



# 2022 ADVOCACY REPORT





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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and live. We respect culture and country. Together we work towards a better future for children and families.



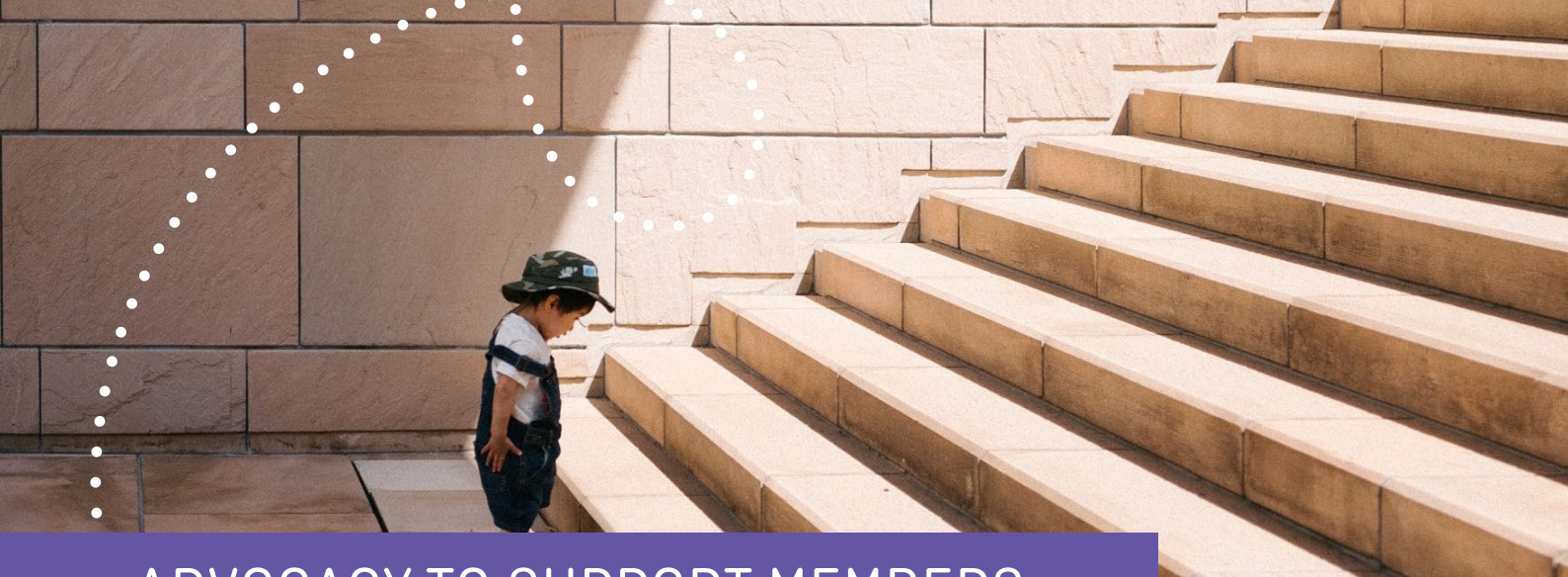
## INTRODUCTION

This year has been extraordinary for advocacy in our sector. Sustained advocacy over several years by Community Early Learning Australia (CELA), alongside other peak bodies and like-minded organisations, has contributed to the record-breaking government funding commitments made in 2022. This support aims to improve outcomes for children, families and the sector over the coming decade.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ The NSW Government announced its Early Years Commitment, representing a tripling of recurrent NSW Government expenditure in early childhood education and care over the next decade - \$15.9b over ten years.
- ▶ The election of a new Federal Government, which had childcare affordability and gender pay equity as two of its key platforms, including an additional annual investment of \$4.7b (58% increase on the median Federal Government expenditure over the past six years) to improve childcare affordability.
- ▶ An announcement by the South Australian Government to hold a Royal Commission into the design of its early childhood education and care system.
- ▶ The Victorian Government announced its Best Start, Best Life reform. The initiative involves the introduction of a universal 30-hour-a-week program in the year before school. It also includes a roll-out of free kindergarten for three-year-olds and the establishment of 50 government-owned childcare services.
- ▶ The Queensland Government announced an investment of \$1b over five years to support all children to participate in a kindergarten program in the year before school.





