



Media Release

Staffing and skills crisis looms for Australian early education and care

25 November, 2021

A recent study by three leading education and care peak bodies has revealed that Australian education and care services reported over 4,500 vacancies had been advertised in the first six months of 2021. Nearly half of all job vacancies in education and care settings remained unfilled in early 2021. Poor pay and conditions, and lack of qualified applicants were key reasons for these shortages.

Over half of all services have made changes to service delivery to respond to the staff shortages – in addition to reducing quality by dropping back to ‘at ratio’ delivery, and staff working additional hours.

The three key community sector education and care peak bodies – Community Early Learning Australia (CELA), Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) and Community Child Care (CCC) – have released a new report, *Investing in our future: Growing the education and care workforce* which reinforces the need for urgent action to address workforce issues in education and care services.

The report, based on a survey of members representing over 3300 sites, raises concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on workforce retention, and numerous challenges faced by high quality education and care services supporting parents and carers as they return to the workplace.

The report reveals that half of all services have experienced greater staff turnover since COVID-19 commenced – a situation made worse by a lack of casuals and staff leaving the sector. It also warns that national demand for educators is expected to increase by 11% and for teachers by 17% by 2025 which is well above the national projected employment growth of 7.8% for all occupations for the same period. Victoria alone requires 4000 additional educators and 2000 new teachers by 2029.

“We know COVID-19 has impacted the sector greatly – there is increased exhaustion on top of the need to test and isolate which has led to increasing shortages in an already depleted workforce. Without suitable government intervention, we will soon see the result of a competing labour market, with increased staffing costs passed on in higher fees for parents.” said Ms Michele Carnegie, CELA CEO.

“We were concerned to discover that children’s services have been forced to sacrifice quality or limit their enrolments to respond to chronic staff shortages. Around one in five children’s services had closed a room or the entire service at least once a term. Right now, some children aren’t receiving the support they need. This causes their health and development to suffer.” said Ms Julie Price, CCC Executive Director.

The report highlights that change is possible. The recently agreed Victorian agreement for kindergartens, the Victorian Early Childhood Teacher and Educators Agreement (VECTEA) provides



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early years teachers with a comparable salary and conditions to school teachers. This has been possible with financial support from the Victorian Government. The report calls for the introduction of a range of funded strategies across the country including:

- Scholarships and financial incentives
- Commitment to and funding pay and conditions that secures and retains educators and teachers
- Supporting improvements in the quality of training
- Prioritising early childhood for skilled migration

The report notes that national action is needed to increase the pool of staff across the country including a commitment to funding the key strategies recommended in the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) Workforce Strategy.

“We know there is good practice happening in places but this needs to be scaled across Australia, and funded. We know we will need tens of thousands of additional staff across our sector nationally. We can't keep on sourcing staff from the same limited labour pool – we need to train, develop and grow a new generation of well-paid professionals. We can also draw on skilled overseas staff to fill short term gaps,” said Mr David Worland, ELAA CEO.

For more information or to arrange an interview contact James Gardener 0413 483 182.

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ELAA improves the lives of Australian families and children by supporting early childhood education and care providers that deliver quality, play-based education and care in their communities. Our vision is excellence and equity in early childhood education and care. www.elaa.org.au

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. www.cela.org.au

Community Child Care Association (CCC) has been the voice of community owned and managed education and care services across Victoria for 50 years. www.cccinc.org.au