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## Early Childhood Portfolio Report

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**Dear Madam President, Distinguished Guests, Fellow State Councillors, Members, Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for allowing me to present the Early Childhood Report for ICPA-NSW at the 2025 Conference.**

The past twelve months has seen ICPA-NSW continue to bring focus to key issues in the Early childhood Portfolio. Central to our issues is a lack of practical access to preschool for families in rural and remote NSW. As many of you will be aware, there has been a necessity for continuous advocacy for access to education for four-year-old preschoolers in identified remote locations where the only preschool four-year-olds could access is Distance Education.

During the past few years, we have had some success with the pop-up pop down model initiated by the NSW Department of Education, utilising existing schools and Distance Education Preschools. These small communities were not beneficiaries within the 100 Preschools announcement, throughout 2024 we continued to ask for this program to be extended to offer two days of preschool for both three- and four-year-olds. We felt we had practical solutions, with available staff at some sites, and a desperate need for this service to allow our youngest learners the opportunity for a strong start to education. We have met with Department representatives on a case by case need to resolve issues and find solutions, however at every turn there have been new challenges.

At the end of 2024, we became aware that where services had been operating successfully, they are now deemed “non-compliant”. Legislative differences between NSW Department of Education and the Early Childhood Regulatory Authority are proving to be significant hurdles. The Local Reform Commission is working to implement the B4Kindy program in these small schools, and although in the early stages of implementation, appear to be the current option for the ongoing lack of preschool access in rural and remote communities. We will continue to work with key stakeholders to influence the model, and advocate for legislative change to find a better solution. We believe each community will be unique and our collective input will better equip those with influence to ensure a better outcome for each community.

ICPA-NSW recognises the significance of school sites to our smaller communities and has actively been advocating for recessed sites to be available for rent to Early Childhood Services offering Mobile Services. Once again, the Education Departments aversion to risk is preventing these assets from being utilized for their original purpose, Education. At a time when we have recognised that rural NSW makes up a significant proportion of our Childcare Desert, it seems both practical and financially viable to utilise facilities already established within communities to accommodate Early Childhood Services. These small communities were not beneficiaries within the 100 Preschools announcement, and most likely won't be in the future.

Can our government feel at ease with simply allowing other organisations, such as community halls and preschools, to carry the risk, or should they consider the greater risk of continued educational disadvantage to our youngest and most vulnerable learners at the most critical stage of development?

Whilst it feels as though we take one step forward and several back in improving access to Early Childhood Services in Rural and Remote NSW, I remain hopeful that the government is now recognising the misalignment between legislation and practical solutions, and we can make real changes that will benefit our rural communities. Early Childhood has a small window, so we need change now to benefit our children while it matters most. The Federal Government has made recent announcements about subsidised care and early childhood education, we all know and understand how vital it is to the future of each child and our society as a whole, but for so many families, there is no service to access. This needs to change, each child matters.

Please feel free to share your concerns, ideas and even successes with me so we can work together to influence change.

Thank you for your attention.

**Kirsty Wilson**  
**Early Childhood Portfolio Leader**