

PORTFOLIO REPORTS - STATE COUNCIL

EARLY CHILDHOOD REPORT

Chelsea Mott – Portfolio Leader, March 2025

ACCESS FOR EVERY CHILD - REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE

In May 2024, the Access for Every Child Coalition launched a joint statement with over 50 organisations, led by The Parenthood urging all governments to implement six key actions to ensure universal access to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) for every regional, rural, and remote child in Australia.

The six key actions:

1. Strong public management for the ECEC system.
2. Supply subsidies for rural and remote providers.
3. Investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.
4. A national workforce strategy, including training for First Nations educators.
5. Improved family day care and in-home care.
6. Interim solutions.

They also called on the public to email their relevant governments to help convince all state and territory governments to back their actions.

EARLY YEARS STRATEGY 2024-2034

The Federal Government released the Early Years Strategy 2024-2034 for all children aged 0 - 5 in Australia in May 2024.

The report outlines a vision to focus on the following four priority areas:

1. Value the early years.
2. Empower parents, caregivers and families.
3. Support and work with communities.
4. Strengthen accountability and coordination.

The Centre for Policy Development has released recommendations from a new report into making the sector more affordable and accessible. It has been recommended that families with a combined income of \$80k per year should be offered three days of daycare for \$30, and disadvantaged families under a combined income of \$80k should receive it for free.

The report argues childcare should be brought into line with other key services such as public education and Medicare to ensure accessibility for all.

The Federal Government is now awaiting a final report from the Productivity Commission into universal childcare.

The report also called for free preschool two days a week once the child turns three, followed by a small fee of \$10-\$15 for subsequent days.

A pay increase for providers was also recommended to cater to the demand that would come with lower pricing.

The 10 recommendations are suggested to take about a decade to implement if accepted and adopted by the government.

The final report was released to the government at the end of May 2024.

COUNTRY KIDS AND COMMUNITIES

An online event '*Country Kids and Communities*' hosted by Thrive by Five in June 2024 called for greater early learning investments in regional and rural Australia.

Guest speakers included Minister for Regional Development Kristy McBain and Shadow Minister Darren Chester, community advocates (Thrive by Five, SNAICC - National Voice for our Children, the Mitchell Institute, and Royal Far West, along with employees in the sector and regional parents.

FEDERAL CONFERENCE MOTIONS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PORTFOLIO

Fourteen motions were carried or deemed covered at the Federal Conference covering the following issues:

- AIC for pre-compulsory
- In-home care
- ECEC staff pay parity
- Universal access to ECEC
- Infrastructure and operational funding of rural and remote ECEC centres
- Mobile early learning
- Working Holiday Maker Visa program

PAY RISE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

A 15 per cent pay rise for early childhood educators and a cap on fee rises were announced in August 2024.

The pay rise will be implemented over two years and will help address a nationwide staffing crisis that has caused waiting times to blow out.

Services whose staff receive the Federal Government funded pay rise will not be able to raise the fees they charge parents by more than 4.4 per cent over the next 12 months.

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION REPORT INTO AUSTRALIA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SYSTEM

The report found that a \$10 per day cap on childcare fees would result in 61,900 more children getting the benefits of early years education and 7,300 more parents entering the workforce.

The Productivity Commission has backed making three days a week of childcare and early learning accessible and affordable to any family who wants it.

Thrive by Five called on the government to guarantee access for all families and introduce a \$10 per day cap on out-of-pocket fees.

The average family with two children in early learning spends 16 per cent of their income on fees.

At the same time, many families struggle to find a place, with 24 per cent of Australia considered a '*childcare desert*', where there are at least three children for every available spot.

Childcare affordability and access challenges have led to Australia having some of the highest rates of women working part-time among comparable countries.

The Productivity Commission recommends the abolition of the activity test, which determines childcare subsidy eligibility based on how much parents work. The test has been found to disadvantage single mothers, First Nations families, and families on low incomes.

The Commission recommended new targets for service quality and an increase in the proportion of children who are developmentally on track.

THE ATTRACTION AND RETENTION PACKAGES FOR REGIONAL CHILD CARE WORKERS PROGRAM

The program provides grants to regional local government authorities to fund initiatives that support bringing in and keeping on early childhood educators.

The grant, available in the October round, offered up to \$250,000. \$781,066 has been allocated to 23 local governments since the grant's inception in 2021.

The Cook Labor Government committed \$1 million over four years in 2021 to support the attraction and retention of early childhood educators in regional areas.

Previous recipients have been:

- The City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder for the Goldfields Professional Development Project, delivered in partnership with the Shire of Coolgardie and the Shire of Leonora \$74,654.70.
- The Shire of Donnybrook Balingup so they can provide housing, support, training opportunities, and travel costs \$25,000.
- The Shire of Denmark to provide housing and travel subsidies for new and existing staff at Gumnuts Occasional Daycare \$25,000.
- The Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley provides subsidised housing and housing allowances \$20,798.05

NEW QUALIFICATION EXEMPTION FOR IN-HOME CARE EDUCATORS

The Federal Government approved an exemption to minimum qualification requirements for eligible in-home care educators working in remote and very remote areas.

This exemption, which came into effect in January 2025 is a permanent part of the in-home care program and recognizes the difficulty in attracting and retaining educators in these areas.

KATANNING EARLY CHILDHOOD HUB

The Shire of Katanning received a total of \$7.3 million to progress the Katanning Early Childhood Hub, to improve access to essential services for families.

