

MEDIA RELEASE

New \$3.6 billion investment locks in benefits of historic ECEC reform

16 June 2026

National early education peak body Community Early Learning Australia welcomes the Federal Government's announcement of \$3.6 billion over 18 months to extend the ECEC Worker Retention Payment.

The Federal Government continues its historic reforms in early education and care by investing in measures that are driving significant positive change for children, families and the services that support them.

The first tranche of the Worker Retention Payment has had a powerful impact in record time by investing in the key factor proven to boost quality and safety – a stable qualified and valued workforce.

This unprecedented investment turned around a longstanding workforce crisis by creating a reason for the best of our sector to stay in jobs they love. Over 80 per cent of providers accessed this grant, resulting in a significant drop in staff vacancies and waivers over the past two years.

The extension of the Worker Retention Payment is the next step to lock in the benefits of major reforms in early education and care, ensuring that all children and families can enjoy its full benefits.

Quotes attributed to Community Early Learning Australia CEO Michele Carnegie:

"The Federal Government continues to prioritise the right investments in early education, after decades of neglect.

"We know that it is the people around children that keep them safe.

"Services can now attract and keep the best staff who will deliver the full benefits of early education to children and their families."

Interview opportunity

- CELA's CEO Michele Carnegie is available for interview in Canberra or online.

Media contact: Laura Stevens (0431 380 471).

Background

CELA supports over 1,800 members employing more than 27,000 educators and teachers nationally including community-managed not-for-profit, government and privately owned small providers delivering preschool, long day care, outside school hours care, and family day care services.

CELA negotiated the first national supported bargaining agreement on behalf of not-for-profit early education and care providers. This process was the catalyst for the Federal Government's \$3.6 billion commitment to fund a 15% increase in early childhood wages through the Worker Retention Payment.