

Work and Play Report 2023

Information Sheet on Regional and Remote Families

The Front Project commissioned Heartward Strategic, an independent social research consultancy, to help us understand how 1,000 families and 147 educators and teachers perceive and experience early childhood education and care (ECEC) in 2023.

Accessing ECEC is a major barrier to families living outside of metro and inner regional areas.

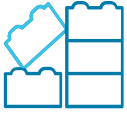
- Two in five parents (39%) living in regional or remote Australia are not currently using paid ECEC. This is compared to just one in five (20%) of parents living in a metropolitan area.
- 9% of regional families say they have considered or changed to a cheaper service due to the current economic climate compared to 15% of metro families.
- 23% of families living outside of metro areas state the hours a service can offer is an important factor in using ECEC compared to 14% for metro.

Recommendations

The ACCC final report found that for-profit providers are drawn into areas where parents have the greatest capacity to pay, which means the current system offers little incentive for providers to establish services in areas of low provision. The Front Project recommends the government takes a system stewardship approach to ensure the ECEC system is meeting its intended objectives for beneficiaries. System stewardship provides a platform for all actors in the ECEC system to be involved in its governance, developing targeted approaches to support and assesses barriers to accessing ECEC. This is particularly beneficial in remote, rural, disadvantaged, and First Nations communities, ensuring the outcomes for children and families are holistic and delivered in partnership with the sector.



Within this system steward approach, we recommend the government act as market steward to ensure the ECEC 'market' delivers on its outcomes. This includes developing targeted support policies, incentivise or establishing government services in under-served or unserved communities, ensuring serviceability, and responding to the market and system conditions.



As part of a systems stewardship approach, the government must embed community-led decision making and prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Organisations as providers of ECEC services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait children and invest in their development, long-term sustainability, including embedding a new funding model.

A sustainable workforce is vital in addressing under-served or unserved communities. A Commonwealth supported 25% wage increase and improved working conditions to mirror the schooling system is also vital to addressing historical devaluation of the ECEC workforce and matching similar roles.



- 79% of parents and guardians support improved wages and conditions for people who work in ECEC services. This includes investing in pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to obtain ECEC qualifications, including recognising cultural knowledge and experience.

Increasing the number of subsidised places for ECEC degrees and providing wrap-around support such as mentoring through to early career will enable more diploma qualified educators to upskill to be degree qualified. This is necessary to ensure we have the right, qualified people in the right places to support our youngest Australians to grow.



- 80% of parents and guardians support changes to attract more degree qualified teachers working in ECEC.

STEWARDSHIP MODELS

System stewardship measures performance based on the outcomes which impact the system's beneficiaries. System stewardship takes an active responsibility for system outcomes and steering the system towards these outcomes if appropriate.

This differs from market stewardship which refers to the role of governments 'shaping' markets in the provision of public services. This approach focuses on inputs, such as funding and resources, and outputs, such as profits and service availability (Meltzer et al. 2021)

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