

# Broadside



COMMUNITY EARLY  
LEARNING AUSTRALIA

**PLACING THE CHILD AT THE  
CENTRE OF EVERYTHING  
WE DO**

**ELECTION 2019**

# NSW state election 2019 – FOCUS ON ADVOCACY

MICHELE CARNEGIE - CELA CEO

With 90% of brain development occurring in the first five years of life, quality early learning sets everyone's foundations. If Australia fails to invest early, we pay for it later.

Our governments **must** invest in the future of our nation. They **must** invest in upstream prevention of educational ills, not just downstream cures. They **must** invest in **us**.

The sector's voice is loud, [calling on the next government](#) to make a firm commitment to affordable, high quality early learning and campaigning for increased public awareness and understanding of [the benefits of investing in early learning](#). Ahead of this wider sector support, CELA's commitment remains firstly to you as community, not-for-profit, and small providers.

With the NSW and federal elections imminent, we focus our advocacy spotlight on the following areas:

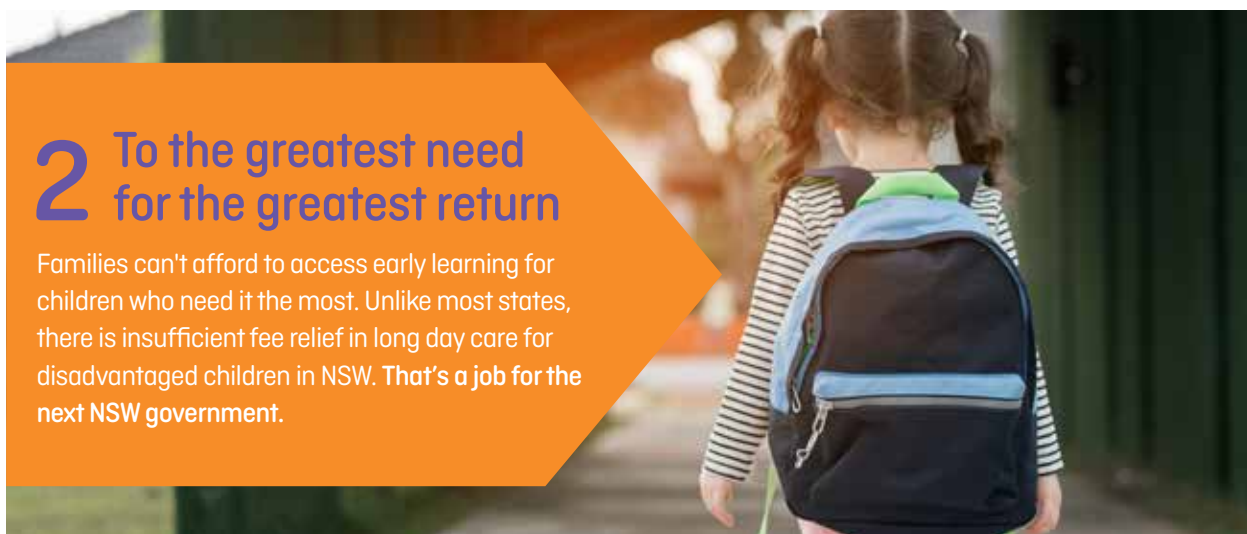
## 1 Children who start behind stay behind


NSW children are being left behind. We have the lowest level of preschool enrolment in Australia. Our children deserve access to affordable, quality preschool, no matter where they live. **That's a job for the next NSW government.**



## 2 To the greatest need for the greatest return

Families can't afford to access early learning for children who need it the most. Unlike most states, there is insufficient fee relief in long day care for disadvantaged children in NSW. **That's a job for the next NSW government.**






### 3 Attract, train, and retain great educators

NSW endorsed a much-needed plan to grow our workforce, but the strategy is sadly short-term and lacks effective funding. The next NSW government has a simple job: extend the 4-year strategy to 10 years, and fund meaningful training support. **That's a job for the next NSW government.**



