



Mid-year Economic Fiscal Outlook Budget Submission

30 September 2019

#BestStartInLife





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Introduction

This submission is presented to the Federal Treasury in relation to the **2019-20 budget**.

As the national peak body in the Australian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector, the Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) represents more than 2,500 members and approximately 360,000 families throughout Australia.

We work on behalf of early learning (centre based, long day care) service owners and operators, predominantly private, as a reputable source of evidence-based advice to policy makers and a trusted source of practical guidance to service operators.

Our vision is a future where **every child in Australia** has access to high quality, affordable and sustainable early learning services.

The benefits of high quality ECEC are now well recognised and acknowledged locally and globally across the education sector. There is an abundance of evidence¹ from studies in Australia and internationally, demonstrating the significant advantages children gain from attending quality ECEC services, which in turn flow on to their family and the wider community.

Children who enjoy quality early learning are likely to be well socialised, confident, inquisitive about the world, accepting of diversity, resilient to manage challenges and also to be life-long learners.

The latest data provided by the Department of Education and Training² indicates that for the December quarter 2018, there were over **1.369 million children** across over **974,600 families** using approved early learning services in Australia with **over 58% in centre-based care**, reflecting the continued demand for early learning services.

From the service provider perspective, in the same quarter there were over **12,886 approved early learning services** operating across Australia, of which **over 60% were centre-based day care services**.

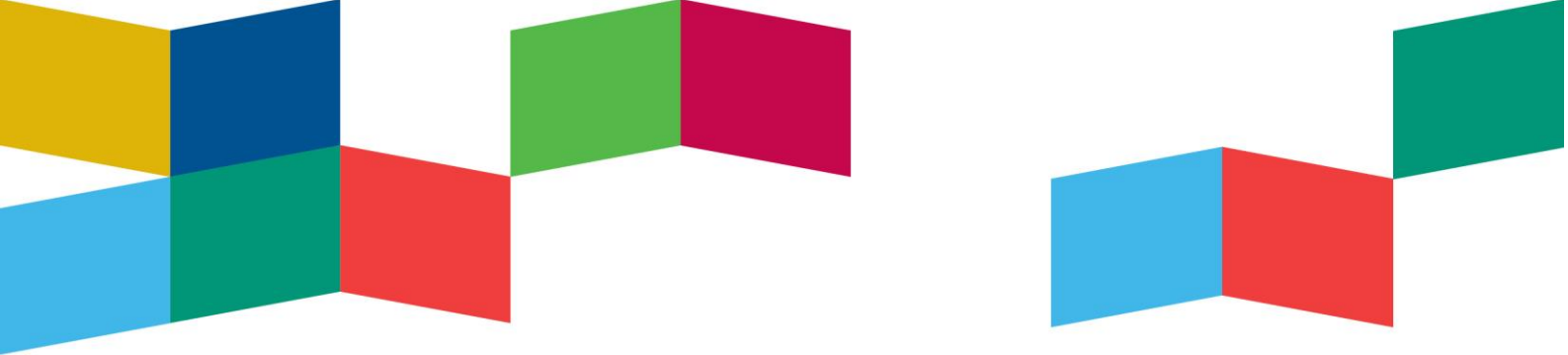
According to the 2016 National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census Report³, the number of workers employed in the sector grew from **153,155 in 2013** to **194,994 in 2016**.

Early learning (centre based, long day care) services employed **over half** the ECEC workforce (55.7%), followed by family day care services (16.7%), outside school hours care (14.1%) and vacation care services (12.1%).

¹ Academic Research: The benefits of early learning and a play-based environment - <http://beststartinlife.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/References-Best-Start-In-Life-Academic-research.pdf>

² Child Care in Australia report December quarter 2018 - <https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-australia-report-december-quarter-2018>

³ 2016 National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census Report - <https://www.education.gov.au/2016-early-childhood-education-and-care-national-workforce-census>



In terms of future growth and the effect on the workforce, the most recent planning data⁴ indicates that there are in excess of 1,000 planning applications for new privately-operated early learning (centre based, long day care) services in Australia.

At a national average service size of 90 places and 25 educators per service, this represents **over 25,000 new educators** required to be trained to service these new centres before the end of 2020, when it is reasonable to expect these services to be operating. Of this number, **a minimum of 1,000** would have to be university-qualified Early Childhood Teachers. This number would at least double to 2,000 when the regulations change on 1 January 2020.

In terms of growth from a supply and demand perspective, our December 2018 report⁵ which ACA commissioned in partnership with Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA) and Australian Community Children's Services (ACCS) reveals that the net increase in long day care centres in 2017 was roughly **2-3 times** the estimated number of new centres needed per annum to meet future demand.

ACA is extremely proud of the early learning sector and we have worked tirelessly in collaboration with other peak bodies to ensure that the education and care that takes place each and every day, informed by the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the National Quality Framework (NQF), is appropriately recognised.

As the sector continues to grow in size, its benefit to young children as well as to future prospects of the Australian economy are increasingly being recognised, both by government and the general community.

The critical issues and recommendations identified in the following report are presented in the context of the priorities for the **2019-20 budget**.

ACA believes that with the right policy and financial frameworks in place, Australia could be a world leader in the delivery of high quality ECEC within 10 years, and that there are four key levers to achieving this outcome: quality, affordability, accessibility and sustainability.

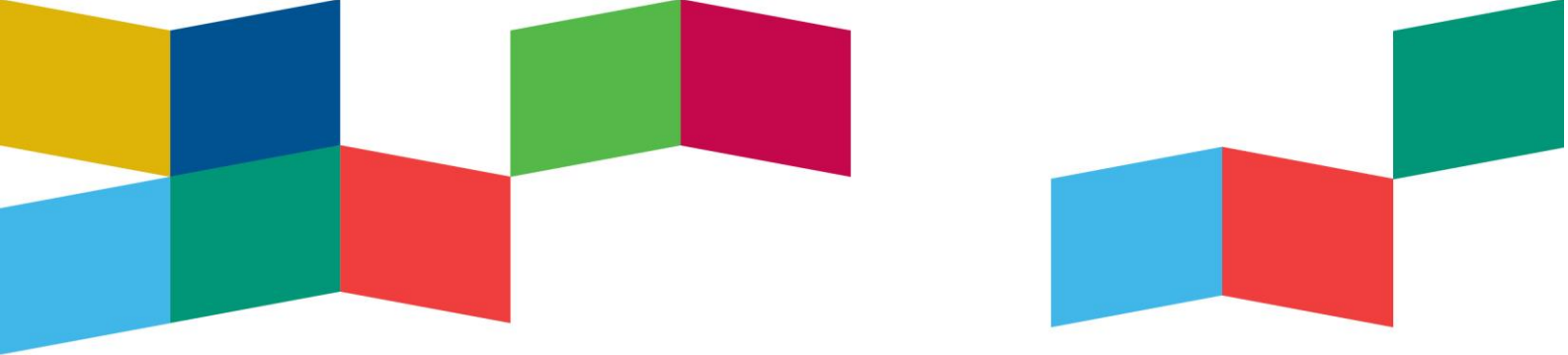
ACA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Federal Treasury's budget considerations for the 2019-20 financial year, in the context of ensuring that **every child in Australia** has access to high quality, affordable and sustainable early learning services, and therefore the **best start in life**.

