, with 56 recommendations and almost 1,000 pages. In this report, it is clear to me that the most disadvantaged children are the most likely to benefit but also the most likely to benefit*".

ECA's CEO Sam Page said, "*At ECA, we are passionate advocates for the rights of every child to thrive and learn. To this end, the Productivity Commission's review into the early childhood education and care sector was very welcome and we thank the Commissioners for their diligence in exploring the cost and availability barriers to accessing early childhood education and care. We also applaud the Federal Government for commissioning this review and their commitment to achieving equitable access to high-quality early childhood education and care for every child*".

ECA consulted widely with the sector during the review, and provided a comprehensive written submission and attended a public hearing to expand on this. ECA's submission advocated for early childhood education and care to be the entitlement of every child; not a provision based on the activity of parents or carers, or where they live.

In our submission "*ECA reinforced the importance of a universal system that is easy for families to navigate without being uniform – we understand that the diversity of communities across Australian contexts warrants flexibility in service models and approaches. Services also need to be inclusive and culturally responsive, underpinned by a professional and valued workforce*", said Sam Page.

Professor Emerita Deborah Brennan AM, co-lead of the Commission's Inquiry said, "*The release of the final report by the Government has been eagerly anticipated, and the beginning of realising the ambition of universal access for every child to attend high-quality early childhood education and care*".

ECA welcomes the following recommendations from the final report:

- Establishing an entitlement of **at least** 30 hours per week to high quality early childhood education for every child from birth to 5 years of age (transition to school)
- Removing the Activity Test and simplifying the Child Care Subsidy through changes to the taper rate
- Developing a model of system stewardship which takes a more proactive approach to ensuring that services are available where needed and affordable for families
- Maintaining the National Quality Framework while supporting an evolution of the rating and assessment process
- Settling responsibilities between the Federal and State/Territory Governments for the delivery of early childhood education and care including preschool programs
- Addressing the unique needs of small communities through the development of supply side funding mechanisms to augment the Child Care Subsidy
- Building a more robust approach to supporting the inclusion of children with diverse or additional needs
- OSHC to be available to every public primary school where there is viable demand
- Recognising that the workforce is the cornerstone of a quality service system and that comprehensive approaches are needed to address workforce challenges

ECA is informed and well-positioned to continue to contribute to the national reform agenda, having recently undertaken consultations across jurisdictions to better understand the barriers to children's access and participation in quality early childhood education and care in 'unserved' and 'underserved' communities. ECA heard from key stakeholders in regional, rural and remote Australia about the realities of no or limited access to ECEC where they live. ECA also identified pockets of promise where cooperation, innovation and resourcing has created change in access and engagement with ECEC for children who may otherwise have missed out.

An early childhood education and care 'entitlement' for every child in Australia is important, highlighting the importance of ECEC in supporting children's learning, development and wellbeing, and its place in the everyday lives of families, enabling access to employment, training and study. ECA is focussed on what quality ECEC looks like in different places, and the models that will deliver the best outcomes for and with 'unserved' and 'underserved' children, families and communities. Enduring solutions are needed to ensure that families can enrol their children in quality early childhood education and care services wherever they live, with the confidence that the service will be open, operating and staffed to ensure quality provision.

As the national peak body for young children, ECA looks forward to working with the Government in implementing the recommendations and supporting the sector to understand the Report's implications and ongoing reform.

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Early Childhood Australia Chief Executive Officer, Samantha Page is available for comment. For interviews, please contact ECA on 02 6242 1800.

ABN 44 950 767 752

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