### 4 Stand up for our National Quality Framework

We have all worked too hard and invested too much to let a Commonwealth political agenda pull the NQF apart. The next NSW government's job is to fight to retain and keep improving our nation's combined commitment to quality for all our children. **That's a job for the next NSW government.**



### 5 We must support our rural workforce to lift educational outcomes for children

A regional workforce needs access to high quality professional learning opportunities, to give educators the expertise they need to turn educational disadvantage around. **That's a job for the next NSW government.**



# 1

## Children who start behind stay behind

NSW children are being left behind. We have the lowest level of preschool enrolment in Australia. Our children deserve access to affordable, quality preschool, no matter where they live. That's a job for the next NSW government.

The majority of our lifelong brain development occurs before we turn five years old. In that time, we learn to communicate, to get along with others, and to be able to control or adapt our behaviour, our emotions, and our thoughts.

These skills are the foundation for everything else we are able to learn and do in life. After the age of five we can make some advances, but it costs more and is less effective than intervening early.

Quality early childhood education is the best chance for all children to make the most of those years of maximum brain development.

### What does that look like?

If you spend two years attending at least two days a week of quality learning-through-play you're more likely to:

- ▶ Make good friendships
- ▶ Pay attention in school
- ▶ Participate in teams
- ▶ Choose healthier food and activities
- ▶ Engage in post-school education and employment
- ▶ Have better literacy and numeracy skills
- ▶ Develop positive adult relationships

NSW children are being left behind. They have the lowest level of preschool enrolment in the country. NSW children deserve these benefits. They deserve to be in classrooms with other children who have had these benefits. It's within the power of the NSW government - no matter who wins - to make it happen.



## What do we need?

NSW children aged three and four must have access to affordable places for early learning, at least two days per week, in long day care or preschools, in the two years before they start school.

## Can we afford it?

The cost of quality early education is far outweighed by its return. The state's total early childhood education investment is \$474.3 million, and to put that in perspective, its total school education investment is more than \$17 billion. That's less than 3% of the total education budget being spent on learning programs for children in the most productive learning years of their lives.

NSW has invested in subsidised places to make it more affordable for 4-year-olds to attend preschool or a long day care program for 15 hours (around two days) a week. In 2018 NSW began a small program of funding for 3-year-olds.

The cost of continuing the 4-year-old universal access and including all 3-year-olds is estimated around \$60 million, of which about half is already committed in the short term. As a percentage of the overall education budget in NSW this additional investment is tiny, yet it will pay dividends almost immediately with benefits flowing straight into school kindergarten classrooms and beyond.

Around 20,000 NSW children, one in five, start school behind their peers every year (AEDC, 2016). Half of these children will stay behind, fail to finish school and transition to employment (Mitchell Institute 2015). Each young person that remains disengaged costs the government over \$400,000 over their lifetime. Ensuring all children start school on track is a prudent investment (Mitchell Institute 2017).

## Why does this matter?

For decades, outcomes for NSW and Australian children have declined against national and international benchmarks. While governments and school education authorities are aware of this deficit, and have invested heavily in classroom support, curriculum development, and teacher training, the evidence of our experience versus other countries suggests there's a much better way to spend our precious education funding.

School students, staff, and communities all stand to benefit exponentially from increased investment in high quality preschool education for at least two days a week, for two years, for every Australian child. This is the model which has seen other nations maintain and improve their international standing while Australia continues to fall behind.

Teachers point to unmanageable classroom behaviour as the single greatest barrier to quality education for all children. On the other hand, primary school teachers say they can identify children who attended quality preschool programs by their ability to 'settle', longer attention spans and more social attitudes.

What research now shows is that the countries that continue to see improved outcomes for children in academics and wellbeing are also the countries which choose to invest in quality preschool programs and make them affordable for all families.

