



# Early Childhood Education and Care Portfolio

## 2024 Conference Report

Portfolio Leader: Julia Broad

ICPA (Aust) has taken many opportunities this year to continue to raise the inequities faced by rural and remote families in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector, to shape the services provided to support the education, wellbeing and development of Australia's rural and remote children. 2024 has seen the finalisation of the reviews of ECEC in Australia with the release of the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission (ACCC) Price Inquiry into Childcare final report in January and the final report from the Productivity Commission Inquiry into ECEC delivered to the Federal Government on 30 June. Public release of the report will be within 25 sitting days of that release date to government. At the time of writing, the final report from the Jobs and Skills Australia capacity study on the workforce needs of Australia's Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector has not been made public.

Key issues that have been repeatedly raised in meetings and submissions this year include the need for:

- Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) for 3–4-year-olds
- Changes to the Working Holiday Maker Visa scheme to accommodate home tutors and nannies to be eligible to work for their 88 days for visa extensions.
- A rural and remote In Home Care program that caters specifically for geographically isolated families.
- Long term continuity of funding for rural and remote mobile early learning services.
- Access to the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) for unique rural and remote ECEC programs.
- Flexibility within Family Daycare Guidelines to meet need in small towns.
- Specific rural and remote staff incentives and pay parity to support the staffing of these programs.
- A National Working with Children Check.

Please follow this [link](#) for the ICPA (Aust) submissions.

### **In Home Care (IHC)**

Price Waterhouse Coopers released the final IHC review report in August 2023. The review found IHC partially met its objective but was hampered by workforce shortages, affordability and access issues. It recommended the program is tailored to serve the three cohorts it seeks to serve. As a result of the review, ICPA (Aust) has been contributing to IHC Quality and Safety Project being implemented by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). That project has been through a pilot phase which was supported by a professional development program designed to build awareness, knowledge and capability through eLearning modules, webinars and workshops. While the aim of the project is to create a framework to guide quality and safety of children and educators, ICPA (Aust) has been calling for practicality and no further administrative burden on families and educators in the implementation of this framework. ICPA (Aust) has been invited to attend a workshop with ACECQA and Department of Education staff in September to build on the information that came from the pilot.

### **Working with Children Check (WWCC)**

The response from the Attorney General, the Hon Mark Dreyfus KC MP to ICPA (Aust) requests for a national WWCC was, that while the WWCC is constitutionally a State Government responsibility, the National Office for Child Safety within the Attorney-General's Department is working collectively with states and territories to improve national consistency of WWCC. The reply detailed the work of the Care and Support Economy Taskforce with National Cabinet to establish a national strategy for the care and support economy. The Attorney-General hosted a Ministerial Forum on Child Safety in November 2023 with all state and territory ministers to promote national consistency in WWCC and renew commitment to embed the National Principles for Child Safety Organisations into legislation. The Attorney-General advised that states and



territories have been progressively implementing the National Standards for WWCC and that the Federal Government is fully committed to improving the frameworks that underpin child safety in Australia.

### Pre Budget Submission

The Pre-Budget Submission lodged by ICPA (Aust) once again included Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) for 3-4 year old geographically isolated children and surety of funding for mobile early learning programs. ICPA (Aust)'s advocacy in regard to these topics continues to cite the recommendation from the 2020 Report into Education in Remote and Complex Environments, namely that the Commonwealth implement AIC for 3-4 year olds to support early childhood education and that funding arrangements be modified for mobile early childhood education to provide flexibility and surety of funding for these services.

### Partnerships

ICPA (Aust) has partnered with The Parenthood in:

1. the release of the report *'Choiceless' The plight of parents in accessing regional, rural and remote early learning and care*. which details the barriers to accessing quality ECEC for families across Australia.
2. The development and launch of their Access for Every Child: Regional, Rural and Remote Coalition Joint Statement for Government Action.

ICPA (Aust) has continued to be involved in the Thrive by 5 campaign. Jacqueline Emery from Royal Far West facilitated **Country Kids and Communities**, a virtual event coordinated by Thrive by Five to highlight their call to make ECEC accessible to all children to support their early development and enrich their lives.

Speakers at the event included:

- Minister for Regional Development, The Hon Kristy McBain MP
- Shadow Minister for Regional Development, The Hon Darren Chester MP
- Director, Thrive by Five, Jay Weatherill AO
- CEO of SNAICC, Catherine Liddle
- CEO of Royal Far West, Jacqueline Emery
- CEO of Yarriambiack Shire Council, Tammy Smith

The speakers highlighted how the early learning crisis in rural and remote Australia is playing out in their particular situations. Following the presentation, Minister McBain detailed the funding her government has provided to the ECEC sector so far but then acknowledged the issues and that more needs to be done and that improvements in this sector will have a positive impact on regional economic development. Shadow Minister Chester supported the Minister's comments and acknowledged that rural and remote families deserve flexibility of choice in ECEC services and that blanket approaches are not the answer.

The event was attended by over two hundred families and ECEC stakeholders.

The Australian Government released its Early Years Strategy earlier this year which is a 10 year plan to create the vision that all children in Australia thrive in their early years and that children have the opportunity to reach their full potential when nurtured by empowered and connected families who are supported by strong communities. ICPA (Aust) now awaits implementation of recommendations from the Productivity Commission report to deliver real and meaningful change for our rural and remote families.

Thank you to our Early Childhood Education and Care team of Alana, Ali, Kate and Nikki for your support and guidance as we have continually raised the issues within this portfolio.