

2024 Queensland State Election

Introduction

Our vision is to ensure every child in Queensland has access to affordable high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) within a sustainable sector. We believe in a system that encourages inclusivity, promotes the well-being of children, and supports the workforce in delivering best-practice ECEC.

The policies in this Election Manifesto are based on lived experience and have been carefully curated to represent over 950 members geographically located throughout Queensland. Our members employ approximately 17,500 Early Childhood Educators/Teachers, who educate and care for around 200,100 children of 263,800 Queensland parents.

This 2024 Queensland State Election Manifesto builds on the advocacy activities we have been undertaking throughout 2024. We continue to inform all sides and levels of politics, on the lessons, needs and policy insights we believe will create greater, holistic systems and practices that support children and the people who support children.

Unprecedented workforce shortages have been and continue to be the greatest concern within the sector and a common theme felt across the state. We acknowledge the significant investment, and the initiatives aimed at remedying workforce shortages and look forward to feeling the full effect of these programs in 2025 and beyond.

We calculate through the efforts of such programs, that by the end of 2025, the non-aligned long-day care sector will have an additional, fully qualified 46 Early Childhood Teachers. This, of course, does not account for ECEC students already in the tertiary education system.

The greater the workforce, in both raw numbers and their knowledge and skill attributes, the greater the opportunity for healthy child development. We advocate for a system that supports the workforce with strategies that respond to the learning and behavioural needs and promote the child's best physical, mental and social well-being.

Our leading policy pillar is safeguarding children's well-being and universal access and equipping the workforce to achieve this. We believe there is still more to uncover, concerning workforce sustainability which forms our second policy pillar.

The Australian Childcare Alliance Queensland looks forward to working with the parties and the candidates to see an embedding of these policies, that fully commit to children, families and the early childhood sector.



Majella Fitzsimmons
President

Summary

The Australian Childcare Alliance Queensland asks the State Government to:

1. Offer universal access to three-year-old kindergarten with 15 hours of fee relief to families and increase four-year-old kindergarten to 30 hours.
2. Offer early intervention professional development programs in all ECEC settings, including improved partnerships between health and the long-day care sector.
3. Establish a Queensland state-based industry agreement and skilled migration program for ECEC workers.
4. Embed infrastructure policies that prevent concentrated clusters of ECEC services.
5. Deliver an ECEC Summit to mobilise innovative, whole-of-government responses to federal reviews, including those of the Productivity Commission, Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, and the Inclusion Support Program.

2024 Queensland State Election

Children's Well-Being and Universal Access

Queensland has achieved enormous success with the model and the delivery of Free Kindy in 2024. The model's success lies in its inclusivity of all Queensland families, not being tied to means or income testing, and the collective use of the ECEC market to support kindergarten participation in every pocket of Queensland.

The participation target set by the Government, for all eligible children is 95 per cent in 2023/24 with an efficiency measure of government cost per child at an estimated \$5,260.

This investment ensures quality and qualified early childhood teachers deliver high-quality play-based education, supports providers in delivering extracurricular activities through the Funding Essentials, and strengthens efforts to improve children's transition to school, including early intervention.

The delivery of universal access to four-year-old kindergarten is likely to achieve or exceed its set participation target and we await the effectiveness measures pertaining to the proportion of children developmentally on track on four or more (of the five) Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) domains in future years.

Access to a high-quality kindergarten program is one of the few proven strategies for lifting outcomes for all children, and evidence suggests that two years has more impact than one, especially for the children most likely to be developmentally vulnerable¹.

The delivery of Free Kindy has seen kindergarten enrolments in rural and remote Queensland increase exponentially. A centre in Mareeba, North Queensland, had one kindergarten room with 22 enrolled children per day in 2023. The enrolment doubled with the delivery of Free Kindy, with 44 children attending per day in 2024 and 66 children enrolled in kindergarten in 2025.

Two hours east of Mount Isa in Julia Creek, two children enrolled in kindergarten in 2023. The centre now has 13 children enrolled in 2024. Similarly, a Townsville centre had 24 children attending two-to-three days a week and upon receiving funding, increased their days of enrolment to four to five days a week with families returning to work for those extra days.

