



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
*Senate Standing Committee on Education and
Employment* report:

*Quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education
and care system*

OCTOBER 2026

Overview

On 25 August 2025, the Senate referred the quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system matter to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee, for inquiry and report by 10 March 2026 (extended to 31 March 2026).

The Senate Education and Employment References Committee reported on the quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care (ECEC) system on 31 March 2026.

The report makes 23 recommendations.

Labor Senators submitted a dissenting report with one recommendation.

The Australian Greens Senators submitted a dissenting report with 13 recommendations.

Australian Government Response

National Child Safety

In August 2025, Education Ministers across the country agreed on historic national actions to strengthen safety and quality in early childhood education and care. Backed by around half a billion dollars from governments, these are the biggest safety reform to the sector since the national early learning system was introduced 15 years ago.

Every child deserves access to quality early learning – and these reforms are about making sure early learning is safe, high quality, and delivered in services families can trust.

A key part of this national action is the investment of up to \$45 million to establish the **National Early Childhood Worker Register** (National Worker Register). The foundational stage of the National Worker Register rolled out nationally on 27 February 2026 and requires approved providers to record details of their workforce including identifying details, Working with Children Check (WWCC) and relevant qualifications and training. As of 1 October 2026, around 98% of services have uploaded worker details to the National Worker Register.

Enhancements to the National Worker Register will be rolled out progressively to enable it to reach its full potential in supporting child safety and enabling earlier identification of risks. These enhancements could include verification of worker identity and other credentials, and enhanced worker screening functionality to enable worker information to be shared with WWCC (and equivalent agencies) and prospective early education and care employers.

The foundation course of the **National Child Safety Training** was launched on 27 February 2026 and as of 1 October 2026 has been completed by 408,433 individuals. This training focused on building an understanding of child safety as well as identifying child abuse and neglect and promoting appropriate action and referral. It must be completed by any person who works or volunteers in an ECEC service regulated under the National Quality Framework, including CEOs and board members who make decisions relating to a service. Around 97 per cent of individuals surveyed after completing the training have said they would recommend it.

The next stage of training became available from 31 July 2026 and must be completed by all persons with management or control of the service, nominated supervisors, persons in day-to-day charge, and all staff who work directly with children. This training builds on the foundation training to equip workers with the skills they need to confidently and consistently implement child safe practices.

Both national training courses were developed by the Australian Centre for Child Protection (ACCP), in partnership with the Queensland Government, on behalf of all Australian states and territories and the Australian Government.

The Australian Government is also providing \$21 million for wage-subsidy grants that will support completion of the training. The subsidy helps ECEC providers pay staff while they undertake training. Small and medium-sized providers will be prioritised in allocating the funding.

Alternatively, providers can close after 5pm for up to 5 hours annually and claim the Child Care Subsidy while their staff undertake the mandatory safety training.

A **National Assessment of CCTV** has also been undertaken in more than 300 ECEC services (the Assessment). The Assessment has examined how CCTV may support the detection, prevention and response to harm, as well as regulatory oversight and public confidence.

The Assessment has been informed by experts including the Australian Federal Police (AFP), the ACCP, the National Office for Child Safety, the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner, as well as other leading child protection, privacy, and security experts, alongside specialist advisors in surveillance, privacy law and child safety. Findings will be presented to Education Ministers in November 2026 and will inform future policy on the safe, ethical and effective use of CCTV in ECEC settings.

Education Ministers have agreed and implemented **reforms to the Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations** (National Law) – the national system of early childhood education regulation – to strengthen safety and quality in ECEC. The reforms include:

- banning use of personal mobile phones and other electronic devices in services;
- improving transparency for families by enhancing the information available about compliance and enforcement actions on Starting Blocks;
- tripling penalties for non-compliance with National Law;
- expanding the powers of regulatory authorities to respond to misconduct;
- strengthening Working with Children Check requirements; and
- making the safety, rights and best interests of children the paramount consideration under the National Law.

Education Ministers tasked the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) with undertaking a rapid assessment of child supervision practices in ECEC. All recommendations from ACECQA’s Rapid Assessment of Child Safe Practices were accepted by Education Ministers. Reforms to address the recommendations will be part of the next tranche of reforms to the National Law.

