



## HOW FAMILIES EXPERIENCE ECEC

**The COVID-19 pandemic has affected Australian families in many ways, including children's participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC).**

Early childhood education has been essential for maintaining education and care for children throughout the pandemic and as we head into economic recovery. To understand how families experienced ECEC during this time, The Front Project conducted an independent survey of over 1000 parents and carers who have been impacted differently by COVID-19.

### Key findings

- **Almost all families think ECEC is important – 97% say it is important and 81% say it is very important.**
- **Parents and carers who are looking for jobs due to COVID-19 value ECEC the most.**
- **ECEC impacts everyday spending – from grocery shopping and socialising to decisions about work and where to live.**
- **The most valued aspect of ECEC is that it provides education and development for children.**

The Front Project asked over 1000 parents and carers of young children about their experiences with early childhood education and care (ECEC) and what has changed during COVID-19.

### How can we improve ECEC experiences for families?

All Australian families want to be able to rely on their local early learning centres to support their children's learning and development and enable them to work. To deliver enough high quality services for families that are also affordable, we recommend Government updates funding to ECEC at the conclusion of the current transitional arrangement to:

- make ECEC more affordable
- prioritise support for vulnerable children
- ensure our ECEC sector is sustainable and high-quality.

These changes will assist centres to continue providing a stable environment for children as parents return to work; and support the ECEC sector to be responsive and flexible to changing demands after COVID-19. Read more in [The Front Project's recommendation for ECEC funding](#).

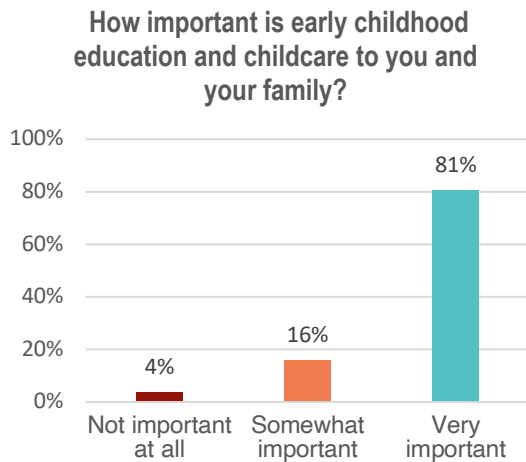


## How do families value ECEC?

ECEC has been essential for families to maintain stable learning for their children and continue working throughout COVID-19. Almost all of the parents and carers surveyed (97%) said ECEC is important to them.

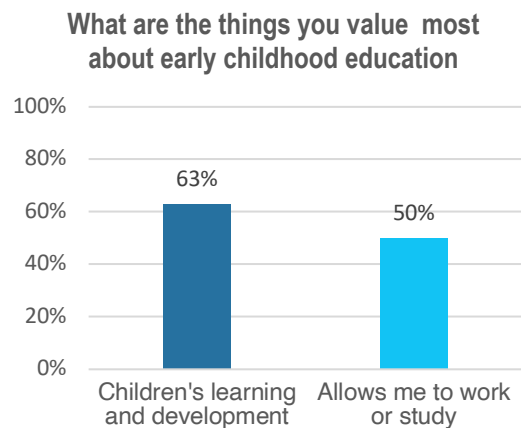
### ECEC is very important to families.

97% of parents and carers think ECEC is important. 81% think ECEC is very important and 16% think it is somewhat important.



### ECEC supports children first, then parents.

Parents and carers think the most valuable thing about ECEC is that it supports children's learning and development. They also highly value how ECEC helps them to work or study.



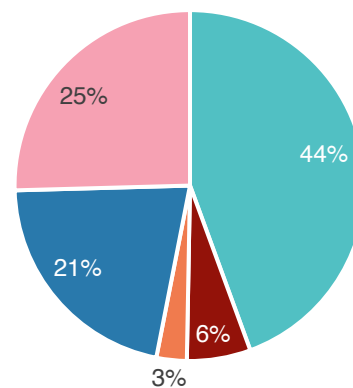
### ECEC will help parents return to work after COVID-19.

Families have been impacted by COVID-19 in different ways. A quarter of parents and carers are concerned about future employment and nearly 10% are looking for new jobs.

The families who had their employment impacted by COVID-19 value ECEC the most. Families who are currently looking for new jobs are 10% more likely to say that ECEC is very important than families who have not had their work impacted by COVID-19.