Paul Mondo
ACA President



⁴ Cordell data - <https://www.corelogic.com.au/products/cordellconnect>

⁵ <https://childcarealliance.org.au/more-news/new-report-provides-insights-into-areas-of-under-and-oversupply>



Two Years Before School: A better future with earlier participation & equitable outcomes

ISSUE

The Federal Government provides funding to give all Australian children access to 15 hours per week of a quality kindergarten/preschool program **in the year before school** (ie. for four year old children).

In addition to the funding dedicated to this initiative under previous financial years, the Australian Government has committed a further \$453.1 million in the 2019-20 Budget to extend the National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education until the end of 2020.

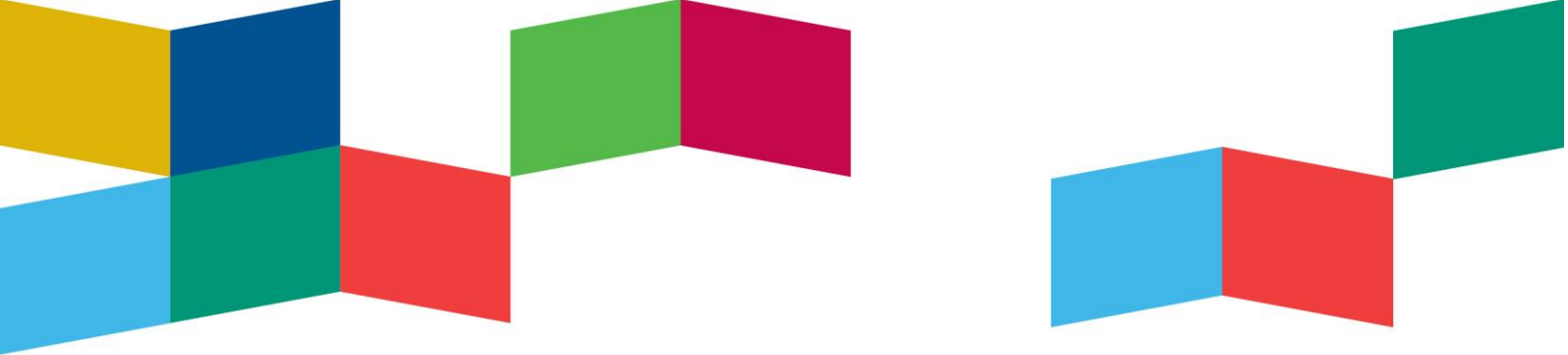
This funding brings the total Commonwealth investment in kindergarten/preschool since 2008 to \$4.2 billion.

This is highly commendable and has the potential to have a profound and lasting impact on our youngest and most vulnerable Australians and their families.

However despite this laudable support, the Universal Access funding model is seriously flawed and has resulted in a lack of national uniformity.

Since the inception of the agreement in November 2008 via the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), each state/territory government has taken a different approach to implementation. This has resulted in grossly inequitable outcomes for children, families and service providers.

Meanwhile there is no federal funding in place to specifically support kindergarten/preschool programs for three year old children (ie. two years prior to their school commencement).



There is a large international evidence base that demonstrates how experiences in the early years (0-5) impacts outcomes later in life.⁶ Children's experiences and strengths at age three very often predicts their health, happiness and success in adulthood.

Our children deserve more.

ACA firmly believes that a second year of kindergarten/preschool gives our children a stronger start in life⁷ and therefore all children should have access to quality kindergarten/ preschool programs during this life period. Additionally, parents **must** have a choice of early learning service type that best suits their work/ family life needs.

We believe that a lack of funding for this age group is putting vulnerable families and the sector under enormous financial strain. This point is expanded on from page 9 of this document.

More than 60% of children who access early learning programs in the two years before school, do so in a long day care centre⁸.

ACA believes that co-locating early childhood education programs on school sites, which takes place in Western Australia as a result of WA government policy, puts the needs of the children aged 0-5 years last in these environments by limiting and decreasing the quality of play-based education and care.

Long day care should be recognised, and funded properly, as the key provider of three and four-year-old kindergarten/preschool programs across Australia to help families, in the two years before school.

Long day care centres are the ideal learning environments for children in their two years before school.

This is because:

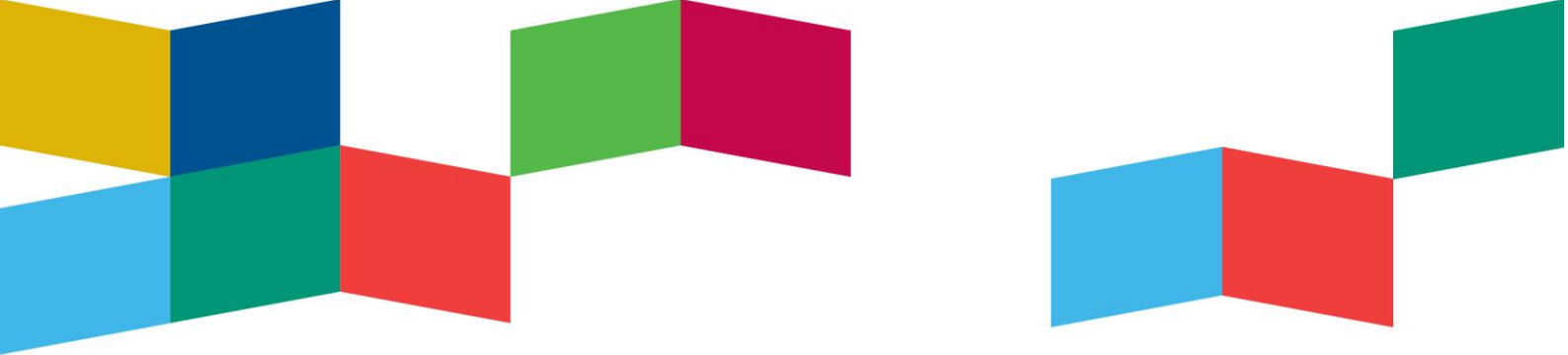
- The infrastructure **already exists** and this can help keep costs down for taxpayers. With 93% of long day care centres reporting vacancies⁹, they have the capacity to meet the needs of families with minimal further investment by Government. This is a resource that needs to be leveraged.
- Long day early learning and care offers the ideal learning environment for 0-5 year olds.