In the highly respected *Lifting Our Game* report, the authors point out:

**“ The benefits of quality early childhood education are widely accepted internationally. The evidence is extensive and consistent. Most comparable countries recognise this, and invest accordingly. In contrast, Australia is below the OECD average in terms of investment in early childhood education and participation in early childhood education. It is not surprising that Australia’s school outcomes are of concern - Australia fails to invest early and pays for it later. ”**

## Who has most to gain?

Evidence is also clear that while all children benefit, children whose families are experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage will gain more benefit than anyone. These children’s life paths are set to struggle without the crucial advantage of education.

Without regular exposure to quality early learning programs, children from disadvantaged homes are likely to start school well behind their peers in every way - socially, physically, emotionally, and in speech, in coordination, in attention span.

Sadly, many children in this situation will struggle to ever catch up with their peers. That ultimately leads to poor outcomes as adults and continues their family’s cycle of disadvantage. They start behind, and they stay behind. A reasonable improvement in early learning funding for all children would give every kindergarten child the best possible chance to focus, make friends, regulate their own behaviour, and learn to learn.

*This is why the next NSW government’s funding must be for all children, for two years before school, and for two days or more a week, in a quality program at preschool or long day care.*

## What is quality?

A decade ago, Australian governments met and were convinced by research that 'quality' needed to be the primary aim of every early years learning service in the country. They agreed to the National Quality Framework (NQF) which has become one of the most successful early childhood education regulation and improvement programs in the world.

Both the research which persuaded Australian governments to create the NQF and substantially more evidence since that time shows the lifetime benefits for preschool children **only appear** when early years programs are high quality and back up by quality schooling.

To maximise returns, the final requirement to give NSW children lifetime benefits is for the government to work closely with the representatives of early childhood education and care in this state.

The sector is ready to work together in order to help NSW make changes to preschool that will last each child a lifetime.

With enough affordable places and sufficient supply of qualified teachers and educators, the next NSW government can be the architect of reforms flowing out to the wider school education sector, the community, and the economy for decades to come.

# 2



## To the greatest need for the greatest return

Families can't afford to access early learning for children who need it the most. Unlike most states, there is insufficient fee relief in long day care for disadvantaged children in NSW. That's a job for the next NSW government

### Greatest need, greatest return

In NSW, unlike Victoria, Queensland and South Australia, families in hardship only receive subsidies for their children to attend community preschools and not for the private or not-for-profit long day care programs which would allow their parents more opportunity to work, study or volunteer.

Children from vulnerable or disadvantaged homes are already at greater risk of missing developmental milestones because of parental illness, family dysfunction, lack of stimulating activities and educational resources, and poor nutrition.

In the first five years of their lives, children's brains develop more and faster than at any other time. In those five years, we all learn to communicate, to get along with others, and to control and adapt our thoughts, emotions and behaviour.

Many children learn these skills in their families, but children from disadvantaged homes are less likely than others to have adults able to help them build foundational skills during the years when their brains most benefit from learning.

Quality early childhood education is the best chance for all children to make the most of those years of maximum brain development.

Sadly, in NSW the families who most need external education and care programs for their children are least able to afford them.

### What must be done?

In Victoria, the new Victorian School Readiness funding program addresses this gap by offering consistent fee subsidies to all families with Health Concession Cards.

The next NSW government needs to follow a program like this one so that families in need have options beyond the limited number of community preschools.

Currently NSW provides a maximum of \$6600 a year for 'equity' families whose children can attend a community preschool, but nothing for long day care service fees.

NSW community preschools are some of the highest quality early childhood education providers in Australia,



but there are only 800 preschools and they usually operate shorter sessions and close during school holidays.

There are also many excellent preschool programs offered in more than 3000 NSW long day care services, but, like preschools, the costs are beyond the reach of disadvantaged families without additional subsidies.