## ADVOCACY TO SUPPORT MEMBERS

### REPRESENTATION

CELA's influence in the remarkable and positive policy shifts of 2022 is visible through CELA CEO Michele Carnegie's active representation and participation in many groups and events:

- ▶ Australian Government Department of Education Early Childhood Education and Care Reference Group
- ▶ NSW Department of Education Early Childhood Advisory Group
- ▶ NSW Department of Education Early Childhood Advisory Group Data Sub-Group
- ▶ National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) convened by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)
- ▶ NSW Department of Education Early Childhood Advisory Group Preschool Reform Agreement Sub Group
- ▶ NSW Education Standards Authority's Early Childhood Reference Group
- ▶ Co-hosted a pre-election forum on 5 April, with speakers then Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education Amanda Rishworth MP and Greens Senator Mehreen Faruqi. Over 300 attendees joined the session
- ▶ CELA CEO one of 12 leaders invited to Early Childhood Roundtable convened by new Minister for Early Childhood Education and Youth Dr Anne Aly, ahead of the Jobs and Skills Summit in Sydney
- ▶ Post-election meetings with Senators: Fatima Payman, Matt O'Sullivan, Mehreen Faruqi, Barbara Pocock, Marielle Smith, Andrew Bragg
- ▶ Workforce Summits in Melbourne and Canberra, convened by United Workers Union and Early Childhood Australia and attended by 20 peak bodies, unions and large providers of early education and care from across Australia
- ▶ Multiple stakeholder consultations initiated by state, federal governments and the Reserve Bank of Australia.

### WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

- ▶ Pre-Election [6 Point Plan for Education and Care](#), co-authored with Community Child Care Association (CCC) and Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA). The Plan was reported by media outlets [The Sector](#) and [Women's Agenda](#), and led to a meeting with Minister for Early Childhood Education and Youth Anne Aly.
- ▶ NSW Economic Women's Economic Opportunities Review
- ▶ NESA Teacher Accreditation Reform Consultation
- ▶ Jobs and Skills Whitepaper consultation.

### SENATE SUBMISSIONS

- ▶ Joint submission to Work and Care Select Senate Enquiry; testified on workforce shortages.
- ▶ Submission to the Education and Employment Senate Committee, Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Cheaper Child Care) Bill 2022.
- ▶ Submission to the Education and Employment Senate Committee, Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Secure Jobs, Better Pay) Bill 2022.



## ADVOCACY ON THE AGENDA

### APIARY FELLOWSHIP

CELA CEO Michele Carnegie was appointed to the Apiary Fellowship. The purpose of the program is to learn and apply the theory, skills and mindsets of systemic leadership to create change for children in Australia. It is driven by The Front Project, working in partnership with Collaboration for Impact and funded by the Paul Ramsay Foundation.

### COMMUNICATIONS TO MEMBERS

- ▶ CELA's COVID-19 Member News page provided information, contextualised to the early childhood education and care sector, as new policy changes were announced.
- ▶ A member Flood page was created and updated regularly as government policy announcements around support initiatives available were released.
- ▶ Weekly Member News emails were sent to 1,800 members providing relevant policy and practice news and updates.
- ▶ Amplify! Articles were written to inform members, analysing policy and relevant implications for the sector. Articles included a wrap-up of the [Jobs & Skills Summit](#), the [ECEC Workforce Roundtable](#), a description of the [Ontario model](#), which inspired much of the Early Years Commitment and [member case studies](#) around workforce.