⁶ Academic Research: the benefits of early learning and a play-based environment - <http://beststartinlife.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/References-Best-Start-In-Life-Academic-research.pdf>

⁷ Preschool: Two Years Are Better Than One, Mitchell Institute, <http://www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/reports/two-years-preschool/>

⁸ Report on Government Services 2018, PART B, CHAPTER 3, Early childhood education and care, <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-governmentservices/2018/child-care-education-and-training/early-childhood-education-and-care>

⁹ Federal Department of Education Early Childhood and Child Care in Summary Report 2018 - <https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood-and-child-care-reports>

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- It delivers age/developmentally-appropriate, tailored and culturally appropriate, physical early learning environments where children can also be bathed, have nappies changed and sleep.
 - Long day care is highly regulated. It is delivered under the National Quality Framework and the Early Learning Years Framework.
 - Long day care offers trained and qualified educators, both from the nurturing and education aspect. Our educators are well trained, with centres having **at least one** degree qualified Early Childhood Teacher. Next year, this will increase to at least two Early Childhood Teachers.

SOLUTION

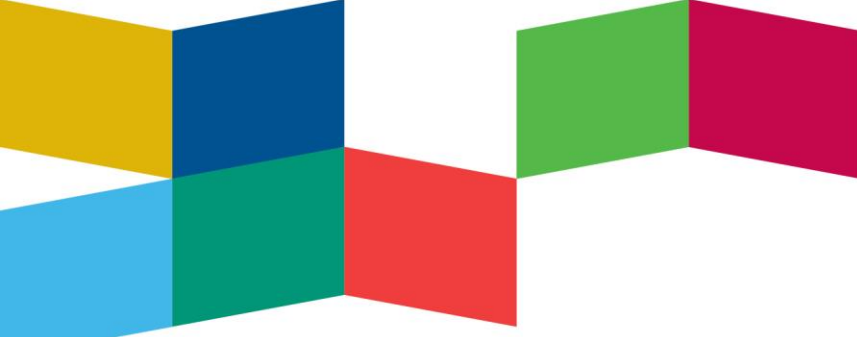
We call on the government to:

- Introduce a long term, sustainable funding model to ensure that all Australian children have access to at least 15 hours per week of a quality kindergarten/ preschool lead by tertiary qualified early childhood teachers, for 40 weeks per year in the two years before school **regardless of type of service**.
 - This would amount to approximately \$453 million a year for 4 year old children and \$453 million a year for 3 year old children
- Modify the existing Universal Access funding model:
 - to provide both greater certainty of funding beyond year to year agreements; and
 - deliver equitable funding to all children (ie. funding that follows the child) regardless of service type or jurisdiction. This would support kindergarten/preschool programs in all settings, including kindergarten/preschool programs delivered in long day care settings.
- Extend exemption of the **Child Care Subsidy activity test** for children in their year before school to children in their **two years before school**.

With over 360,000 families in our care, ACA believes **all of Australia's children** have the right to the **best start in life**.

BENEFIT TO FAMILIES AND TAXPAYERS

- **All Australian children**, including children from **vulnerable and disadvantaged families**, would have greater access to high quality affordable early learning services in their two years before school, which has proven to deliver greater outcomes both when they enter the school system as well as



later in life. They would also be more likely to have stronger mental health and increased wellbeing and less likely to be involved in the criminal justice system.¹⁰

- Parents would have the choice of early learning service type that **best suits and supports their work/family life needs.**

BENEFIT TO GOVERNMENT

- This approach would be a highly effective spend of taxpayers' dollars, with long term capital savings through a lower spend on human services by government in the future:
 - Research has shown that by investing in quality early childhood education, children have better education, health and employment outcomes throughout their lives¹¹. For every dollar invested now, Australia receives \$2 back over a child's life¹².

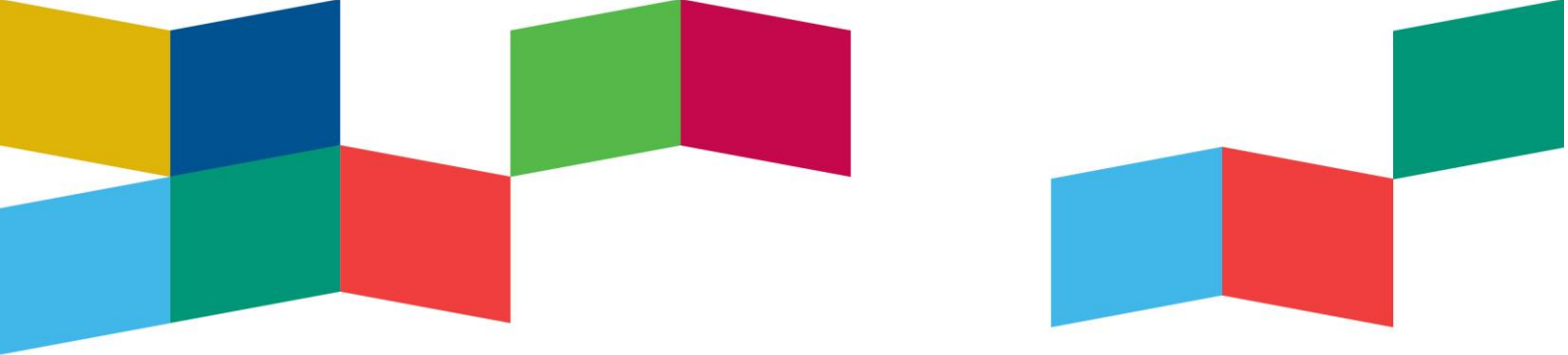
Every dollar spent on high-quality, birth-to-five programs for disadvantaged children delivers a 13% per annum return on investment. These economically significant returns account for the welfare costs of taxation to finance the program and survive a battery of sensitivity analyses¹³.

¹⁰ <https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/the-evidence>

¹¹ <https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/the-evidence>

¹² A Smart Investment for a Smarter Australia: Economic analysis of universal early childhood education in the year before school in Australia, The Front Project June 2019 - https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/images/downloads/ECO_ANALYSIS_Full_Report.pdf

¹³ The Heckman Equation - <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/research-summary-lifecycle-benefits-influential-early-childhood-program/>



New Child Care Subsidy: Affordability & why our most vulnerable children need support

ISSUE

The Child Care Subsidy (CCS) was designed, mainly, to increase workforce participation, rather than to harness the benefits of early childhood education for children.

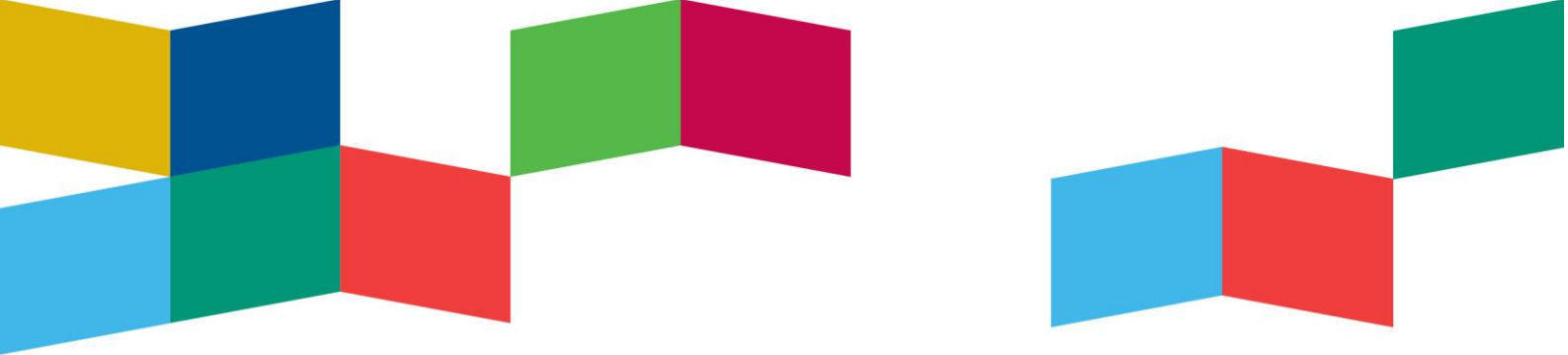
Children are missing out on a **minimum level of subsidised access** because their often struggling families do not meet the activity test, reducing their capacity to afford early learning services.

