

23 August, 2021

The Hon. Gladys Berejiklian, MP
Premier of New South Wales
52 Martin Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Premier,

Re: NSW Early Childhood Education Advisory Group

Following statements made at your media conference on Friday, and announcement of the stringent additional controls to reduce transmission of the COVID Delta strain, the NSW Early Childhood Education Advisory Group has serious concerns about conflicting directives by Chief Health Officer Kerry Chant and now yourself, regarding instructions to parents and to our State's 5800+ Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services.

Confusion is now rife across our sector, among our workforce and the families we support. The statements made on Friday are not reflected in the Government's latest Health Orders but were clear enough to create a new level of fear across our sector, about risk of transmission to and between children, staff and the families who interface via our services.

We request that a clear directive from the CHO is reflected in the Public Health Order and supported by funding to enable early education and care services to continue to support families during lockdown and assist the economy to reopen post lockdown.

By contrast to NSW, the recent lockdown in Queensland and the current one in the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria, included clear rules about who can and can't attend early education and care services, limiting access to essential workers, including those working at home, disadvantaged children and those who can't reasonably supervise their children. We request that the same restrictions apply in NSW.

The absence of clear rules, has today seen parents advising services that they will continue to send their children to early education and care, putting enormous pressure on services to manage parents' expectations. The absence of clear rules is also at odds with the NSW Government's intent to restrict spread amongst households and keep the ECE sector safe.

The economy is critically connected to the sustainability of early education. As a recognised group of Peaks and organisations collectively representing thousands of early education and care services across NSW and tasked with providing advice to the Government, we fear that the consequence of not taking the PHO one step further, will result in services across NSW experiencing unsustainable financial and workforce loss. Ensuring safety and viability of services now, preserves the workforce and avoids a predicted high number of educators leaving. Loss of workforce means that the sector will not have the qualified educators needed to meet the early education and care places required that parents will need on the other side of restrictions.

On Friday, over 130 services were closed, and the Sydney Children's Hospital Network is providing medical care to 700 children across NSW, with 223 children infected with COVID between 0-9 years of age. We again request clear advice on NSW Health findings related to health and safety for ECEC services based on the known risks of transmission of the Delta strain of COVID-19, including

transmission by children. This is critical information which shapes how services operate in the current environment.

In addition, we seek clarity on your directive to families to keep their children home from child care in relation to the Family Assistance Law (FAL). The FAL does not provide federally funded services an opportunity to refuse a family access to a service. The mixed messaging is confusing. Could you provide direction on services ability to enact your directive to families and still stay within the bounds of the FAL?

We look forward to your immediate response.

Your sincerely,

Representatives of the NSW Early Childhood Advisory Group

Michele Carnegie, Chief Executive Officer, **Community Early Learning Australia (CELA)**

Melissa Messina, Representative, **Local Government Children's Services**

Jenni Hutchings, Chief Executive Officer, **Big Fat Smile**

Chris Legg, Chief Executive Officer, **KU Children's Services**

Associate Professor Sandy Wong, **Macquarie School of Education**

Pauline O'Kane, Chief Executive Officer, **Network of Community Services**

Professor Marina Papic, **Australian Catholic University**

Meg Mendham, Chief Executive Officer, **Community Connections Solutions Australia (CCSA)**

Andrew Paterson, Chief Executive Officer, **Family Day Care Australia (FDCA)**

Professor Marc de Rosnay, Academic Director, **Early Start, University of Wollongong**

Anita Jovanovski, Chief Executive Officer, **NSW Family Day Care Association Inc.**

Carol A Burgess, NSW State President, **Ealy Childhood Australia (ECA)**

Kim Bertino, State Manager NSW/ACT, **Goodstart Early Learning**

Elizabeth Death, Chief Executive Officer, **Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA)**

Warren Jacobson, Director, **Outside School Hours Council of Australia (OSHCA)**