



# 6 Point Plan for Education & Care

Helping children get a great start

Delivering access to high quality services for families

Paying educators fairly

**APRIL 2022**

A Joint Election Submission by:



Community Child Care Association



Community Early Learning Australia



Early Learning Association Australia

## Acknowledgement of country

Community Child Care Association, Community Early Learning Australia and Early Learning Association Australia acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of this nation and the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work. We recognise their continuing connection to culture, land, water and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

## About Us



### Community Child Care Association

Community Child Care Association (CCC) has been the voice of community owned and managed education and care services across Victoria for 50 years. Our 700+ service members rely on us for professional advice and support, and to keep them up to date with industry standards, best practices and the implementation of government policy. CCC is here to help services transform their vision into practice and we offer membership, quality training and consultancy services.

[www.cccinc.org.au](http://www.cccinc.org.au)



### Community Early Learning Australia

Community Early Learning Australia (CELA) is a not for profit organisation with a focus on amplifying the value of early learning for every child across Australia – representing our members and uniting our sector as a force for quality education and care. Founded over 40 years ago, we represent over 1,600 early education and care services employing 21,000 plus educators. Our national influence is extended through publications and social media which have a circulation of 52,000 per week and our learning and development program which trains over 7,000 educators per year in quality practice and governance.

[www.cela.org.au](http://www.cela.org.au)



### Early Learning Association Australia

Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) is a peak membership association. Our vision is excellence and equity in early childhood education and care. Our diverse membership base includes 630 service providers managing services at over 1,250 locations with more than 15,000 staff caring and educating 70,000 children. Our members are early years management organisations, independent kindergartens, local governments, long day care services, government and independent schools and out of school hours care programs.

[www.elaa.org.au](http://www.elaa.org.au)

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# INTRODUCTION

# Introduction

There is nothing more important than giving our children the best possible start in life.

That's why we have built a plan that delivers access to high quality early education and care for all types of families, close to where they live.

Community Child Care Association, Community Early Learning Australia and Early Learning Association Australia have prepared this joint plan to outline our shared vision for delivering real solutions and results. This is on behalf of our members in long day care, kindergartens, preschools, family day care, occasional care and outside school hours care.

Our members provide higher quality education than many other providers. They invest more into their staff and their communities, often paying staff above award wages and funding professional learning to support staff retention and development.

Our vision is for all children to access high quality education and care, delivered by a qualified and stable workforce.

## Our 6 Point Plan

This is an ambitious plan to deliver:

- high quality education and care for children
- better wages and conditions for educators
- access to high quality education and care for families when they need it, delivered by qualified educators
- opportunities for all parents and carers to work.

This plan outlines the solutions to these problems and foundations for strengthening education and care.

Our plan requires urgent attention from government. It clearly identifies affordable, effective and straight forward solutions to current and emerging challenges.

It is a blueprint for government to deliver enduring results for Australia's children, families and our valuable workforce.

Working in partnership with government ensures the best possible future for children and families.