## **Expand initiatives that build trust and improve access**

Some of the state's most extreme hardship is felt by families living in remote areas or without personal or public transport. Some people in those communities experience additional cultural barriers to sending their children to early childhood education. They may have poor English language skills, or damaging personal experiences in education that make them more protective of their children attending external programs.

We need the next NSW Government to fund some very specific initiatives that encourage vulnerable families to send their children to early childhood education to gain the quality learning-through-play which is needed to prepare them for school and life.

Initiatives include funding community outreach workers to support families of young children, transport to ensure accessibility, and innovative models of delivery in certain areas with low participation in early learning. Funding for bus transport has happened to some extent, but more is needed and a long-term commitment to adequate funding will let families make permanent plans for both children and adults.

## **Overcome unfair barriers**

Children with disabilities and children who have been removed from their homes or deemed 'at risk' desperately need stable, supportive early childhood education programs but cannot gain the additional support they need.

One way the next NSW government must help is to engage with the National Disability Insurance Agency, schools, and early learning providers to clear the way for children with disabilities and developmental delays to get the most from their first years of life.

The state government runs the NSW departments of Health and Education. It is in a position to bring those agencies and others together to remove unintended administrative and funding blockages and make it easier for children with disabilities to use their NDIS funds for quality early years programs.

Similarly, the next NSW government can support the state's early childhood educators to access 'capacity building' funding from allied health providers - an absolutely crucial step to ensure families get the sector support they need to navigate the NDIS in the early years.

# 3

## Attract, train, and retain great educators

NSW endorsed a much needed plan to grow our workforce, but the strategy is sadly short-term and lacks effective funding. The next NSW government has a simple job: extend the 4-year strategy to 10 years, and fund meaningful training support. Our children deserve quality, well paid, professionally recognised educators

### Our Children deserve quality well paid professionally recognised educators.

NSW recently completed a four-year Early Childhood Education Workforce Strategy, for the period 2018-2022. The strategy, while welcome, is hampered by two factors:

1. insufficient funding for meaningful professional learning and development initiatives
2. a limited timeframe which discourages long range planning by employers and staff.

The National Productivity Commission, and others, recognise a damagingly high turnover rate among professional early childhood educators. The sector's staff turnover sits around 27% per annum. Any workplace will experience staff turnover, the early childhood education sector suffers from disruptive change too often. After removing parenthood-related causes, which have a greater effect due to the highly feminised workforce, from the figures the turnover remains high. Educators point to low wages as the single greatest cause even though many employers pay above award. Their colleagues in schools, many with similar tertiary qualifications, typically enjoy shorter face-to-face hours and much longer vacation periods.

High turnover leads to increased employment costs per staff member, lost investment in professional learning, constant disruptions to efficient team-building, additional stress for directors and managers seeking qualified staff and a lack of continuity for children in the educators they know and love. The combination of these factors hampers the pursuit of quality and diminishes outcomes for children.

NSW has started well with its four year strategy, but the next NSW government needs to build on that work, and quickly.

## What must be done?

NSW must create a 10 year NSW Early Childhood Education Workforce Strategy (2019-2029) that builds a quality, well-paid, highly satisfied, and professionally recognised early years workforce.

## Why?

The four years currently covered in the NSW strategy is simply not long enough. Research under the National Quality Framework (NQF) shows educators are willing to improve their formal qualifications but tend to take longer to finish a program of study. This can be due to maternity breaks, pressures at work, or needing additional time to improve their personal literacy or language skills.

A four year strategy doesn't provide the confidence employers and educators need that support for learning will be available for the time needed to complete a degree or diploma.

Administratively, four years is also problematic. It typically takes more than a year to review and update a strategy like this, during which time employers and educators will not be able to make longer term plans for aspirations like entering a degree program on a scholarship.

Around Australia and in similar initiatives in NSW, 10 years is seen as a more appropriate period for workforce strategic planning and actions. It removes important policies from the immediacy of a short election cycle and lets small and large service providers make plans for staffing and professional development that will offer stability and growth to their staff.