The Australian Government has invested around \$22 million for the **Joint Compliance and Monitoring Program (JCMP)** with the States and Territories. The JCMP enables joint regulatory action, including data and intelligence sharing, joint investigations and monitoring, identification of emerging sector risks and trends, as well as enhanced deterrence and enforcement through co-ordinated action across jurisdictions.

The National Quality Framework (NQF) Snapshot for Quarter 2 of 2026 shows that state and territory regulators conducted more inspections than ever before – 6,493 service visits, up 5.6 per cent on the previous quarter and 8.7 per cent on the prior year. State and territory regulators also took 1540

compliance actions, an increase of around 110 per cent compared with the same time last year, and up 65.1 per cent on the previous quarter.

Strengthening Regulation of Early Education

In 2025, the Australian Government passed new laws to hold providers to account – changing Family Assistance Law to give the Commonwealth the power to suspend or cancel Child Care Subsidy funding where a service is not meeting quality, safety or compliance requirements.

These laws give the Secretary of the Department of Education the power to take into account a provider's quality, safety and compliance history when considering whether a provider should be approved to administer the Child Care Subsidy (CCS), whether they should continue to be approved, or if they should be approved to operate a new service. As of 1 October 2026, 127 services have been put on notice; 59 of these services are now Meeting Quality Standards while 10 are no longer approved (including where a provider has surrendered their licence). The powers have been used to cancel the CCS-approval of two providers.

The legislation also gave the Department the power to undertake unannounced service visits to ensure the CCS is being administered correctly and to support early identification of safety and quality issues to the relevant state or territory regulator. The Australian Government has invested \$73 million to support implementation of this new power. As of 1 October 2026, more than 1,500 unannounced service visits had been undertaken across all states and territories (since November 2025).

Working with Children Checks

In November 2025, all Attorneys General endorsed the Standing Council of Attorneys General (SCAG) Agreement to Deliver National Working with Children Check Reform (WWCC SCAG Agreement).

The WWCC SCAG Agreement outlines six Priority Actions that set out the agreed pathway and timeframes to strengthen and improve consistency for a national approach to WWCCs, based on mutual recognition:

1. implementing mutual recognition of negative notices
2. meaningful consistency in automatic exclusion criteria
3. meaningful consistency in risk assessment frameworks
4. clear information sharing pathways
5. an operational National Continuous Checking Capability (NCCC)
6. mutual recognition of WWCCs.

Significant progress has been made across Priority Actions under the WWCC SCAG Agreement, with jurisdictions continuing to work collaboratively to strengthen and improve national consistency in WWCC arrangements. On 31 July 2026, all jurisdictions agreed the mid-2026 deliverables set out in the WWCC SCAG Agreement, establishing meaningfully consistent baselines of disqualifying offences, risk assessment processes and the types of information to be shared with state and territory WWCC screening units. By early 2027, jurisdictions are to amend legislation and policy as required to reflect the agreed approach, with mutual recognition of WWCCs to be achieved by mid-2028.

Early Education and Care Commission

In May 2026, the Australian Government announced it will work with states and territories to consider the development of an Early Education and Care Commission (Commission).

In July 2026, Education Ministers agreed to explore the development of a potential Commission to strengthen safety and quality in the ECEC system, and that if established, it should involve reform of the existing Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA).

A Working Group co-chaired by the Australian and South Australian Governments has been established to provide advice to Ministers. Education Ministers have also agreed to establish a time-limited expert panel to support targeted consultation on a potential Commission and will consider further advice in November 2026.

Worker Retention Payment

On 17 June 2026, the Australian Government announced a further investment of \$3.6 billion over the next 2 years to continue funding a wage increase for the ECEC workforce. This investment is tied to a commitment from services receiving the payment to limit fee increases, and a requirement that they meet Quality Area 2 (Children's Health and Safety) of the National Quality Standard from July 2027.

Workforce retention and stability is critical to quality and safety in ECEC, enabling children and educators to develop consistent and stable relationships. Since the Worker Retention Payment was announced in 2024:

- there are around 20,000 more ECEC workers, about an 8 per cent increase
- job vacancies have decreased by around 30 per cent
- the percentage of services operating with a staffing waiver has fallen from 8.9 per cent to 4.3 per cent
- fees at centres receiving the payment grew at around half the rate of centres that are not signed up.