Additionally, the activity test is difficult for all families to navigate and is unnecessarily complex, particularly for those families with varying work hours per fortnight, along with those not proficient in English. The turn around time for families applying for a Customer Reference Number (CRN) and then the CCS can be up to two months.

The CCS is set at an hourly rate and is scheduled to increase annually in line with indexation. However the indexation rate over the last two years has not kept up with the respective hourly rate increases for educators under the relevant awards, which means the scheduled CCS hourly rate increase does not necessarily keep up with the running costs for early learning service providers.

To further exacerbate this, the two Fair Work Commission cases (the ERO work value case and the Modern Award Review), which relate to the hourly rate under the *Children's Services Award 2010* and the *Educational Services (Teachers) Award 2010*, will have a significant impact on affordability for families, as has been acknowledged by all parties.

Families are not in a position to bear the cost of any increases that flow on as result of increased wages. ACA therefore believes that the hourly rate should be adjusted when the outcomes of these cases are known.



Another issue is many service providers make the decision not to charge certain families while waiting for their CCS application to be finalised, only to discover that the eventual CCS back-payments are paid to the family rather than the service provider.

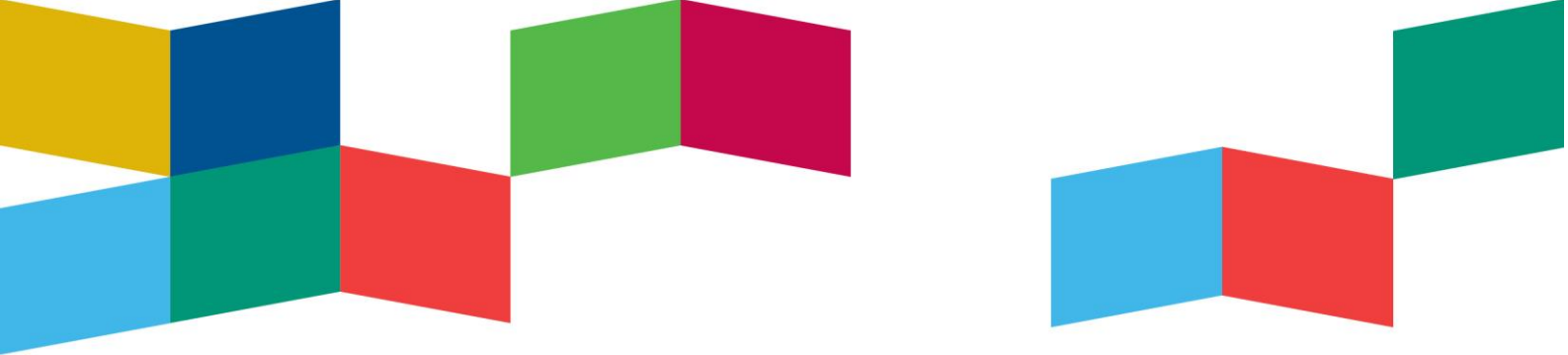
The unintended consequence of this payment process is that the service provider is left substantially out of pocket with very little recourse. The eventual consequence is that service providers are unlikely to assist in similar circumstances in the future, excluding vulnerable children from access to quality early learning services.

ACA believes that every child in Australia should have access to high quality, affordable and sustainable early learning services and therefore the best start in life. This includes those children from **vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds**.

SOLUTION

The solution is simple:

- Amend the new CCS to support all Australian children, allowing all families access to at least 18 hours a week of subsidised high quality, affordable early learning services.
- Increase the CCS hourly rate once the Fair Work Commission has made their rulings, as a direct response to this outcome.
- Reduce the turn-around time for families applying for a Customer Reference Number (CRN) and then applying for the CCS.
- Provide more support for families from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds to navigate the complex CCS application process.
- Provide funding to allow for an IT solution that prevents back-payments from going to families.



BENEFIT TO FAMILIES AND TAXPAYERS

- **All Australian children**, including children from **vulnerable and disadvantaged families**, would have greater access to high quality affordable early learning services. which has proven to deliver greater outcomes both when they enter the school system as well as later in life. They would be also more likely to have stronger mental health and increased wellbeing and less likely to be involved in the criminal justice system.¹⁴
- Parents would have the choice of early learning service type that **best suits and supports their work/family life needs**.
- Families would have a much **simpler, easier process** to access **immediate** subsidised early learning services.

BENEFIT TO GOVERNMENT

- This approach would be a highly effective spend of taxpayers' dollars, with long term capital savings through a lower spend on human services by government in the future:
 - Research has shown that by investing in quality early childhood education, children have better education, health and employment outcomes throughout their lives¹⁵. For every dollar invested now, Australia receives \$2 back over a child's life¹⁶.
- Every dollar spent on high-quality, birth-to-five programs for disadvantaged children delivers a 13% per annum return on investment. These economically significant returns account for the welfare costs of taxation to finance the program and survive a battery of sensitivity analyses¹⁷. Providing all children with a minimum level of access would reduce complexity in the system, making it easier and less expensive to administer by Centrelink.
- The provision of a **simpler, easier process** for families would translate to far less administration for the Department of Human Services (Centrelink), creating substantial operational cost savings.

¹⁴ <https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/the-evidence>

¹⁵ <https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/the-evidence>

¹⁶ A Smart Investment for a Smarter Australia: Economic analysis of universal early childhood education in the year before school in Australia, The Front Project June 2019 - https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/images/downloads/ECO_ANALYSIS_Full_Report.pdf

¹⁷ The Heckman Equation - <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/research-summary-lifecycle-benefits-influential-early-childhood-program/>



Early Learning Workforce Strategy

ISSUE

Sourcing early childhood educators and Early Childhood Teachers (ECT) is a significant problem Australia-wide, with undersupply exacerbated by the requirement for an additional ECT for centres from 2020 and oversupply of the number of services.

The Australian Government predicts that the sector will need to fill an additional 29,000 ECT jobs in Australia by 2023. If action is not taken soon, one-third of kindergarten/preschool services will not have a trained teacher on staff within four years.¹⁸

The early learning sector is already struggling to meet the demand for well trained, competent Early Childhood Teachers and early childhood educators, with not enough entrants into the sector to meet demand. There is no Federal Government early learning workforce strategy to support the growing demand of vocationally trained educators and tertiary trained teachers.

