



# 2025 Early Childhood Education & Care October Report

Anne Chater

**Anne Chater here – new Federal Councillor to the ECEC portfolio.** This portfolio is a fast moving feast of advocacy groups, government initiatives, private providers, community-run organisations and academics – all working across the broad and complex landscape of early childhood education and care (ECEC).

Some of the Teams meetings I regularly join representing ICPA include those hosted by the **Minderoo Foundation's Thrive by Five initiative**, as well as sessions focused on the development of a **Safety and Quality Framework** led by the Australian Government Department of Education. These conversations are valuable opportunities to ensure the voices of rural, remote and geographically isolated families are represented in national ECEC policy discussions.

At the recent National Conference of Early Childhood Australia ECA in Perth, **Senator the Hon Dr Jess Walsh**, as Minister for Early Childhood Education, delivered a major address reaffirming the government's commitment to universal, quality early childhood education and care across Australia – including in regional and remote areas. Full speech can be found:

<https://ministers.education.gov.au/walsh/early-childhood-australia-national-conference>

Key points from her address included:

- **Foundational importance of early years**

She emphasised that “90 per cent of brain development happens before a child turns five,” and that high-quality early learning with the right supports can “set a child up to succeed in life.”

- **Universal early education & equity**

The Minister reaffirmed that universal early childhood education and care remains a core government priority — “giving every child access to the benefits of quality early learning, no matter where they live.”

- **Safety & quality reforms**

She reiterated the government's focus on strengthening child safety in early learning, noting that there is “no quality without safety.”

- A **\$189 million National Child Safety Package** was announced to support stronger oversight, mandatory safety training, and a nationwide register of early educators.
- She underscored the need for collaboration between the federal government and states/territories in implementing these safety measures.

- **Workforce investment**

Minister Walsh acknowledged the challenges in educator retention and remuneration. She highlighted the recent **15 per cent pay rise** for early childhood educators as a measure to help

retain and attract staff.

She also announced the establishment of a **Workforce Reference Group**, which will include educators to help inform policy development.

- **Affordability & CCS reforms**

The Minister confirmed that changes to the **Child Care Subsidy (CCS)** have already reduced out-of-pocket costs for many families, by approximately **\$7,500** on average.

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She also spoke of the upcoming **“3-Day Guarantee”**, which will offer **72 hours per fortnight** of subsidised early learning to all children (and **100 hours for First Nations children**).

- **Access expansion & BEEF / Community grants**

She reaffirmed the role of the **Building Early Education Fund (BEEF)** in expanding access to quality services in under-served and unserved communities, including regional and remote areas

She also noted that the Community Child Care Fund grants will be extended to **three years**, to help improve longer-term viability of services, particularly in disadvantaged or vulnerable locations.

- **Legacy & vision**

The address framed universal early education as a generational reform — one that requires stable, ongoing investment and partnership across levels of government. The Minister affirmed a vision of a “strong, stable sector” where children, families and educators are all valued.

### **A couple of closing thoughts – A Whole-of-Community Approach**

ICPA branches and members are encouraged to continue engaging with their **state and federal Members of Parliament** to ensure that the realities of delivering early childhood education and care in rural and remote Australia are clearly understood. Grassroots information from families, educators, and communities is essential for ensuring that Ministers and government departments are informed of the challenges on the ground — including staffing shortages, lack of service availability, and the additional costs and logistics faced by remote families.

As per the motions passed at **Federal Conference**, ICPA Federal Councillors will soon travel to **Canberra** to meet with available Ministers and government departments. The strength of ICPA Federal Council’s annual delegation to Canberra — in meeting with Ministers, parliamentarians and departmental officials — stems directly from the dedication of our membership, whose well-considered and rigorously debated motions at Federal Conference ensure that the real issues facing rural and remote families are carried to the highest levels of government.