## **Educators and employers support the need for national workforce strategy, and the next state government must pursue this actively with its colleagues on the COAG Education Council.**

## Why?

Like all other employment sectors, early years education is a mobile workforce and since 2012 this has been supported by national regulations, national laws, and national qualification and employment policies through the NQF.

An important element of the NQF was to give the independent national statutory authority, ACECQA, the power to set qualification requirements and to approve the 'equivalence' of any individual diploma and degree qualifications from any Australian or overseas tertiary education institution.

While this approach has many merits and is largely welcomed by employers and educators, it is yet to iron out all inconsistencies in approved qualifications. In particular, the sector would welcome greater access to primary education degree-qualified teachers whose studies also covered the early years.

People with education degrees that include the early years, but who did not complete their 'prac teaching' in an early childhood setting, are usually not deemed to have equivalent qualifications. This further drains the available pool of degree qualified educators in our sector and we believe the COAG Education Council needs to consider its overall position on consistency in qualifications.

In the 12 months to June 2018, NSW experienced a net loss in population of 21,700 people to interstate migration. Early years educators move to and from NSW for work like any other employee, and a national workforce strategy would not only support individuals and their employers, it would support the state and territory governments, too.

## A general professional development fund for all educators.

### Why?

The current NSW strategy includes steps in this direction, but the funding is tied to single financial years and therefore an unreliable source of support in the sector. The small amounts of money that are on offer in each grant make it difficult for services to develop efficient and effective long-term training plans and to support retention by enabling educators to undertake professional learning and upskilling.

The government sets, supports, and regulates standards for employment, through the NQF and other industrial laws. Past experience shows that great gains can be made in the workforce when the government also independently provides and monitors professional development funding.

Alongside the independent national authority, ACECQA, the next NSW government should use its knowledge of the standards and regulations with which early childhood services are most struggling, and direct high quality sequential learning over a defined timeframe and development activity to those areas via a general training fund.

## Increase and support the employment and learning of Aboriginal educators.

### Why?

Aboriginal educators remain underrepresented in the NSW early childhood education workforce, but are highly desired in many, possibly most, services.

When present and trained as early childhood teachers and educators, Aboriginal people can ensure culturally rich early learning occurs for all children. Their presence inspires confidence in Aboriginal families, and a greater number of Aboriginal educators will undoubtedly lead to higher enrolment rates among Aboriginal children.

While the current strategy takes steps in this direction, more must be done, over a longer period, to reach out to Aboriginal people to enter this workforce and increase their skills.

## Ensure early childhood teaching degree qualifications and experience are recognised regardless of workplace setting or the age of children they work with.

### Why?

As well as raising qualification inconsistencies at COAG level, the next NSW government must work with the sector, the NSW Educational Standards Authority (NESA), ACECQA and the national teacher registration authorities to include more early childhood teaching degree qualifications for accreditation/registration.

It is already difficult for early years services, especially long day care, to compete with the school sector for staff whose degrees cover both early childhood and older children.

A teacher is a teacher, regardless of where they completed their prac teaching. When a qualified teacher, who has an understanding of the early years, is willing to accept lower pay and shorter holidays in order to work with pre-school aged children, the sector must be able to hire them without additional barriers under the approved qualifications list.



# 4

## Stand up for our National Quality Framework (NQF)

We have all worked too hard and invested too much to let a Commonwealth political agenda pull the NQF apart. The next NSW government's job is to fight to retain and keep improving our nation's combined commitment to quality for all our children.

### Continued partnership support for the NQF.

The NSW early childhood sector, and our colleagues in other states and territories, were shocked when the Commonwealth cut NQF funding in 2018-19 and flagged the end of the National Partnership Agreement (NPA) that sustains the NQF.

