



Early Childhood Education and Care Policy Statement

Background

Access to quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services promotes children's cognitive and socio-emotional development, laying the foundation for academic success and fostering important life skills such as communication, problem-solving, and collaboration. It also supports working parents by enabling them to pursue employment or education opportunities, thereby enhancing workforce participation and economic productivity.

Children and families living in rural, regional and remote areas of Australia experience more limited access to a range of quality ECEC services relative to those living in metropolitan centres, and in some instances, have no access at all.

Issues

The primary intervention by the Federal Government in ECEC markets and services, through the demand side Child Care Subsidy, while effective in many metropolitan situations, is a blunt instrument that hasn't delivered outcomes for smaller communities or those with complex needs.

Policy Position

- The Federal Government should work more closely with State and Territory governments to manage, monitor, regulate, intervene in and shape the ECEC system to meet the objective of every child having access to quality services.
- The Federal Government should offer a mix of supply-side options in partnership with the states and territories to better incentivise service provision in regional, rural and remote areas. This could include subsidies to services on a 'per child' basis, and block funding such as grants or payments for capital or operating expenses.
- The Federal Government should develop a workforce strategy tailored to regional, rural and remote areas as an essential safeguard for the early childhood sector - which is waning in these locations - and to facilitate its growth. Initiatives within this strategy could include wage subsidies, professional development, relocation incentives, and professional support and training.
- The Federal Government should develop more flexible policy options and market interventions to support the provision and accessibility of family day-care, in-home care and other care options, as models of service delivery more likely to prove sustainable in regional, rural and remote locations where a centre would not be viable.

Adopted by NFF Members' Council on the 16th of May 2024.