# CELA ADVOCACY PILLARS

CELA has five advocacy pillars which guide our work:



ACHIEVING QUALITY  
EARLY EDUCATION



BUILDING A STABLE  
WORKFORCE THAT IS  
NURTURED AND VALUED



ENSURING VIABILITY  
FOR COMMUNITY AND  
SMALL PROVIDERS



IMPROVING ACCESS FOR  
VULNERABLE CHILDREN



CLOSING THE EDUCATIONAL  
GAP FOR RURAL CHILDREN



# 1. ACHIEVING QUALITY EARLY EDUCATION

## ISSUE

High-quality early education and care is critical, yet 12.5% of Approved Services are rated as Working Towards the NQS (ACECQA July 2022 Snapshot). The average number of years between Assessment and Ratings visits has increased since budget cuts in 2018, meaning more than half of services have not had an Assessment and Rating visit in more than three years. As workforce shortages become more acute, the proportion of services with staffing waivers has increased from just above 4% in July 2019 to 9.3% in October 2022 - an outcome which jeopardises quality.

Workforce capacity is one of the key variables impacting quality education and care. Services which have stable teams of educators, with the skills and knowledge to meet children's needs, have a significant impact on learning and development. However, workforce attrition in the sector is quite high compared to other occupations; the COVID-19 pandemic and a tight labour market has exacerbated the problem. Priority action is required to attract new entrants to the sector, and to retain those already working in it.

## OUR ACTIONS AND RESULTS

Our [6 Point Plan for Education and Care](#) called on Government to address the length of time between Assessment and Rating visits. In October, the NSW Government launched its [Ministerial Statement of Expectations](#), which includes a commitment that every early childhood education and care service will be visited by the regulator at least once a year (this may be for Assessment and Rating, compliance or monitoring).

CELA participates on early childhood advisory groups at NSW and Commonwealth levels. This has contributed to Government recognition that barriers to complete qualifications should be minimised. As a result, both levels of Government have offered expanded free training and scholarships for educators to upgrade their qualifications, and to encourage new entrants to the sector.

CELA continues to support quality education outcomes through its learning and development program, offering training in areas of identified need. This year CELA released micro credential in Leadership and another in Neuroscience, with more to come in 2023.





## 2. BUILDING A STABLE WORKFORCE THAT IS NURTURED AND VALUED



### ISSUE

Workforce was a key focus of 2022's advocacy. Workforce shortages are at acute levels. September data from the National Skills Commission show vacancies in education and care reached a new high of over 7,200 places.

### OUR ACTIONS AND RESULTS

Building on CELA's joint report with CCC and ELAA last year, "[Investing in our future: growing the education and care workforce](#)", CELA conducted member workforce pulse surveys in January, June and October 2022. We shared findings with Government via submissions, meetings with Ministers and members via Amplify! articles and social posts.

The Labor Party took addressing gender equity in wage outcomes to the election and won. It now has a mandate to include gender equity as one of the objects of the Fair Work Commission. Ultimately, CELA hopes this will lead to a lift in the Awards for early childhood education and care occupations, which was one of the key recommendations of our 6 Point Plan for Education and Care.

The 2021 Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census was released this year. CELA analysed this data, along with course enrolment and completion, job vacancy information and academic research. The analysis informed CELA's view that improving wages and conditions is the single most important measure that needs to be taken to address workforce shortages. As the major funder of education and care, Government has the key role to play in resolving the crisis.

Early Childhood Australia had a seat at the Jobs and Skills Summit and represented this view. CELA reinforced this view through our submission to the Cheaper Childcare Bill Senate inquiry, the Work and Care Select Senate Inquiry, and our many meetings with Senators and Minister Anne Aly.

### WHAT IS NEXT

There is Government appetite to reinvigorate multi-employer bargaining to lift wages in highly feminised industries such as education and care. CELA is supportive of these opportunities. However, we are concerned they will take too long to implement in the context of the increased demand likely to result from the Cheaper Childcare legislation when implemented in July 2023, and the current retention, recruitment crisis that impacts the sector daily.





### 3. ENSURING VIABILITY FOR COMMUNITY AND SMALL PROVIDERS

#### COVID-19

During early 2022, Omicron impacted services' attendances and viability. CELA engaged with members to measure the impact and using the data, successfully advocated to Minister Tudge for:

- ▶ Unlimited allowable absences
- ▶ Flexibility with waiving the gap fee
- ▶ Broadening the eligibility criteria for services to apply for a Community Child Care Fund grant if they had to close or partially close due to COVID-19.