The quality of vocationally trained educators has long been an issue impacting the provision of high quality early learning for Australia's children. Whilst some headway has been made in eradicating poor quality Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), many employers still find a high variance in the quality and job readiness of many vocationally trained educators.

The Federal Department of Employment Report (April 2017)¹⁹ and the NSW Department of Education's Early Childhood Education Workforce Review (October 2017)²⁰ have confirmed labour shortages for both Certificate III, Diploma and Degree qualified educators and teachers.

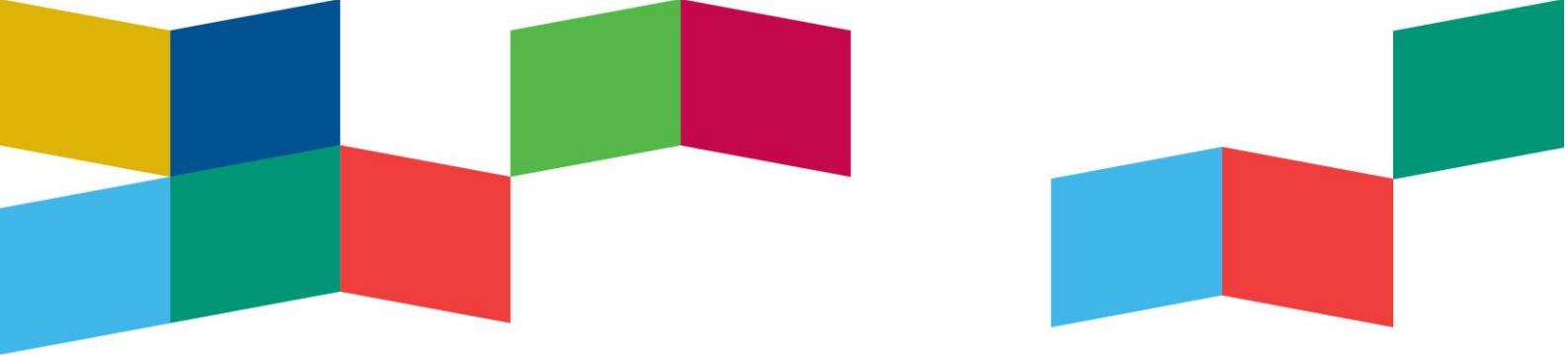
New modelling indicates that one third of all kindergarten/preschools may lack a qualified teacher in the next four years if this issue is not addressed.²¹

¹⁸ Executive Summary, Upskilling in Early Childhood Education Report, Futuretracks and FrontProject - <https://www.futuretracks.org.au/images/downloads/UpskillReport.pdf>

¹⁹ Federal Department of Employment Report (April 2017), https://docs.jobs.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/241111earlychildhtchrnsw_2.pdf

²⁰ NSW Department of Education's Early Childhood Education Workforce Review (October 2017), <https://education.nsw.gov.au/media/eccec/pdf-documents/2017/Workforce-Literature-Review.pdf>

²¹ One-third of all preschool centres could be without a trained teacher in four years, if we do nothing, [Megan O'Connell](https://theconversation.com/one-third-of-all-preschool-centres-could-be-without-a-trained-teacher-in-four-years-if-we-do-nothing-120099), Honorary Senior Fellow, University of Melbourne - <https://theconversation.com/one-third-of-all-preschool-centres-could-be-without-a-trained-teacher-in-four-years-if-we-do-nothing-120099>



ACA would like to acknowledge the Australian Government's commitment to establishing a *Skills Organisations Pilot Program* under the Delivering Skills for Today and Tomorrow²² initiative, which will trial new approaches to address this issue. ACA endeavours to work with the pilot program as a sector stakeholder to help in addressing some of the early learning sector's concerns.

The former *Long Day Care Professional Development Program* (LDCPDP) allowed early learning service providers to meet their specific professional development needs to support the National Quality Framework, adhere to the National Quality Standard and deliver the Early Years Learning Framework or other approved learning framework.

The funding had an enormous positive impact on the training of staff in the early learning sector.

The LDCPDP funding concluded on 30 June 2017 and no further funding initiative was introduced to ensure a longer-term solution to the professional development requirements of the early learning sector.

There is no Federal Government funding in place to support the professional development of Australia's early childhood educators and teachers.

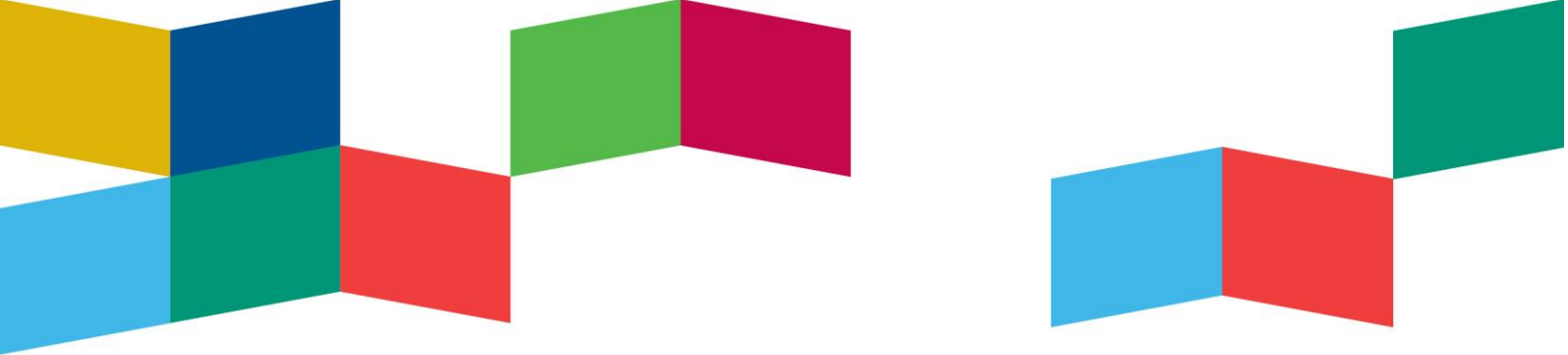
SOLUTION

We call on the government to allocate funding to a national early learning workforce strategy that aims to ensure an adequate supply of quality early childhood educators and teachers for the sector.

This must include:

- Government policy that will deliver a consistent level of high quality vocational training courses with the required outcomes, to ensure that Australian young children receive the best quality early childhood education and care
- Addressing the desperate shortage of degree qualified Early Childhood Teachers (ECT's) in the wake of the 2020 change in NQF requirements regarding early childhood teachers and the potential for the universal kindergarten/preschool programs to be extended to 3 year olds. Government policy could reduce barriers for existing Diploma qualified educators who may wish to upskill to a teaching degree.
- Government funding for the professional development of early childhood educators and teachers i.e. A program similar in concept to the LDCPDP with the same distribution model that allows early learning service providers to determine the most appropriate training needs for the staff in their own services.