It was a hidden announcement, tucked under what initially appeared to be extra funding for ACECQA but which, on investigation, turned out to be the bare minimum ACECQA needed to pay its staff and keep the lights on. Why? Because the Commonwealth had, without warning, cut all funding previously provided to the states to be shared with ACECQA.

"The Government is committing an additional \$14.0 million to support the ongoing work of the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) through to 30 June 2020 in overseeing the National Quality Framework. This guarantees ongoing Commonwealth leadership following the completion of the partnership agreement with states and territories." (Ministerial media release, May 8 2018)

### What's the problem?

From the outset of the NPA in 2009, the Commonwealth had delivered a shared national responsibility for the NQF by subsidising the state and territory costs of participation. This approach, common in most NPAs in any portfolio, made it both attractive and affordable for a truly federated system to be implemented.

Without the \$20million and more that the Commonwealth was expected to share among the states each year, we can expect far more dispute and fragmentation of the NQF - which has a direct effect on employers, educators, families, regulators, and ultimately on children.

We have all invested far too much time, money and commitment in the NQF to see it disbanded now.

## What must be done?

The sector expects the next NSW government to commit publicly to the ongoing implementation of the NQF and to use the COAG process to convince the Commonwealth to reinstate a federated approach and shared funding, rather than, as the media release suggests, ongoing Commonwealth leadership being the new order.

## How?

If the Commonwealth will not renew the national partnership, we expect the next state government to commit to adequate funding for implementation and administration out of the NSW budget. Based on the loss from Commonwealth, this means about \$7million from the , to maintain quality standards in early childhood education as it already does for school education [NESA].

## Improve quality with reassessment benchmarks

The NSW government is responsible for regular assessment and ratings of services using the national laws, regulations and quality standards as a guide.

NSW has assessed most services so the focus now needs to shift to quality improvement, especially since one in four services are assessed as working towards the quality standards.

At an operational level, NSW needs to do more to improve its delivery of assessment and ratings and to safeguard the reputation of its ratings by using clear performance benchmarks.

## How?

One important initiative for the next NSW government is to reassess all rated services in a timely way so that the credibility of the ratings system is maintained.

A suggested timeframe is reassessment within 12 months for services assessed as Working Towards, two years for services assessed as Meeting and three years for services assessed as Exceeding.

## Safeguard the research effort

One crucial role that ACECQA and the NQF have played in raising quality in early years learning has been in sourcing and communicating evidence of how quality education works, what it looks like in practice, and how to direct our focus to the areas of greatest benefit to children.

### Why?

This research effort, both from ACECQA researchers and from others working to the NQF principles, has delivered vital improvements and efficiencies in our sector. In less than 10 years we have moved from relying heavily on international studies to sourcing considerable Australian and NSW based evidence for our work.

This means government is able to make wiser choices about funding - for instance, placing much greater emphasis on community-based early learning services when it becomes clear from research that our not-for-profit sector delivers considerably better quality outcomes in every ratings measure.

Without this research effort, governments and the sector are once again flying blind.

## Meet the OECD standard for investment in early childhood education

It is no less than disgraceful that Australia has allowed its investment in early years learning to fall so far behind similar countries in the OECD. It is not at all surprising, given the benefits of early learning to children's foundation skills, that our lack of investment matches our poor performance in every educational outcome from those same countries.

The next NSW government must gift its citizens a permanent improvement in the lives, businesses and communities today's children will build.

### How?

The next NSW Government must lift investment in early learning, along with other levels of Government, so that NSW and Australia match the performance of leading OECD countries by investing at least 1 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in early childhood education.

It could start by following the compelling evidence in the Lifting Our Game report, which it co-funded, to provide affordable places in preschool and long day care for at least two days a week, for two years before school, for every NSW child.



The state's total early childhood education investment is \$474.3 million, and to put that in perspective, its total school education investment is more than \$17billion.

That's less than 3% of the total education budget being spent on learning programs for children in the most productive learning years of their lives.