These families especially need stable, reliable, high quality education and care for their children, so they can take up job opportunities and get our economy back on track.

### What impact has Covid-19 had on your employment status?

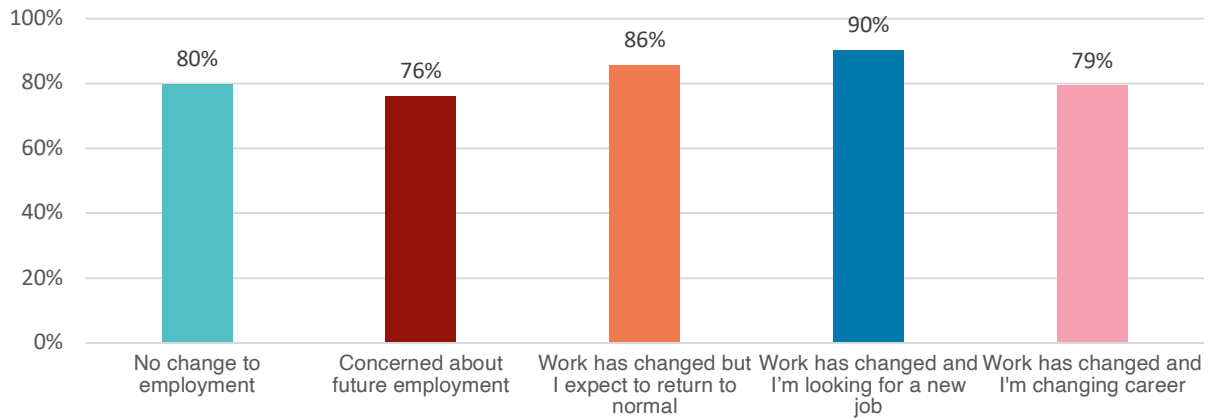


- No change to employment
- Concerned about future employment
- Work has changed but I expect to return to normal
- Work has changed and I'm looking for a new job
- Work has changed and I'm changing career





### Parents and carers who think early childhood education is very important, by how COVID-19 has impacted employment



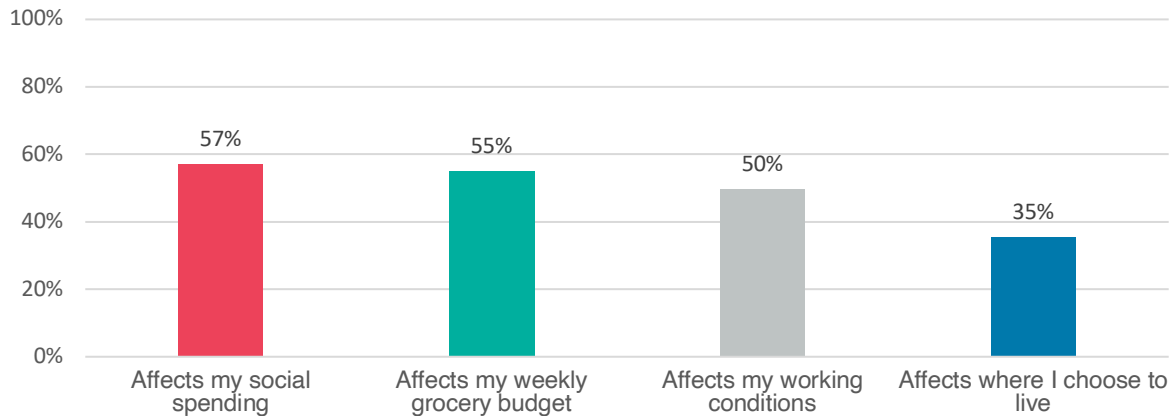
## Does the cost of ECEC impact spending choices?

Parents and carers say that the cost of education and care for their children impacts family choices. These include the ability to support basic needs like getting food on the table and their working conditions, such as how many hours they can work, how much flexibility they need, where they can work and how much they earn. It also impacts their ability to contribute to economic growth through spending money on social activities that support the tourism, hospitality, sports, arts and cultural sectors.

### The cost of ECEC impacts the spending choices of many families:

- Almost two thirds of families say fees affect their social spending habits
- More than half of families say fees affect their weekly grocery budget
- One in two families say fees affect their working conditions
- Over one third of families say fees affect where they choose to live.

