

MEDIA RELEASE

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ACA welcomes the Productivity Commission's recommendations for the prevention of mental health issues in our youngest Australians

Australia's peak body for early learning (childcare) services, has welcomed the recommendations from the Australian Productivity Commission for 'generation reform'¹ of mental health services to improve prevention and early intervention efforts that focus on the wellbeing of infants, children and their parents.

In its final report on the costs to the economy of mental health, the Commission observed that one in 10 preschool-aged children in Australia are exposed to multiple factors that put them at increased risk of mental illness in adulthood.

Following an incredibly stressful year for families ACA President, Mr Paul Mondo said he fully endorsed the Commission's views that "early childhood education centres represent an initial point to identify risk factors for mental illness and to offer direction towards any necessary services."

ACA supports the Commission's recommendations including:

- special purpose grants to enhance the ability of early childhood, education and care services to support the social and emotional development of children;
- State and Territory Governments should expand routine health checks in early childhood to include social and emotional wellbeing;
- evidence-based approaches to mental health and wellbeing in the training and continuing professional development of teachers and early childhood educators;
- expanding the measurement of wellbeing in the early years to middle childhood; and
- expanding parenting programs.

"We agree with the Commission that our early learning sector is a gateway into the broader mental health system," Mr Mondo said. "We believe we can provide an untapped opportunity to support children's emotional and social development and identify risk factors early on."

ACA made a detailed submission to the Productivity Commission, with many of its recommendations endorsed. The proposal was developed with Monash Partners, Sydney Partners Health, Research and Enterprise (Sphere) and SNAICC - the peak the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. It is focussed on equipping the early learning sector with the training, skills, resources and support it needs to identify and better support families struggling with mental health and domestic violence.

Importantly, the proposal also aims to develop innovative, evidence-based play and education methods aimed at preventing the next generation of victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.

"We agree that generational reform, leveraging Australia's ECEC sector, is urgently needed to support families and prevent our youngest and most vulnerable from experiencing devastating mental health and family violence impacts."

¹ <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/report>

“However, in order to identify those children at risk and support early intervention, early childhood educators must be supported by adequate professional development and suitable resources.”

“We look forward to working with all State and Federal Governments as they adopt the Productivity Commission’s recommendations,” Mr Mondo said. “With the proper additional funding, we know we can strengthen our ability to better protect, and nurture, the emotional development and wellbeing of Australia’s youngest children,” Mr Mondo concluded.

A copy of the ACA joint submission to the Productivity Commission can be found [here](#).

ENDS

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Background

The Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) works on behalf of early learning (long day care) service owners and operators to ensure families have an opportunity to access affordable early childhood education and care (ECEC) throughout Australia.

Our national and state bodies work collaboratively with all levels of government, regulatory authorities and other stakeholders with an evidence-based approach, to ensure that families are supported into the future with a sustainable, affordable and viable ECEC sector.

Affordable access to early learning services is a huge priority for many Australian families with young children, as well as those planning to have children.

The benefits of high-quality early learning are now well recognised and acknowledged locally and globally across the education sector, as well as **among families**.

There is a wealth of academic research that demonstrates that 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.

ACA believes that with the right policy and financial frameworks in place, we could ensure that **every child in Australia** has access to high quality, affordable and sustainable early learning (childcare) services, and therefore the **best start in life**.

Australian Childcare Alliance

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