²² https://www.budget.gov.au/2019-20/content/factsheets/download/fact_sheet_skills_package.pdf



BENEFIT TO FAMILIES AND TAXPAYERS

- Australian children deserve the best quality we can provide them in terms of education and care. Continuity of training allows our children to access to the best of teachers and early childhood educators without parents facing undue pressure on the fees.
- If all centres can access a quality and well-trained workforce, they will not be a risk of 'failing' the government's National Quality Framework despite having done all they can to meet the criteria.

BENEFIT TO GOVERNMENT

- If properly funded and facilitated, this initiative will underscore the government's commitment to early learning as a destination career for many young Australians who, right now, choose primary school teaching as their career goal.
- In remote and regional Australia, more professionals will be drawn to the region and allow more centres to be opened in towns and centres, which right now, fail our children due to the lack of an appropriately skilled workforce.
- Rural families would have access to the same quality teachers/carers in quality long day care centres as their city counterparts.
- These reforms would enable the government to fulfil its own reform agenda on demanding an increase in the quality of carers in long day care centres.



ACECQA Funding

ISSUE

With the Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)'s funding due to expire in June 2020, it is vitally important for funding to be allocated to ensure the maintenance of national oversight of the National Quality Framework.

Considering the different regulatory environments from one jurisdiction to another and the inconsistencies in the assessment and rating process between jurisdictions, it is vitally important that ACECQA plays a part in attempting to ensure more equitable and nationally consistent application of both the regulations and the Assessment and Rating process.

As part of the current review of ACECQA it may be prudent to consider the need for greater authority for ACECQA to deliver on ensuring national consistency of the NQF and NQS.

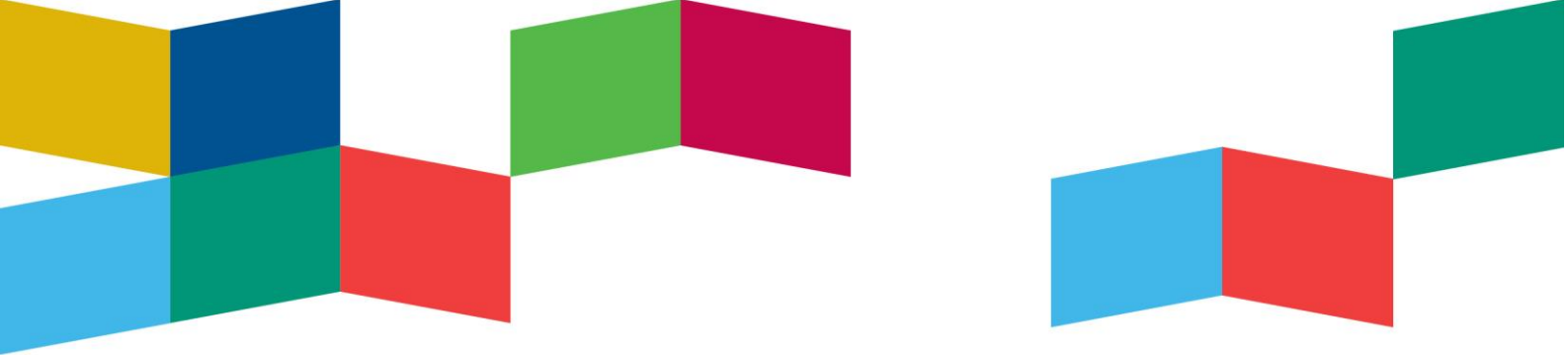
SOLUTION

We call on the government to:

- allocate long-term funding to provide ACECQA with the resources urgently required to continue its role in ensuring Australia-wide consistency across the state jurisdictions with the National Quality Framework (NQF) as well as continuing its other important functions such as assessing qualifications and providing support to the early learning sector.

BENEFIT TO FAMILIES AND TAXPAYERS

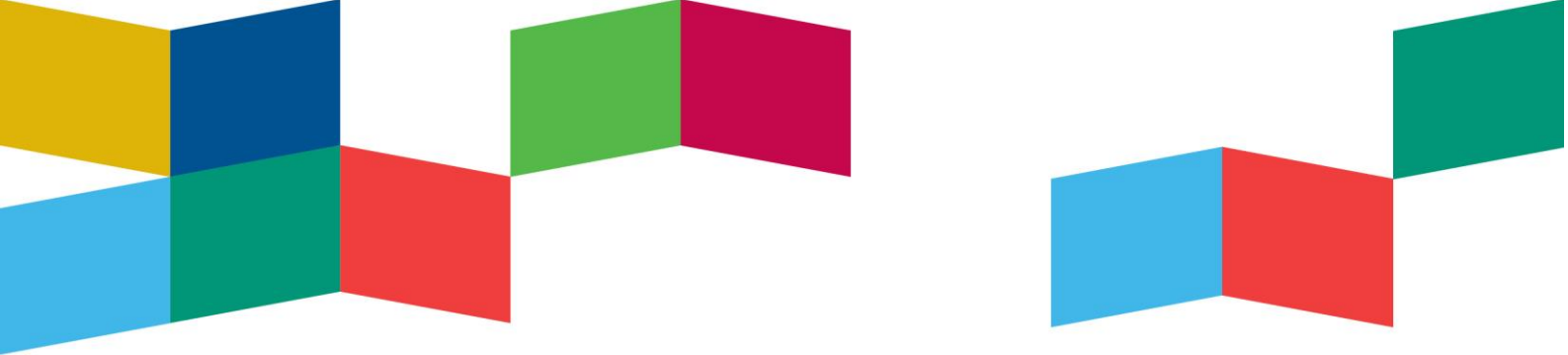
- The continuation of ensuring national consistency across the state jurisdictions would provide Australian families with access to high quality early learning services Australia-wide.



BENEFIT TO GOVERNMENT

- The allocation of funding for the continuation of ACECQA's important role would enable the Government to fulfil its own reform agenda improving the quality and consistency of education and care across long day care, family day care, kindergarten/preschool and outside school hours services.





Greater alignment of the provision of early learning services to support demonstrable need

ISSUE

Oversupply is a growing issue in Australia's early learning sector. With few barriers to entry for new or existing providers to set up new centres, the saturation of early learning services in certain geographic areas has led to many services experiencing lower occupancy rates, impacting the level of quality provided and the affordability to families.

A report²³ commissioned by the Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA), the Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA) and Australian Community Children's Services (ACCS) revealed that the net increase in long day care centres in 2017 was roughly 2-3 times the estimated number of new centres needed per annum to meet future demand.