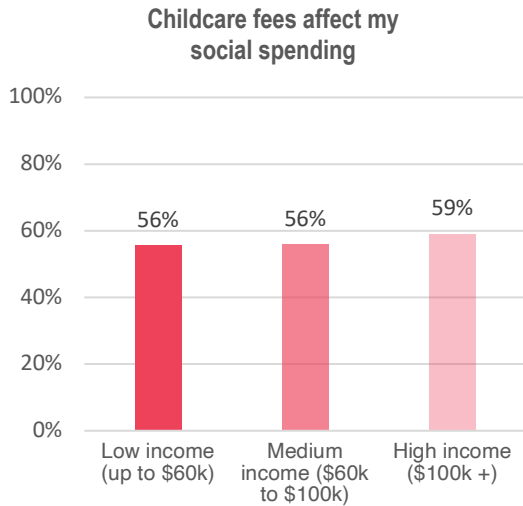
### The cost of early childhood education...





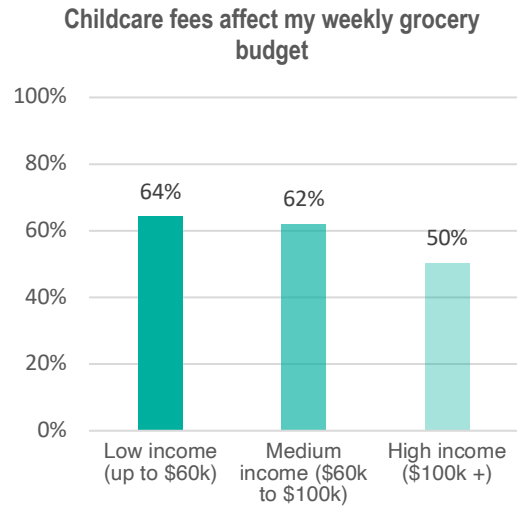
### ECEC fees impact social spending habits for 57% of families.

The impact on social spending habits is similar for families with different incomes.



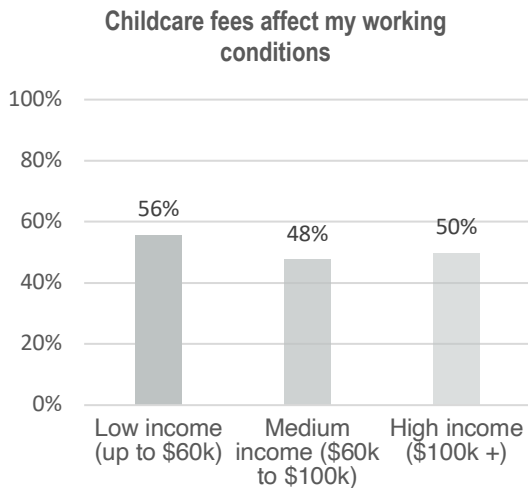
### ECEC fees impact the weekly grocery budget for 55% of families.

Low-income families are more likely to have their weekly grocery budget impacted by fees.



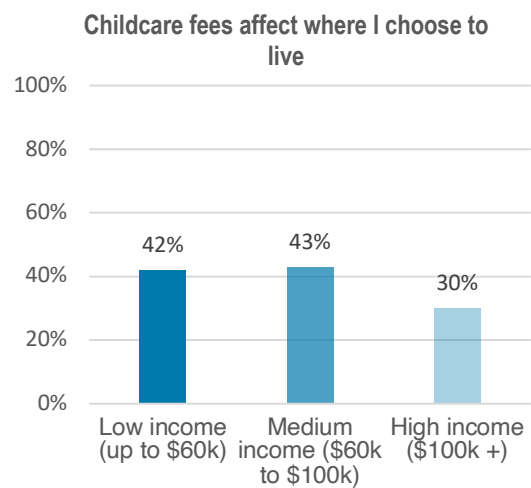
### ECEC fees impact decisions about work for 50% of families.

Families across all income levels say fees impact how they work but low-income families are impacted the most.



### ECEC fees impact where 35% of families choose to live.

Low and medium-income families are more likely to have decisions about where they live impacted by fees.



This survey of over 1000 families was conducted by independent researchers as part of our work to contribute to a stronger ECEC system after COVID-19. [Visit The Front Project website](#) for more information about how we are working to improve outcomes for children or [subscribe for updates](#) to be the first to know about new insights.

*The Front Project is an independent national enterprise working to improve quality and create positive change in Australia's early childhood education system. [thefrontproject.org.au](http://thefrontproject.org.au)*