Recommendations

- ❖ *The Australian Government notes that many recommendations relate to areas of shared government responsibility.*
- ❖ *The agreement of the Australian Government, as well as all state and territory governments, is required to act on recommendations where responsibility is shared.*
- ❖ *Some shared recommendations would require states and territories to amend legislation in their respective jurisdictions to give effect to the change and are therefore subject to legislative processes and timeframes.*

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the Government prioritise the closer integration of law enforcement into current child safety reforms, to allow a more joined-up approach to child safety. Specifically, the committee recommends the government consider:

- a. **as a priority—closer integration of the WWCC register, the National Educator Register and police/regulator intelligence;**
- b. **reforms to allow the use of facial recognition tools for the purpose of rapid victim identification by police in cases of child sexual assault, subject to appropriate legislative guardrails and oversight mechanisms commensurate with the sensitivity of the technology and the privacy interests engaged, and noting its status as an emerging technology;**
- c. **establishing appropriate mechanisms, whether operational, structural or otherwise, to allow regular two-way feedback between police and regulators in relation to sub-threshold matters; and**
- d. **establishing clear guidance on the preservation of CCTV footage and other records for evidentiary purposes in cases involving alleged child sexual abuse, including appropriate retention periods, access protocols, and safeguards to ensure that any such requirements do not result in the surveillance of children beyond what is necessary for child protection purposes.**

The Australian Government **partially supports** this recommendation, and notes that work is already underway in collaboration with states and territories in areas where responsibility is shared.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, highlights action through the WWCC SCAG Agreement to progress closer integration of WWCC systems with police and regulatory intelligence, as well as other sources of jurisdictional and Commonwealth information.¹

The Australian Government's response also details the work underway through the Education Ministers Meeting to enhance the National Early Childhood Worker Register and to explore the use of the CCTV in ECEC settings through a National Assessment. Findings from the Assessment will be presented to Education Ministers in November 2026 and will inform future policy on the safe, ethical and effective use of CCTV in ECEC settings.

¹ Recommendation 1a refers to increased integration with a 'WWCC register'; however, there is no Commonwealth-level WWCC register.

The Australian Government will continue to monitor developments in the use of facial recognition tools for the purpose of rapid victim identification by police in the context of child safety reforms to inform ongoing work.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the Australian Government refer to the Australian Law Reform Commission the question of whether existing sentencing frameworks for serious child sexual abuse offences adequately serve as a deterrent and protect children from individuals who pose an ongoing risk. The referral should consider whether current sentencing provisions, including for repeat offenders, are commensurate with the gravity of these offences, and what reforms may be appropriate to ensure that those who abuse, exploit or prey upon children do not remain a threat to child safety.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that the Australian Government with the state and territory governments develop clear, consistent timeframes for regulators to respond to allegations of concerning behaviour and breaches of the National Law and regulations.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation. The recommendation relates to matters where the Australian Government shares responsibility with states and territories or where states and territories have sole responsibility.

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments, consider expanding access to the National Early Childhood Worker Register to enable prospective employers to undertake appropriate pre-employment checks.

This should include consideration of mechanisms to allow employers to access relevant information relating to an individual's regulatory history, including any prohibition notices, suspensions, or substantiated breaches of workplace health and safety or service-level policies, subject to appropriate privacy and procedural safeguards.

The Australian Government **supports in principle** this recommendation, and notes that work is already underway in collaboration with states and territories in this area. The recommendation relates to matters where the Australian Government shares responsibility with states and territories or where states and territories have sole responsibility.

The Australian Government response, above, outlines work underway through the Education Ministers Meeting to enhance the National Early Childhood Worker Register.

Recommendation 5

The committee recommends that the Australian Government amend the Fair Work Act 2009 to ensure that employment settings appropriately reflect the safeguarding requirements of child-

facing workplaces, including early childhood education and care, and protect employers who, in good faith and on reasonable grounds, take adverse employment action (including suspension, role reassignment, or termination) due to concerns about a worker's potential risk to children.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

The *Fair Work Act 2009* already allows employers to take disciplinary action against workers who pose safety risks to children. In early childhood education and care settings, approved providers have legislative obligations under the Education and Care Services National Law to protect children from harm and ensure children are adequately supervised. Providers may suspend staff or take other reasonable action to manage child safety risks while allegations are being investigated.

The adverse action provisions of the *Fair Work Act 2009* do not prevent employers from taking reasonable action to address genuine child safety concerns, including where action is necessary to protect children or manage risks while allegations are investigated. Such disciplinary action will not fall within the meaning of adverse action unless it is taken for a prohibited reason, such as the employee has exercised a workplace right or because of an employee's protected attribute, such as race. Employers must, however, act fairly and provide the reasons for their action.

