

Y Australia Policy Statement

Early Childhood Education and Care

The Y (formerly the 'YMCA') in Australia is a social enterprise, operating in more than 650 communities, with 11,500 employees with over 16 million visits to our programs and facilities over the past year.

Our global YMCA movement reaches 65 million people in over 120 countries, in every continent.

The Y purpose is to empower children, young people and communities Australia-wide to build a just, sustainable, equitable and inclusive world, where every person can thrive in body, mind and spirit.

Across Australia, the Y offers a wide range of programs and services that support children and young people across their life cycle.

This Policy Statement sets out the Y's vision for Early Childhood Education and Care in Australia.

1. PUTTING CHILD SAFETY FIRST

There can be nothing more important in our early childhood education and care settings than the safety of all children in our care. We need a sector that puts child safety first by:

- a) Ensuring all providers have workplace culture and practices in place that ensure children are safe and that our staff are appropriately trained.
- b) Developing a national child safety accredited training framework.
- c) Adopting national legislation to put in place the ten national child safe standards of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*.
- d) Establishing a national Working with Children Checks system.
- e) Harmonising and strengthening Australian mandated reporting processes and reportable conduct schemes.

2. ACCESS AND INCLUSION IS CRITICAL

We support a universal early childhood education and care that enables all children to flourish. If all Australian children and families are to be given the educational, social and economic opportunities of Early Childhood Education and Care, regardless of location, culture, identity or language, then we need services that:

- a) Can be accessed seamlessly by families in a parent friendly environment that builds a strong sense of belonging and identity.
- b) Enable improved inclusion and diversity in early childhood education and care settings.

- c) Are culturally sensitive and actively encourage First Nations identity, history, spirituality and kinship.
- d) Provide a resource rich environment that bring together all government services required for each child to thrive.

3. FUNDING FOR BETTER OUTCOMES

Early Childhood Education and Care needs better funding.

Critical improvements cannot be achieved without additional, and sustained funding. Our staff are central to of service quality, access and inclusion but workforce shortages are a major challenge.

Funding to the sector must recognise:

- a) That increased wages are needed to attract and retain staff.
- b) The value of investing in workforce training and development.
- c) That passing on of increased costs to providers or to parents will be detrimental to access and inclusion to services.
- d) The need to consult closely with service providers regarding specific funding reform proposals.
- e) The value of longer-term funding cycles to retain quality talent, maintain or improve physical learning spaces and provide consistency of care.

4. SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

We need an early childhood education and care sector that supports children and families by enabling:

- a) Evidence based practices that provide high-quality early childhood education and care ensuring our children have the fundamental skills and the emotional and social readiness required for a rapidly changing future.
- b) Safe and inclusive Early Learning Centres (ELC), kindergartens and Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) spaces that support a child's learning journey.
- c) The opportunity for families to fully participate in their communities and the workforce.
- d) Active and meaningful engagement with children and their families during early childhood education and care systems and policy design.

5. SUPPORTING A QUALITY CARE WORKFORCE

We need a professional workforce to provide the quality care children and families deserve by ensuring:

- a) We have highly trained and skilled staff supported by a funded workforce strategy and high-quality professional development.
- b) Workforce strategies that address critical staff shortages, create secure jobs and provide a pipeline of future workers.
- c) Recognition of the importance of the Early Childhood Education and Care workforce to Australia's productivity.
- d) Longer term funding cycles are encouraged to support secure employment in the sector.

6. THE IMPORTANCE OF NOT FOR PROFIT PROVIDERS

Like other not for profit providers, the Y's Early Childhood Education and Care settings are in communities that we contribute to, and actively support. As a not for profit provider, it is in our DNA to invest back into the communities we serve. Government Policy must:

- a) Recognise and protect the important role for not for profit providers in the sector and community.
- b) Ensure changes in policy, financial and regulatory settings for Early Childhood Education and Care don't hinder, and in fact support, the capacity of not for profit providers to provide other critical services to communities, particularly those in need.

7. REGULATING FOR BETTER EDUCATION AND CARE

Education and Care Services National Regulations and National Quality Standards around the country provide critical legal safeguards for Early Childhood Education and Care, however they can be improved by:

- a) Supporting whole of government approaches that ensure continuity and smooth transitions for children as they move between different early childhood education and care settings.
- b) Providing different assessment tools and support for different risk profiles and service contexts such as OSHC and Early Learning Centres .
- c) Reviewing inconsistencies with how staff ratios and qualifications are being regulated between the States and Territories in Australia, especially where areas like ratios and educator qualifications are not consistent.
- d) Supporting greater consistency between regulators in the application of the National Quality Standards.