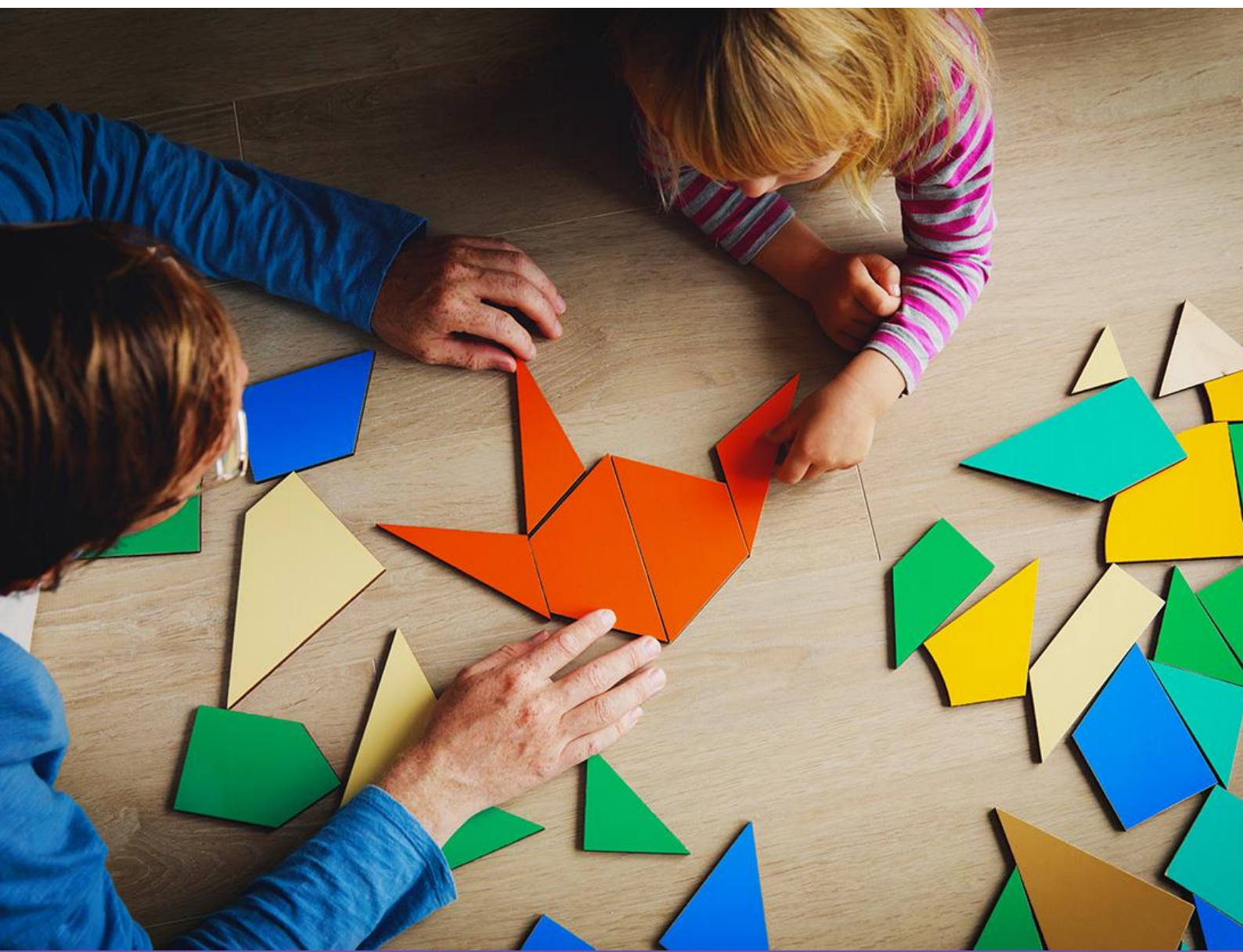
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# 6 POINT PLAN FOR EDUCATION & CARE

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A Joint Election Submission by:



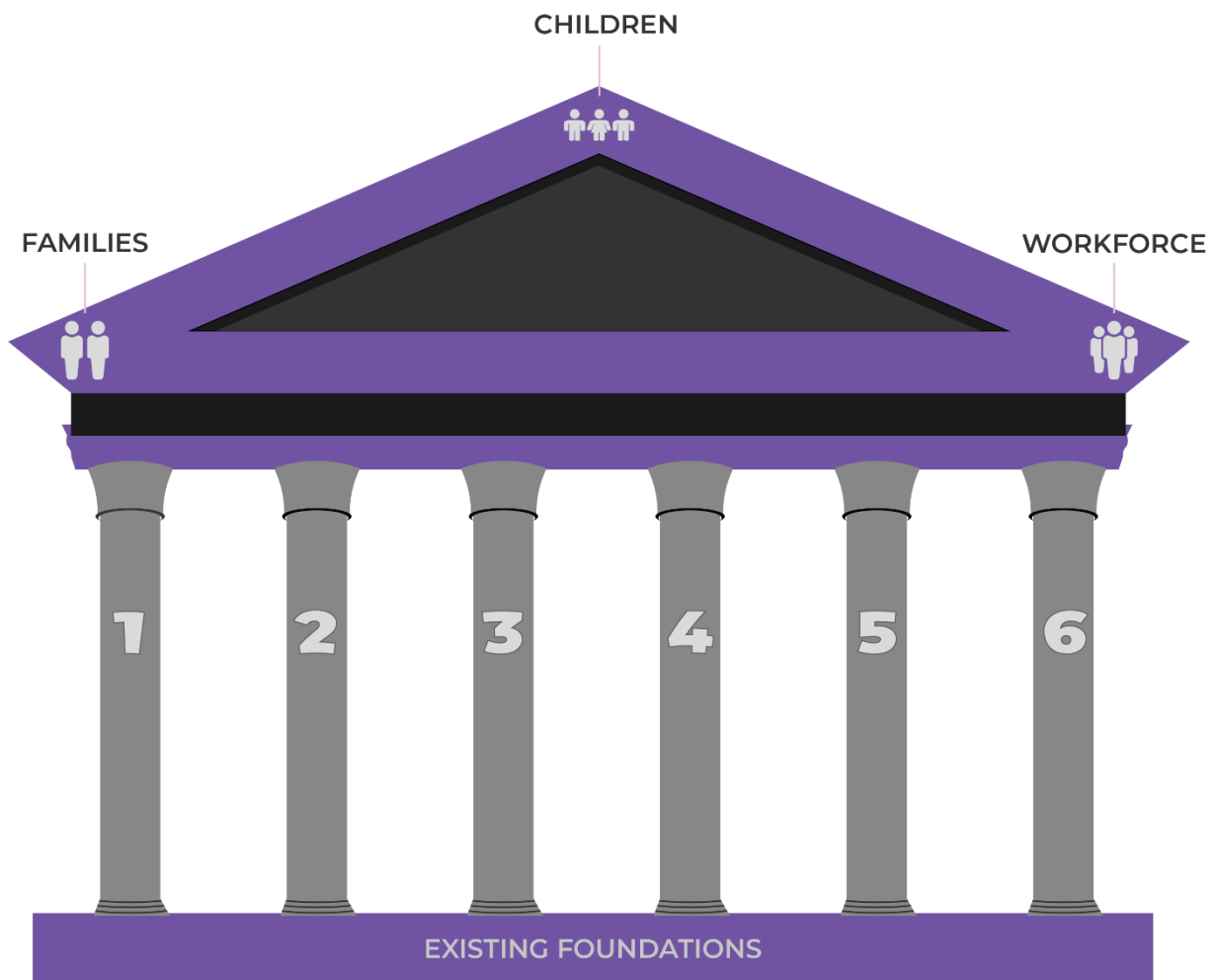
Community Child Care Association



Community Early Learning Australia



Early Learning Association Australia



## OUTCOMES:

- High quality education and care for children
- Better wages and conditions for educators
- Access to high quality education and care for families when they need it, delivered by qualified educators
- Opportunities for all parents and carers to work.



# SOLUTIONS FOR EARLY EDUCATION & CARE

## Solution 1

# Two days of funded early education & care every week for all children from birth to school

Every parent, teacher and childhood expert knows that the first five years of a child's life are critical to building the social, emotional and developmental skills needed to succeed.

In a country as wealthy as Australia, where you live or how much your family earns should not affect your chance to succeed in life – but unfortunately it does. Children who live in rural and remote areas, or who are from poor or disadvantaged households are much more likely to start school behind, and half of these children never catch up.

Access to high quality education and care is proven to help prepare children to start school ready to learn, particularly children who are disadvantaged. However, families are discouraged from accessing early childhood education and care when they need it because the system is fragmented and complex.

## The solution

Fund two days of quality early education and care each week for all children from birth to the start of primary school.

## The benefits

- This is a transformative solution for children and families, delivering immediate benefits as well as a generational improvement in access to early education and care. It would bring Australia in line with leading international models. The benefits are many, and include:
  - » Providing access to early education to all children when they need it: our most vulnerable children have the most to gain, setting them up for the best start in life.
  - » Ensuring that children are better prepared to start school, meaning they are ready to learn from day one and are less likely to fall behind: they develop the foundational cognitive, social and emotional skills that set them up for school and beyond.
  - » Improving parents and carers' access to paid work, especially for women. This boosts the economy by improving workforce participation, productivity and tax revenue. It also takes pressure off families trying to balance carer responsibilities with increasing costs of living.

## Solution 2

# Strengthen Australia's commitment to the inclusion of all children

All Australian children need support to succeed and to give them the best start in life. Some children require more support than others.

Children with disabilities, developmental delays, serious health conditions, trauma and other challenges are less likely to participate in high quality education and care. Yet these children have the most to gain from these services.

Families struggle to access appropriate care and support for children with additional needs due to significant under investment in inclusive services. The cost, quality and availability of these services differ wildly, especially in regional and remote areas.

The Australian Government's Inclusion Support Program supports families and services by delivering vital support that ensures children with additional needs can fully benefit from quality education and care services. There is significant unmet demand for this program, meaning we are missing opportunities to give children the best start in life.

## The solution

Fund unmet demand for the Inclusion Support Program.

Fund Inclusion Agencies to meet ever increasing demand especially in regional and remote areas.

Integrate allied health and other experts with Inclusion Support Program services to optimise children's early learning and development.

## The benefits

- High quality education and care in a child's formative years produces significant cognitive, social, emotional and language benefits.
- High quality education and care services can build the capacity and capability to deliver services for all children in an inclusive and accessible way.
- Our most vulnerable children get the strongest possible start in life, while giving parents support and opportunities to re-join or enter the workforce.