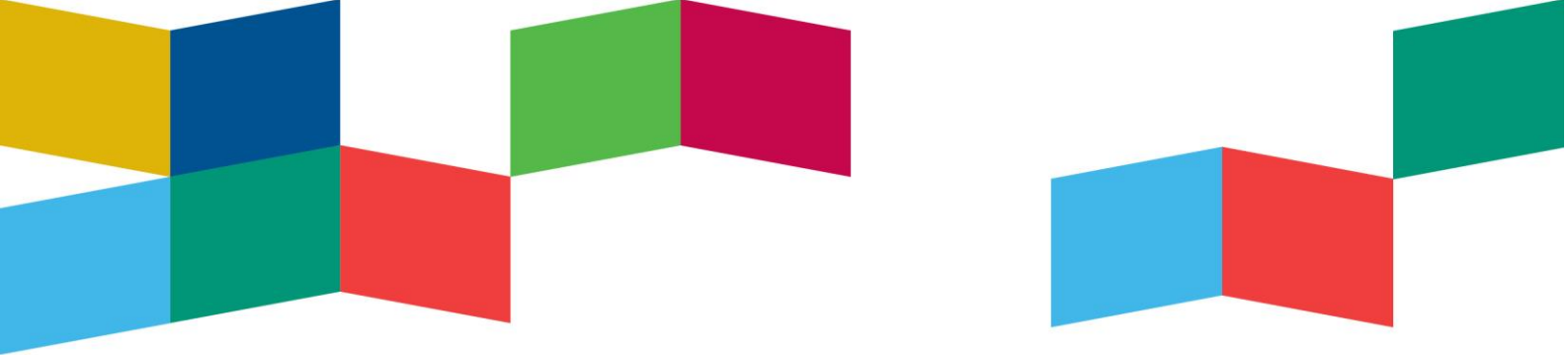
This is an alarming statistic - if the same growth continues in the coming years, there is likely to be an enormous impact on the quality of services and the viability of all early learning services, resulting in an increase in government spending.

Planning data²⁴ predicts that there are currently over 1,000 new centres in the pipeline around the nation, which if completed could deliver another 90,000 childcare places in an already flooded market. Whilst we know that there are still some locations where demand outstrips supply, it is important for decision makers to be able to identify these few areas in need and understand how these particular communities can be better supported to supply the needs in that space, whether metropolitan or rural.

If not addressed, oversupply will lead to increased costs for families, an increase in government spending and may have a negative impact on the quality of services in local communities.

²³ Occupancy and Performance Appraisal: Early Childhood Education and Care Sector Report, <https://childcarealliance.org.au/news/192-new-report-explores-the-factorsinfluencing-the-supply-and-demand-of-early-learning-services-across-australia>

²⁴ According to data sourced from Cordell Connect - <https://www.corelogic.com.au/products>.



The early learning sector operates under a unique set of circumstances - families are subsidised by the Federal Government and includes a high level of fixed costs (wages, rent and mortgages). As a result, prices are relatively inelastic, and typically do not decrease with increased supply and competition.

ACA strongly believes that in this context, early learning services should only be made available where needed, as part of good, local community planning to allow for better access at a price that facilitates participation by all families, strengthens the local community and allows for sustainable, high quality services.

The Federal Department of Education receives vacancy reports weekly from all service providers and this information could prove highly valuable for informing the market as to areas of need, to ensure responsible and targeted new developments. The Department of Education has informed ACA that it cannot produce aggregated occupancy data reports because the Child Care Subsidy IT System has not been designed for this purpose.

SOLUTION

We call on the government to:

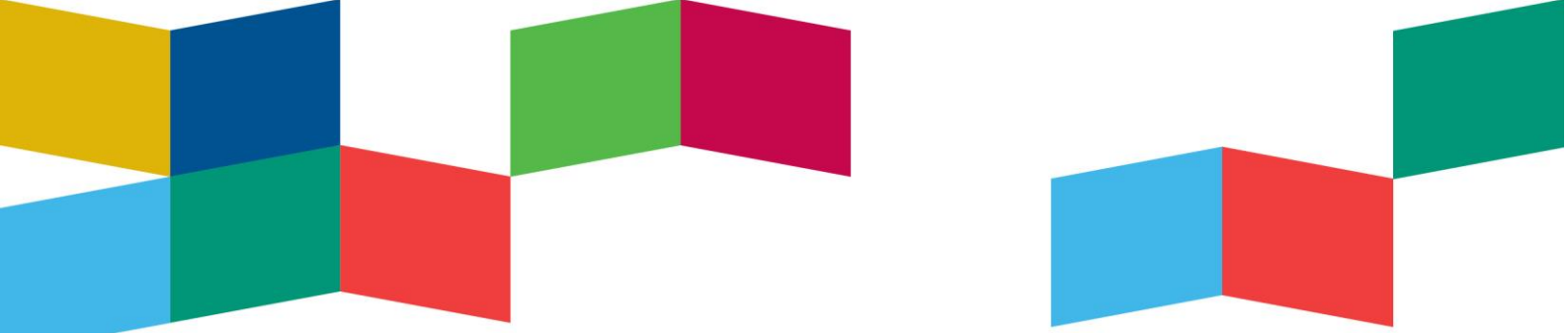
- allocate funding to allow for the development of aggregated occupancy reports for specific regions such as clusters of postcodes or state electorates. Such reports would be invaluable to advise the market as to where oversupply and undersupply exist and therefore allow for careful town planning
- consider the application of legislation similar in theory to the Pharmacy Location Rules in the context of ensuring the provision of ongoing affordable, high quality early learning services to all Australian children by better aligning service provision to demonstrable need.

BENEFIT TO FAMILIES AND TAXPAYERS

- Families would benefit through the ongoing viability, high quality and affordability of early learning services in their local area.

BENEFIT TO GOVERNMENT

- The ongoing viability, high quality and affordability of early learning services Australia-wide would ultimately prevent further government spend on developing infrastructure to address a declining sector in certain geographic areas.



Detection and early intervention: leveraging the influence of early childhood educators to both identify and prevent family violence

ISSUE

Domestic violence is a serious problem affecting Australian society. It occurs across all ages, socioeconomic and demographic groups but mainly affects women and children.

The statistics are alarming, with an average of one woman a week being murdered by their current or former partner²⁵. Almost 1 in 4 (23%) women and 1 in 6 (16%) men have experienced emotional abuse from a current or previous partner since the age of 15²⁶.

Children exposed to domestic violence are more likely to have behavioural and emotional problems. Children of victims are also at risk of continuing the violence with their own children and partners and at heightened risk of alcohol and drug abuse and delinquency in later life²⁷.

Domestic violence can have far-reaching financial, social, health and psychological consequences.

The indirect costs include the costs to the community of bringing perpetrators to justice or the costs of medical treatment for injured victims.

In terms of economic costs, staff absenteeism and replacement costs alone were estimated to cost employers over \$30 million per annum while the total cost (including direct and indirect costs) to the corporate/business sector was estimated to be around \$1 billion per annum.²⁸

Whilst the government has dedicated millions in funding to address this problem, most recently with Prime Minister Scott Morrison pledging \$328M in March²⁹ towards more domestic violence prevention, response and recovery initiatives, **the prevalence of domestic violence in Australia continues to grow.**

Australia needs a long-term solution and the cultural change needs to start in early childhood.