Recommendation 6

The committee recommends that the Australian Government review how national child safety training is delivered and assessed in early childhood education and care sector to ensure it drives genuine engagement with safeguarding.

This should include strengthening assessment requirements so that participants demonstrate a clear understanding of the material, and examining whether current settings adequately require engagement and robust evaluation, with ongoing monitoring incorporated into regular audit processes. The review should ensure the training functions as a real safeguard that builds capability and awareness, rather than a procedural exercise.

The Australian Government **supports in principle** this recommendation, and notes collaboration between states and territories to roll out the National Child Safety Training. The recommendation relates to matters where the Australian Government shares responsibility with states and territories or where states and territories have sole responsibility.

As the National Child Safety Training is still being rolled out, a review of the training would be premature at this time. However, further to the response above, the Australian Government notes that:

- the training was developed in consultation with the sector and experts to ensure that it supports all people involved in ECEC to meet their legal child safety obligations, strengthen safeguarding practice, and reduce harm to children;
- the training requires the learner to undertake an assessment for each topic in the course in order to progress;
- the training imposes progression controls, randomised question banks and mandatory knowledge checks to encourage engagement and ensure learners demonstrate a clear understanding of the material;
- National Law requires approved providers to ensure all staff undertake the training and state regulators are auditing compliance;

- the ACCP collects feedback on user experience and engages in ongoing improvement and may use this feedback to review and update the materials where required; and
- the training was first updated on 10 June 2026 to implement changes from feedback received.

Recommendation 7

The committee recommends that the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority, in consultation with relevant peak bodies, develop and implement guidelines for anaphylaxis prevention and management for children with allergies; and guidelines for the appropriate safety and care of children with type 1 diabetes.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation. The recommendation relates to matters where the Australian Government shares responsibility with states and territories or matters where states and territories have sole responsibility.

The Education and Care Services National Regulations require services to have policies and procedures regarding medical conditions in children, including anaphylaxis. Approved providers must ensure that staff and volunteers understand both the medical conditions policy, and each child’s medical requirements.

ACECQA provides support in implementing the National Allergy Council’s *Best Practice Guidelines for Anaphylaxis Prevention and Management in Schools* and *Best Practice Guidelines for Anaphylaxis Prevention and Management in Children’s Education and Care*. The guidelines outline the key principles and recommendations for reducing the risk of anaphylaxis in ECEC settings, including and outside school hours care.

The Australian National Diabetes Strategy 2021–2030 (the Strategy) sets out a national approach to the prevention, early detection, and management of diabetes in Australia. Within this broader framework, the Strategy recognises the particular needs of children with type 1 diabetes, emphasising the importance of ongoing, well-coordinated care that is appropriate to their stage of development.

Recommendation 8

The committee recommends that, as part of its rapid review, the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority recommend that all jurisdictions amend their regulatory framework to:

- **Ensure the practice of active rather than passive supervision, to minimise opportunities for unsafe behaviours; and**
- **Address the underlying operational and regulatory pressures that are contributing to reduced educator-to-child ratios during sleep and rest periods in early childhood education and care services.**

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government response, above, outlines work underway through the Education Ministers Meeting in relation to ACECQA’s Rapid Assessment of Child Safe Practices.

Recommendation 9

The committee recommends the Australian Government through Education Minister Meetings or through a request to ACECQA, increase the frequency of authorised officer spot check visits to early childhood education and care services, and ensure that authorised officers receive appropriate training, including in early childhood and care practice. To strengthen oversight, the policy should incorporate minimum targets, such as a minimum of four unannounced spot checks per year. The committee notes this may necessitate a resource commitment from states and territories.

The Australian Government **partially supports** this recommendation, and notes that the Australian Government has committed to 1,600 unannounced service visits by Australian Government Authorised Officers each year. Other elements of this recommendation relate to matters where the Australian Government shares responsibility with states and territories or matters where states and territories have sole responsibility.

The Australian Government response, as outlined above, reflects a range of actions, investments and progress on increased service visits by authorised officers from all jurisdictions. States and territories have also agreed to ensure that all services are assessed on average every three years, with more frequent visits for those rated “Working Towards” the National Quality Standard.

Recommendation 10

The committee recommends that the Australian Government publicly announce whether it intends to continue or cease the Worker Retention Payment as soon as possible to provide the early childhood education and care sector with certainty.