The project consists of three integrated buildings: an early learning centre, a family centre, and child health offices.

The Katanning Early Childhood Hub is expected to provide the community with up to 67 long-daycare places, creating 28 jobs during construction and seven full-time positions once the project is complete.

The Hub is one of 24 priority projects under the Early Years Partnership (EYP), which is a collaboration between the State Government, Minderoo Foundation, The Kids Research Institute Australia, and the local community.

The EYP aims to improve the development, health, and learning of children aged 0 - 4 years old across four partnering communities.

THE EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES NATIONAL LAW APPLICATION BILL 2024

The bill is aimed at aligning Western Australia's education and care legislation with the rest of Australia to ensure stronger accountability for service providers and ongoing high-quality education and care services for children.

It comes after all Australian states and territories agreed to develop a National Quality Framework (NQF) in 2012, which introduced a new quality standard to improve education and care across long day care, family day care, kindergarten, and outside school hours care services.

The Bill will support a timelier application of modifications to the NQF, ensuring WA's early childhood and care legislation remains consistent with all Australian jurisdictions.

AUGUSTA CHILDCARE FACILITY

The State Government has committed \$550,000 towards establishing a childcare service in Augusta, with the transformation of a vacant state-owned building into a fit-for-purpose facility.

The project will provide the community with up to 30 childcare places and create between 8-10 local jobs.

Once completed, it is expected the new childcare service will help to attract and retain residents, as well as unlock the local workforce currently restricted by a lack of childcare options in the area.

PRESCHOOL REFORM AGREEMENT (PRA)

More than \$1.2 million in funding is being provided to WA's Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector through the Preschool Reform Agreement (PRA), to develop and maintain quality preschool programs.

The Commonwealth funding will be distributed to the ECEC sector through the Supporting Children in Early Childhood Education and Care WA grants program administered by Child Australia.

In 2023, 16 organisations received over \$1 million in funding through the grant program towards boosting quality and access to kindergarten programs, which benefitted more than 5,700 children across the state.

Under the recent round that closed in August 2024, grants between \$20,000 to \$100,000 were available for organisations in both metropolitan and regional WA to deliver initiatives that develop and maintain quality preschool programs, promote enrolment and regular attendance, and prepare children for school.

Examples of the types of initiatives include providing parent support workshops, purchasing resource materials, and professional development for educators to deliver culturally appropriate programs.

The program is aligned with the PRA's objectives, with a key focus on enhancing preschool participation and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and developmentally vulnerable children.

REMOVAL OF CHILDCARE ACTIVITY TEST

The government has introduced legislation to remove the Childcare Subsidy Activity Test, which determines eligibility for government-subsidised childcare.

The Childcare Subsidy Activity Test will allow 126,000 children from low-income families to access early education and 40,000 parents to re-enter the workforce, injecting \$4.4. billion into the economy.

The Activity Test had been intended to encourage parents to work, but it had limited choices and made it harder for parents, especially single parents, to make an income.

Reforming or removing the Activity Test has been recommended by the Productivity Commission, Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, Business Council of Australia and dozens of other organisations.

ATTRACTION AND RETENTION GRANTS

Ten regional local governments will receive grant funding to attract and retain early childhood educators in regional Western Australia.

This is the fourth and final round of the Attraction and Retention Packages for the Regional Childcare Workers Program.

The funds are used for initiatives including training, relocation costs and travel allowances, as well as setting up traineeships and partnerships with local TAFEs to attract more early childhood workers.

Attraction and Retention Packages for Regional Childcare Workers Program 2025 recipients:

| | |
|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Shire of Boyup Brook | \$25,000 |
| Shire of Perenjori | \$16,985.07 |
| City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder | \$25,000 |
| Shire of Collie | \$25,000 |
| Shire of Esperance | \$49,799.93 |
| Shire of Kent | \$12,000 |
| Shire of Kulin | \$21,215 |
| Shire of Gnowangerup | \$25,000 |
| Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley | \$25,000 |
| Town of Port Hedland | \$25,000 |

EARLY DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING GRANTS

Fourteen Early Childhood Education and Care providers in WA have received funding through the Supporting Children in Early Childhood Education and Care WA grants program, which supports projects that foster early learning and development.

The funding through the Commonwealth and State Government partnership will be distributed to the WA Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector through the second round of the Supporting Children in Early Childhood Education and Care WA grants program administered by Child Australia.

The successful projects align with the PRA's objectives, focusing on improving participation and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and disadvantaged children.

NEW CHILDCARE CENTRE FOR DERBY

The Ngunga Group Women's Aboriginal Corporation has received funding to deliver the first phase of establishing an Early Learning and Family Centre in Derby.

Funding will deliver a project definition plan for the development of the centre, which will provide culturally secure early learning.

The centre is one of 24 priority projects funded through the Early Years Partnership, which is a collaboration between the State Government, Minderoo Foundation and The Kids Research Institute Australia.

The Early Years Partnership aims to improve the development, health and learning outcomes of children aged 0 - 4 years across its partner communities of Derby (including Mowanjum and Pandanus Park), Armadale West, Central Great Southern and Bidadanga.

CHILDCARE EDUCATOR VACANCIES REPORT



Staff vacancies in the Early Childhood Educator sector are down 22 per cent following the government pay increase.

New data from Jobs and Skills Australia shows vacancies in the sector decreased by 22 per cent between December 2023 and December 2024.