Three-year-old kindergarten is offered in most OECD15 countries and has been introduced in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia. Queensland has achieved success in the delivery of Free Kindy and can double the gains with the delivery of an additional year.

¹ Two years are better than one. Kindergarten programs in Queensland: Mitchell Institute 2016.

The Australian Childcare Alliance Queensland asks the State Government to:

1. Provide 30 hours per week of free kindergarten for all 4-year-olds, and 15 hours per week of free 3-year-old kindergarten from 1 January 2025/26 delivered by a suitably qualified Early Childhood teacher, removing the cost barrier to participation, relieving cost of living pressures for Queensland families, improving educational outcomes, and supporting labour market participation.

The scaffold to children's well-being in early education settings is invariably through the workforce and their knowledge and capacity to support healthy behaviours and to provide an environment that fully encourages inclusivity, belonging and well-being.

In early 2024, 70.3 per cent of our member services reported a need for primary prevention help. This included additional training around behavioural management, socio-emotional support, and further training to support children with additional needs.

The Free Kindy program provides the optimal opportunity for Queensland to identify how much of an impact the early childhood setting has in the introduction of school readiness and primary prevention work.

Despite the sector's base level of knowledge on developmental milestones, there is a disconnect and an additional need to fill the primary prevention gaps the sector is feeling to truly support children.

The Australian Childcare Alliance Queensland asks the State Government to:

2. Offer early intervention programs for all children, in all ECEC settings (such as the non-aligned long day care centres) as a strategy to identify and address diverse learning and behavioural needs.

This includes a multi-pronged approach that:

- a. Strengthens the knowledge of early childhood educators through professional development to identify and address learning and behavioural difficulties in children; and
- b. Includes improved partnerships with multidisciplinary allied and clinical health teams that work with early education providers to address concerns with children and families.

Workforce Sustainability

Australia has experienced unprecedented workforce shortages in the ECEC sector. Advocating for commitment to improve conditions for all ECEC workers, including increased funded wages and better professional development opportunities has been led by our national Australian Childcare Alliance team.

The Queensland Government's \$33 million commitment to address workforce shortages is crucial for retaining and attracting more people into ECEC. Additional workforce measures, not yet explored, include those relevant to migrant workers in ECEC, including the establishment of a state-based industry agreement and skilled migration programs.

The Australian Childcare Alliance Queensland asks the State Government to:

3. Establish a Queensland state-based industry agreement and skilled migration program for ECEC workers.

In the 2024 second quarter, the Australian Government's Department of Education reported that the growth in the number of ECEC providers is exceeding the growth in attendance and need by families.

Advertising the oversupply of ECEC and its impact on the workforce has been high on our agenda and we have written far and wide in 2024, advocating for policies that recognise the impact of ECEC oversupply.

The purpose of such policies is not to inhibit new centres, but to prevent obstructing existing services' ability to access staff, for services to be able to operate at the highest child-to-educator ratio and to prevent oversupply in areas where the State needs services elsewhere.

The Australian Childcare Alliance Queensland asks the State Government to:

4. Introduce policies that prevent concentrated clusters of EC services, such as the introduction of Development Approval mandated needs assessments which would require the developer to pay the Government to undertake demographic mapping that applies strategic thinking that represents proximity boundaries to other EC providers.

Working Together

The reviews by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and the Productivity Commission should see the landscape and delivery of early education in Australia change.

We are advocating for a collaborative approach to address the above-mentioned reviews, due for release before the Queensland State Election earmarked for October. We propose that the Queensland Government holds an ECEC Summit to mobilise innovative whole-of-government responses that impact the Birth to Five-year-olds, and the sector that supports them. We ask that there is considerable conversation and healthy debate before recommendations are passed down or signed off by Queensland.

The Australian Childcare Alliance Queensland asks the State Government to:

5. Deliver an ECEC Summit that broadens the thinking, commitment and contribution of relevant government agencies and key organisations and responds to the Productivity Commission and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission reviews together.

-END-