²⁵ Bryant, W. & Bricknall, S. (2017). *Homicide in Australia 2012-2014: National Homicide Monitoring Program report*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. Retrieved from <https://aic.gov.au/publications/sr/sr002>

²⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017). Personal Safety Survey 2016. ABS cat. no. 4906.0. Canberra: ABS. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4906.0>

²⁷ https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/archive/Domestic_violence

²⁸ Report - Impacts and Costs of Domestic Violence on the Australian Business/Corporate Sector 2000 - <https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/32848794?q&versionId=40131884>

²⁹ <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/record-funding-reduce-domestic-violence>



OUR VISION

ACA has paired up with Monash Partners and Maridulu Budyari Gumal - the Sydney Partnership for Health, Education, Research and Enterprise (SPHERE), in a world first collaboration to build capacity in early childhood educators to identify the risk factors of family violence and intervene early.

The proposed partnership is unprecedented. This is the first time, to our knowledge, that a not-for-profit organisation advocating for the future of Australia's children, the Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA), and the Australian Health Research Alliance (AHRA), via two of Australia's NHMRC accredited Translation Research Centres, Monash Partners and SPHERE, have come together to address such a serious social issue.

Our collaborative vision is to:

- co-design evidence-based training and resources and purposeful curriculum/pedagogical systems, for early childhood educators, that allow educators to identify the risks of family violence, to intervene early, and
- to create the supportive environments needed to foster healthy child development and powerful learning opportunities to shape the minds of the next generation, especially for kindergarten/preschool children who are already experiencing, or at-risk of experiencing, family violence.

THE IMPACT

Education, health, and social care face overlapping problems, yet the sectors operate largely in silos. Integration of these three disciplines is needed to improve outcomes for our most vulnerable and disadvantaged Australians.

Our goal, therefore, is to bring all key stakeholders together, including key national advocacy bodies, to **develop the systems approach needed** to implement evidence-based training and resources for educators and the curriculum and pedagogical practices that aim to reduce the prevalence of family violence and reduce the development of engrained child behaviours and beliefs that lead to family violence in later life, especially when intergeneration effects are at play.

Our impact will be national and vast. We will combine practice-based evidence and expertise across ACA's 2,500 member centres with ground-breaking research, clinical, and improvement and implementation science expertise across Monash Partners, SPHERE and AHRA at large, to deliver a **nationally coordinated approach** to Australia's most significant child and family welfare and protection issue.



WHY INVOLVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

One of the primary goals of the Royal Commission's Family Violence report released in 2015, is the prevention of family violence through early identification and intervention. Devastatingly, most children exposed to family violence, witness this from their first year of life.

Many of these children are in childcare and/or early childhood education settings. As a key service for families and children, early learning (centre based, long day early) centres are, therefore, ideally placed to contribute to the early detection of family violence. Indeed, everyday 360,000 families walk through the doors of ACA centres and the children from 0-5 years spend up to 8 hours within the embrace of the nurturing educators.

These educators come to know the children like their own. They talk to the parents almost every day. They observe the children closely - how they play, how they interact with each other. They provide them with their early learning stepping stones.

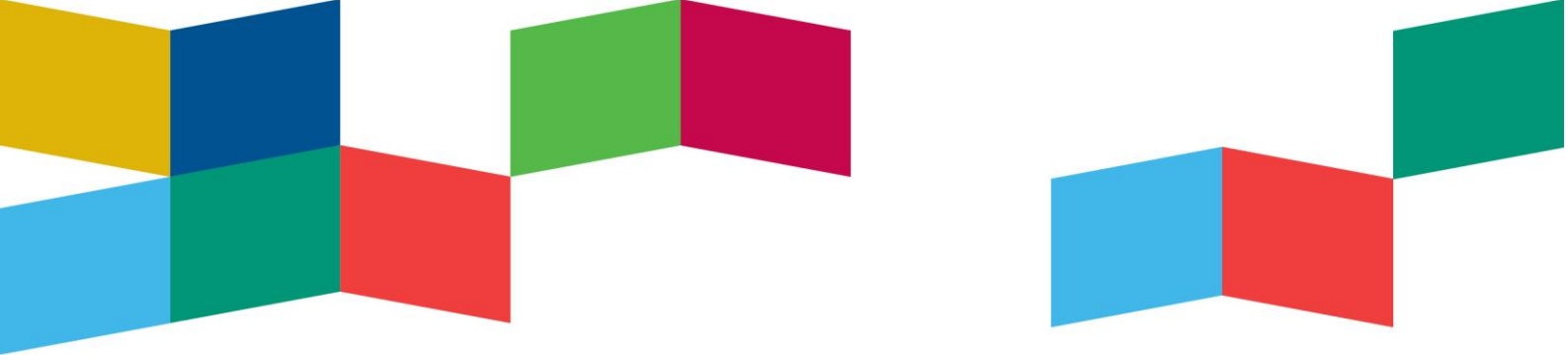
These educators also have the rare opportunity to intervene early by identifying and reaching out to help the children and their families who may be in the grip of family violence.

WHAT THE PARTNERSHIP WILL DO

ACA's large-scale partnership with multidisciplinary health and social care professionals and leading experts from two Australian Translation Research Centres (Monash Partners and SPHERE) will:

- 1) engage key stakeholders, consumers, set priorities and develop a shared vision and a practice and curriculum framework;
- 2) raise awareness among the ACA community of the role early childhood educators in this space;
- 3) mobilise the ACA community to focus on risk factors of family violence;
- 4) co-develop a sustainable, system level, early child education and care (ECEC) setting family violence intervention model, akin to the Sustainable Primary Care Family Violence Model - this model will be informed by extensive needs analysis, evidence synthesis and logic models to determine what needs to be changed and/or strengthened and for whom.

This will include developmental surveillance and the provision of wrap around services that ACA offers for initial assessments and engagement with families, and then a "warm" handover to other health professionals as needed or referral to services including GP, parenting programs and so on (akin to the Watch Me Grow model).



In addition, co-designed curriculum development and pedagogical practice will be embedded in this intervention model given that our focus is not only on the educators but on the children themselves to change their behaviours, beliefs and knowledge during the most critical formative years of their lives;

- 5) using intervention mapping, develop intervention objectives and measures of success, co-design interventions and resources, create a vital digital platform and benchmarking system to measure and feedback success across the ACA community (without measurement impact and improvement cannot be ascertained), implement the interventions, and evaluate and iteratively improve - this work will also leverage existing ECEC interventions focused on fostering the parent-child relationship by this team; and
- 6) create a cost-effective national telephone support service for educators to support the implementation of interventions and resources.

SOLUTION

We are seeking government support of approximately \$5,000,000 in funding to launch this innovative project, to allow for the training component, stakeholder engagement and a pilot program to take place.

Should this funding go ahead, SPHERE would act as the lead agency to enter the funding agreement and administer the roll out of the program collaboratively with ACA and Monash Partners.

The result would be an early learning sector that is equipped with the training, skills, resources and support to respond immediately and appropriately, providing the **best and safest outcomes for children and families**. This is an outcome that is needed urgently.



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