## Solution 3

# Mandate National Quality Standard assessments & ratings at least every 3 years

The National Quality Standard sets the benchmark for early childhood education and care and outside school hours care services.

Families must be able to rely on quality ratings as an accurate guide for the quality of education and care services. However, ratings are only relevant if they are up to date.

More than half of all services have not had quality ratings issued in the past three years. This is unacceptable.

The average time between assessment and rating visits for most services has blown out, stemming from National Partnership Agreement funding cuts in 2018. This means some services are operating below the minimum National Quality Standard but continue to receive government funds.

## The solution

Mandate National Quality Standard assessments and ratings at least every three years.

Remove consistently underperforming service providers from National Registers and revoke government funding.

## The benefits

- Children receiving high quality early learning are far more likely to thrive at school and enjoy lifelong benefits.
- Families have confidence their child is accessing high quality services.
- Governments are confident they fund high quality education and care that pays dividends for children and their families, now and into the future.

## Solution 4

### Build & implement a national industrial instrument for the education & care sector

The education and care sector is facing a major workforce crisis. This crisis has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The majority of the sector faces low average pay and conditions, huge staff turnover and poor quality graduates. This means that services struggle to find the quality staff our children and families need. Without appropriately skilled staff, education and care services have to reduce sessions or close altogether.

Early childhood education and care wages are significantly lower than other occupations. A centre manager earns on average \$1,272 per week, which is well below Australia's average weekly earnings of \$1,460 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

Children's learning is directly impacted by the quality of staff delivering education and care. They cannot form meaningful relationships with staff if there is high turnover.

Significant funding is spent in training staff to work in education and care, but it is being wasted as many do not stay in the sector long, due to poor pay and conditions.

The National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy aims to foster a sustainable and high-quality workforce of teachers and educators. This strategy can be a powerful opportunity for much needed reform. However, the ten year timeline for its implementation is far too slow. Priority actions in the Strategy need to be funded and delivered now.

A skilled workforce and attractive career paths are crucial, given education and care staff play a vital role in shaping Australia's children.

The improvement of wages and conditions must be secured without increasing the cost of care for families.

### The solution

Leverage insights from the Victorian Early Childhood Teachers and Educators Agreement to build, fund and implement a national industrial instrument for teachers and educators.

Fund the National Children's Education & Care Workforce Strategy priority actions now including fast tracking remaining strategies for implementation.

### The benefits

- A national industrial instrument improving pay and conditions is the most effective tool for solving the sector's workforce crisis.
- Education and care will be an attractive career path if staff are fairly compensated.
- Better wages and conditions will transform the sector into one seen as delivering rewarding career opportunities.

## Solution 5

### Implement the National Children's Education & Care Workforce Strategy now

## Solution 6

# Properly fund infrastructure & governance support

### **Lack of infrastructure investment**

There is no coordinated approach to infrastructure investment in community and not for profit education and care. Piecemeal funding and an overheated property market means communities can miss out on quality, affordable education and care services, limiting parents' capacity to engage in paid work.

At the same time, there are services opening up in areas where they are not needed. This impacts the viability of services and wastes government resources.

Community and not for profit services find it difficult to plan for their communities' needs, relying on grants, council support and community fundraising to invest in infrastructure. They try to fill service gaps, particularly in regional and remote areas which are less attractive to for profit providers. However, there is still significant unmet need which could be solved by targeted infrastructure funding.

### **Lack of centralised governance and administrative support**

Many community and not for profit services rely on voluntary committees run by parents to fulfill the governance role in their operations. For many services, the opportunity to volunteer provides excellent 'social glue', helping families get to know other families in the area. The sector is highly regulated and it needs to be because the stakes are high.

It would assist overall provision if not-for-profit community managed services were supported to establish and maintain operations in a way which didn't unreasonably burden parent volunteers. There are already models out there which could be replicated for education and care, such Early Years Managers in Victoria, or sector or regional bodies for schools.

Committees need administrative and governance support, while protecting the local autonomy of these services.

Government support is needed to ensure good governance and infrastructure are delivered across the sector so as voluntary committees' roles are proportionate and reflective of contemporary demands on families' time.

## The solution

Fund infrastructure to establish and sustain community owned and not for profit education and care services where they are needed the most.

Fund new and expand existing governance models to provide governance support for community committees.

## The benefits

- This investment will protect the sustainability of the education and care sector. It will ensure high quality services are accessible and affordable for families, while being guided by local community needs.
- The investment will guarantee community committees and education and care leaders receive the support they need to oversee and deliver high quality services.