



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

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

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday 28 October, 2025

ECA Response to *Four Corners*' 'Hunting Ground'

Early Childhood Australia (ECA), as the national peak body for early childhood, affirms our commitment to the safety of all young children.

ECA Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Samantha Page, said, *'Watching Four Corners' Hunting Ground, we heard further devastating stories of harm and maltreatment of children and child sexual abuse in some early childhood services, with emerging information coming to light around perpetrators of child sexual abuse. The children and families so deeply affected by this harrowing abuse and breach of trust remain front of mind for ECA. Harm and maltreatment of children and child sexual abuse should not happen. We need a substantial improvement in safety and quality to address shortcomings in current arrangements and strengthen safeguarding across provider and service types.'*

Australia's current early childhood provision mix is complex: it is more a 'market approach' than a coordinated or stewarded 'system'. It is a complicated web of varying policy and funding arrangements, which at best are complementary, and at worst create challenges to quality provision. Various reviews have identified where vulnerabilities and challenges to quality provision exist.

ECA acknowledges the agreement and commitment by Australian governments through Education Ministers Meetings and various reviews and engagement. This shared approach by Australian governments is translating in practice to a commitment to privileging children's safety, rights and best interests, as well as measures such as the National Register for Educators, CCTV Trial and greater powers and resourcing for regulatory authorities.

Yet more needs to be done. We believe a new approach to quality and safety is needed—a system steward, in the form of an early childhood commission or authority, with a mandate to renegotiate the provider mix and the expectations of providers. This would

mean requiring early childhood expertise at the governance and senior leadership level, limiting profit/surplus and rental or property costs (eliminating excessive rents) and requiring a more substantial investment in the workforce. It is time to evolve the *National Quality Framework* (NQF) to provide clearer guidance on staffing and child safeguarding and a more responsive and accountable approach to regulatory compliance.

There is also an urgent need for professional learning and professional support, developed by early childhood experts who understand practice, to assist educators and service leaders to strengthen child safeguarding and prevention of child sexual abuse. This goes beyond minimum or baseline information; sophisticated and adaptive resources appropriate to the range of skills in the sector are required.

ECA asserts that where there is a need for capability uplift, this must accommodate different contexts and different provider and service types as we move towards a new early childhood system. We welcome the investment of the federal, state and territory governments in strengthening quality and safety, and the Australian government's Three Day Guarantee and Building Early Education Fund, which can begin to accommodate children and families who currently sit outside ECEC provision. But it is clear that the safety and quality agenda must underpin these efforts. Constant and enduring vigilance for safety and proactive safeguarding for Australia's children is imperative: children's safety is everyone's business—from board room or governing committee right through to the sandpit.

Samantha Page said, *'ECA remains committed to the realisation of universal, high-quality early childhood education and care where every young child is safe, thriving and learning. The early childhood sector, quality providers and the professional early childhood workforce must continue to be invited to be part of the solution. We know that the early childhood workforce of dedicated, knowledgeable and highly skilled professionals has been deeply shaken and pained by these revelations. We believe that it is imperative that we hold onto the principled, ethical sector and service leaders and educators who contribute to the very best early childhood practice every day.'*

The *Four Corners* investigation also raised issues currently being worked through within the sector, such as:

- identifying grooming and risk factors
- establishing and maintaining a culture of safety
- building evidence-informed knowledge of child sexual abuse and how to prevent it
- improving practice in responding to disclosures, concerns or reports of harm
- defining staffing and supervision levels that keep children safe (beyond ratios)

- tightening WWCC as a mechanism and its use in practice
- the necessity of timely, effective regulatory responses by well-resourced regulators.

Samantha Page, said, *'ECA continues to actively contribute to the children's safety, safeguarding and wellbeing agenda. Through ECA's Rapid Response Taskforce and advocacy, including contributions from our state and territory Committees, ECA remains deeply committed to this work. In doing so, we also acknowledge quality providers and dedicated, ethical and principled early childhood professionals. They are key to how we build out quality and safety across the sector.'*