At the NSW Government level, CELA advocated for free RAT tests to be distributed in early childhood settings. This was eventually successful, helping to ensure transmission was limited and costs of tests did not have to be carried by services, educators or families.

Later, the Public Health Order requiring educators to be vaccinated was lifted, though the risks associated with becoming infected with COVID-19 were (and remain) very serious for many community members. It was a new period in the COVID-19 pandemic where education and care services were to exercise their own judgement around vaccination for their workplaces. CELA negotiated to obtain free HR advice for services and provided templates and resources to assist services to navigate the changes.

#### PRESCHOOL REFORM AGREEMENT AND AFFORDABLE PRESCHOOL

The Affordable Preschool program, part of the NSW Government's Early Years Commitment, delivered an additional \$1.3b over four years to provide fee relief for families with children in preschool. It includes \$64.2m over two years to trial funding support for long day care services to offer three-year-old preschool. This is in addition to the \$840m over four years to deliver on the Preschool Reform Agreement's goals around increasing preschool attendance, particularly in the year before school.

CELA celebrates this level of targeted investment in early education and continues to advise government on implementation that balances government objectives and service operational capacity.

#### FLOODS

Floods devastated parts of NSW this year. After extensive advocacy by CELA and other peak bodies, the NSW Government announced \$9m in grants for education and care services to repair and rebuild facilities damaged by the floods. The Government funded access to mental health support, provided by Converge International. In May, this was extended to early childhood education and care services as a result of our advocacy to ensure early childhood received commensurate support to schools.



## 4. IMPROVING ACCESS FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN



### ISSUE

The 2021 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) was released this year. The results showed a concerning increase in the proportion of children from First Nations populations and children living in disadvantaged areas presenting with developmental vulnerability.

### OUR ACTIONS AND RESULTS

Many CELA members reinforced The AEDC findings via member surveys, our 1800 support line and during training events. They reported an increase in the number of children presenting with trauma and developmental needs. Members informed CELA they are enthusiastic to help children in these situations, but they need support around how best to support children with complex higher needs. There is a need, particularly in some communities, for in-service allied health support.

CELA met with Minister for Early Childhood Education and Youth, Dr Anne Aly to convey that some CELA members find it challenging to raise the funding and secure the grants to meet their community's complex needs. Following the Early Childhood Australia National Conference in October, CELA CEO Michele Carnegie introduced members Narelle Myers from Bermagui Preschool and Amy Shine from Forbes Preschool to Dr Aly. Narelle and Amy spoke of what they have achieved in their own services in relation to supporting vulnerable children. They also highlighted the challenges they still face when it comes to ensuring that children get the education and access to allied health they need.

### WHAT IS NEXT

The NSW Early Years Commitment goes some way to addressing vulnerability with its Brighter Beginnings Program, which includes access to health and development checks for 4-year-olds in NSW preschools. Ideally, such visits should occur sooner. CELA will continue to advocate at the national level to ensure that services in communities with complex health needs are provided with highly skilled staff and allied health support.





## 5. CLOSING THE GAP FOR RURAL CHILDREN

### ISSUE

According to the 2021 Australian Early Development Census, one in five children are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains. Children living in rural, remote and disadvantaged communities are more likely to be vulnerable, and this has lifelong consequences for achievement at school and beyond. Vulnerability is linked to postcode; the children who benefit most from early education and care are the ones most likely to be without access to it.

### OUR ACTIONS AND RESULTS

The current market-based structure has left many communities, particularly those which are rural, remote or disadvantaged, without access to early education and care services. Our 6 Point Plan for Education and Care advocated for Government to take a more planned approach to ensure all children can access education and care, no matter their postcode or family's bank balance.

The NSW Early Years Commitment, announced in June this year, includes a \$5b Childcare and Economic Opportunity Fund. This will help providers to open services in areas where there is a shortage of places and will assist services to remain viable in communities where extra help is needed.

### WHAT IS NEXT

CELA will work with members, government and agencies to improve access to education and care services in communities where they are lacking, with a focus on supporting not-for-profit, community-managed services.



COMMUNITY EARLY  
LEARNING AUSTRALIA

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