The Australian Government **supports** this recommendation. An investment of \$3.6 billion was announced on 17 June 2026 to extend the Worker Retention Payment.

Recommendation 11

The committee recommends that the Australian Government consider tax concessions for the cohort of the early childhood education and care workforce for Public Benevolent Institutions that is currently unable to access salary packaging concessions to encourage staff retention and reduce turnover.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government’s response, outlined above, highlights the Australian Government’s investment in a 15 per cent pay rise for ECEC workers and the impact this has had on staff retention and attraction.

Recommendation 12

The committee recommends that the Australian Government work with the regulators of both vocational education and training and higher education to ensure high-quality educators and early learning teachers are entering the profession.

The Australian Government **supports in principle** this recommendation.

The Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) regulates vocational training, while the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) oversee higher education providers. ACECQA approves qualifications to determine if they meet NQF requirements and conducts ECEC migration skills assessments for applicants applying for skilled migration visas. The Department of Education works with ASQA and TEQSA to monitor any concerns raised about pre-service training quality and provider oversight.

The Australian Government has also established 10 Jobs and Skills Councils (JSC). HumanAbility is the JSC for the care and support sector. HumanAbility is currently reviewing the Certificate III in ECEC and Diploma of ECEC qualifications. The review is considering current and emerging workforce skill needs, including findings and recommendations from recent sector reviews and workforce reform initiatives. A final report on the review is expected to be available from April 2027.

Recommendation 13

The committee recommends that the Australian Government with the state and territory governments urgently commission an independent review of the National Quality Framework, focusing on how services are assessed against the National Quality Standard and how assessments can be made more accurate, transparent and consistent.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation. The recommendation relates to matters where the Australian Government shares responsibility with states and territories or matters where states and territories have sole responsibility.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, highlights a range of recent actions and investments to improve quality and safety in early childhood education and care. Additionally, from September 2025, the information available on StartingBlocks.gov.au was progressively updated to provide greater transparency on the regulation of services. Updates include:

- when a regulator last visited a service
- any conditions placed on providers
- the link between a service and its provider
- when approval has been amended
- when a compliance notice has been issued
- when a notice of suspension has been issued
- any conditions imposed on the service
- any emergency action notices issued
- any enforceable undertakings.

Recommendation 14

The committee recommends that the Australian Government, as a matter of urgency:

- **Publish grant guidelines and confirm the application opening date for the professional development subsidy ahead of the commencement of mandatory national child safety training obligations for new staff on 14 August 2026;**
- **Provide clear public guidance on the total funding available under the subsidy, the allocation methodology, and the treatment of training costs incurred by providers prior to the opening of applications;**
- **Ensure that the subsidy administration process does not disadvantage providers (particularly small and medium operators and not-for-profit services,) who incur upfront training costs for**

- new staff before applications open, and consider mechanisms to allow retrospective claims for eligible costs incurred from the commencement of mandatory training obligations; and
- **Review whether the subsidy adequately accounts for the full range of costs associated with mandatory compliance, including out-of-pocket expenses such as payments to casual staff completing training outside rostered hours, and the administrative burden placed on providers, particularly not-for-profit services, in managing grant applications and acquittals, recognising that for not-for-profit providers, unsubsidised compliance costs are borne directly by the communities and children they serve.**

The Australian Government **partially supports** this recommendation.

The grant guidelines for the Professional Development subsidy were published in April 2026. The guidelines include information on total funding available. The subsidy administration process is designed to be as least administratively burdensome as possible for providers to complete and retrospective claims are permitted under the grant guidelines.

The subsidy is based on current award rates and includes a 25 per cent casual loading. The subsidy is a contribution to the costs of providing professional development.

Recommendation 15

The committee recommends that regulatory authorities provide clear, timely and actionable feedback to services following assessment and rating processes, to support continuous improvement and greater transparency.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation. The recommendation relates to matters where the Australian Government shares responsibility with states and territories or matters where states and territories have sole responsibility.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, highlights a range of recent actions and investments to improve quality and safety in early childhood education and care.

Recommendation 16

The committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments, introduce regulatory mechanisms to prohibit early childhood education and care providers from expanding or establishing additional services where they are not consistently meeting the National Quality Standard across their existing services. In implementing this measure, governments should consider clear thresholds and criteria to ensure that expansion is contingent on demonstrated and sustained compliance with quality and safety requirements.