The cost of continuing the 4-year-old universal access and including all 3-year-olds is estimated around \$60million, of which about half is already committed in the short term. As a percentage of the overall education budget in NSW this is additional investment is tiny, yet it will pay dividends almost immediately.

As the most populous Australian state, NSW has influence at a national level. Combined with the Victorian effort to fund two years of preschool for all children, NSW could lead the way for all other jurisdictions and the Commonwealth to finally grant our children the start they need to succeed in school and in life in modern society.



# 5

## We must support our rural and remote workforce to lift children's outcomes

Attracting and keeping a quality workforce is a challenge across rural and regional Australia. This challenge is multiplied for early learning services in rural and regional Australia – services struggle to attract and retain staff, and to support staff to engage in professional learning due to the challenges of distance, cost and availability of staff to backfill.

### What is the effect on educators?

Educators have limited access to face to face professional learning due to the cost of travel and time out of the workplace. The shortage of casual staff to backfill vacancies, cover illness and offsite training, adds further pressure.

The impact of this on educators is that they are less supported and have less access to leading edge pedagogy and practice than their urban counterparts. They face barriers to meeting accreditation standards. Educators are less able to keep pace with developments in practice that would build their knowledge and capacity, and the experience of children in their care. At the same time, many rural and regional educators are facing complex and challenging family matters that impact children.

These Educators are faced with unacceptable barriers to professional learning, which builds practice, knowledge and capacity, enabling them to enhance the experiences of children in their care. At the same time, many rural and regional children are facing complex and challenging family matters which demand high skills from educators.

Educators in rural and remote services are more likely to have trained remotely, and less likely to have worked in a variety of services so may lack diverse professional experience. They have less opportunity to develop and learn new skills, more limited networks and are more likely to experience burnout.

### Impact on children and quality early education

Regional and remote children start school far behind their city counterparts – they are more likely to be developmentally vulnerable than children from metropolitan areas. Nearly one in two children from remote

communities are developmentally vulnerable compared to around one in five across Australia. [reference Lifting Our Game Report]

This early disadvantage continues throughout children's schooling and beyond. Rural and remote children are far more likely to be absent from school regularly – around forty percent of NSW government primary children in remote areas miss a month of school per year. [Report on Government Services 2019, Table 4A.24]

Regional and remote children are less likely to complete school, and to transition on to further study or work. Only 55 percent of rural and regional young people across Australia are fully engaged in work or study at age 24 [Mitchell Institute, Education Opportunity 2015, p.71].

The key to turning these statistics around is ensuring all learners have access to high quality early learning. We need to address disadvantage before children arrive at school, and we need a highly trained workforce to do this.

## What is the solution?

Educators in regional and remote communities need additional training to meet their communities' needs. The recent inquiry *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* confirmed how crucial early intervention is to meet those children's needs. Quality early education, delivered by educators who can continually develop and refine their practice, is a vital, and efficient, way to deliver early intervention.

We need a rural and regional workforce strategy with explicit focus on actions to attract, retain and continually develop the educator and teaching workforce in non-urban areas. This includes committing funding for access to in-person professional learning, learning networks and release time, similar to the consideration given to school teachers in the same areas.

## CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

Contact

Michele Carnegie

Chief Executive Officer

Community Early Learning Australia

p: 1800 157 818 e: [MicheleCarnegie@cela.org.au](mailto:MicheleCarnegie@cela.org.au)



**Office and Postal Address**

Addison Road Community Centre, Building 21,  
142 Addison Road, Marrickville NSW 2204

**Phone** (02) 8922 6444

**Fax** (02) 8922 6445

**Email** [info@cela.org.au](mailto:info@cela.org.au)

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

**Facebook** [www.facebook.com/communityearlylearningaustralia](http://www.facebook.com/communityearlylearningaustralia)

**Twitter** @celaust

**ABN** 81 174 903 921



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