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MEDIA RELEASE

Families turned away from childcare because of critical staff shortages: Australian Childcare Alliance reports new survey data

The Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) today released new survey data, revealing early learning (childcare) centres throughout Australia are struggling with such severe workforce shortages they have been left with no choice but to cap enrolments.

The ongoing staffing crisis across the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector has been reflected in recent operational data provided by ACA's members in a national survey.

Conducted in two tranches, the survey showed the majority of ECEC services are being forced to cap enrolments as they simply don't have enough staff to meet the legal ratio requirements of educators to children.

Across a single week in February 2023, more than two thirds of the 627 centres surveyed confirmed enrolments that week had been capped, which equated to a total of 16,300 places cut off from Australian families.

A second survey of 442 centres across a one-week period in May 2023, revealed that — again — more than half had been forced to cap enrolments due to the ongoing workforce shortages.

ACA President, Paul Mondo, said the shortage of qualified early childhood educators and teachers is the single most pressing issue facing Australia's early learning sector.

"Right now, we urgently need at least 10,000 well-trained, competent early childhood educators and teachers to fill vacancies," Mr Mondo said.

"We simply do not have enough people to meet the demand for early learning and care, whilst also remaining compliant with the educator-ratios put in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and staff alike.

"To attract and retain the educators we urgently need, we are calling for a significant investment from the Australian Government to increase wages and attract more workers into the sector."

The Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) supports the first ever application for a supported bargaining authorisation which was lodged on 6 June, which will enable a group of ACA members, the United Workers Union and Federal Government to work together in negotiations for improving wages for the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector.

Director of Glen Dhu Children's Services in Tasmania, Mel Reid-Prewer, said learning outcomes for children are at risk due to the shortage of experienced and qualified educators available across the sector.

"Capping enrolments is not a decision that's ever made lightly, and it's not something anyone would do if they had not absolutely exhausted every other option they can think of. This is a last resort," Ms Reid-Prewer said.

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“Centres are desperate to be able to provide a vital service to children and families and keep their businesses viable. They’re very torn ethically by having to do this, to cut off enrolments and opening hours, early collection – but we have to prioritise quality over quantity. It’s incredibly challenging.”

As the peak body for early learning services, with ACA members’ educators caring for more than 360,000 families across Australia, ACA has consistently advocated for additional government support to help attract and retain more early learning educators.

“Early childhood education and care is essential to ensure Australian children get the best start in life, and that will only be possible when we significantly strengthen the ECEC workforce” Mr Mondo said.

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About the Australian Childcare Alliance

The Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) works on behalf of early learning (long day care) service owners and operators to ensure families have an opportunity to access affordable early childhood education and care (ECEC) throughout Australia. We represent over 2,500 members which equate to over 4,500 early learning services across the country, caring for the children from over 360,000 families.

Our national and state bodies work collaboratively with all levels of government, regulatory authorities and other stakeholders with an evidence-based approach, to ensure that families are supported into the future with a sustainable, affordable and viable ECEC sector.

ACA believes that with the right policy and financial frameworks in place, we could ensure that every child in Australia has access to high quality, affordable and sustainable early learning (childcare) services, and therefore the **best start in life**.

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