The Australian Government **supports in principle** this recommendation. The *Early Childhood Education and Care (Strengthening Regulation of Early Education) Act 2025* makes quality and safety a key requirement for services and providers seeking or maintaining CCS approval. It gives the power to refuse applications for or suspend or cancel CCS funding if a service is not meeting quality, safety and other compliance requirements. Other elements of the recommendation relate to matters where the Australian Government shares responsibility with states and territories or matters where states and territories have sole responsibility.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, highlights a range of actions taken to strengthen regulation and compliance in ECEC.

Recommendation 17

The committee recommends that the Australian Government as a matter of urgency, review its support for children with additional needs, including the existing Inclusion Support Program and the impacts of the Thriving Kids program, with a view to providing funding certainty for families and early childhood education and care providers.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government acknowledges the importance of inclusion of all children in early education and care. The 2026-27 Budget provides a further \$54.8 million in supplementary funding for the Inclusion Support Program for 2026-27, bringing total additional funding for 2026-27 to \$114.0 million. This is in addition to the \$133.3 million ongoing appropriation for the program.

The 2026-27 Budget also provides up to \$139.7 million over five years from 2026–27 to facilitate state-delivered Thriving Kids services for children in ECEC settings, with funding held in the Contingency Reserve pending consultation and design with states and territories.

Recommendation 18

The committee recommends that the Australian Government ensure that the Community Child Care Fund is sufficiently funded to meet existing demand for services in childcare deserts and consider models better suited to thin markets.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Community Child Care Fund (CCCCF) Open program continues to support eligible ECEC services to address barriers to ECEC participation in disadvantaged, regional and remote communities. Services were notified in July 2026 of outcomes for Round 5 of the grant program, which will provide up to \$106.9m over three years in sustainability support and capital support grants.

The Government is also investing \$1 billion through the Building Early Education Fund (the Building Fund) to build or expand ECEC services in areas of need.

Recommendation 19

The committee recommends that the Australian Government together with the state and territory governments discuss the matter of inflated rental fees and license fees, including those charged by public primary schools, for early childhood education and care services at a future Education Ministers Meeting and consider potential measures to address this issue.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

The recommendation relates to matters where the Australian Government shares responsibility with states and territories or matters where states and territories have sole responsibility.

Recommendation 20

The committee recommends that future policy development includes, as a general principle, consultation with parents so that support for families considers flexibility and choice for parents, as well as early childhood development outcomes for children in their early years.

The Australian Government **supports in principle** this recommendation. The recommendation relates to matters where the Australian Government shares responsibility with states and territories or matters where states and territories have sole responsibility.

Parents and carers are consulted on policy development through the Parents and Carers Reference Group (PCRG), providing parents and caregivers with an opportunity to have a say on what the Australian Government is doing to support children aged 0 to 12, and allows government to hear directly from parents and caregivers on what matters to them.

The PCRG has been consulted on a range of reforms related to quality and safety in ECEC, including the application of CCTV in ECEC settings and the development of the National Child Safety Training.

Recommendation 21

The committee recommends that the Australian Government improve accessibility and clarity of information regarding the Child Care Subsidy, including through the development of a user-friendly calculator on Service Australia's website to address the difficulties families experience in understanding their eligibility and entitlements.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

In April 2026, improvements were made to the CCS calculator on the Starting Blocks website to help families find out what they might pay for early childhood education and care. This included providing detailed information about each item impacting out of pocket costs, such as number of children in care and their ages, family income and session length and days in care. The calculator was also updated to include withholdings in the calculation.

Information about changes in fees charged by services from year-to-year, as well as revenue and profit for large for-profit providers is also published on the Starting Blocks website.

Recommendation 22

The committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments, review educator-to-child ratio requirements in Outside School Hours Care to ensure they are calibrated to the developmental and supervision needs of school-aged children. The review should consider the differing needs of younger and older primary school-aged children, whether activity-based or age-differentiated staffing arrangements are appropriate across different Outside School Hours Care settings and transitions, and how ratio settings can maintain child safety while supporting the viability of services, particularly in regional, remote and smaller school communities.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation. The recommendation relates to matters where the Australian Government shares responsibility with states and territories or matters where states and territories have sole responsibility.

The Australian Government response, above, outlines work underway through the Education Ministers Meeting in relation to ACECQA's Rapid Assessment of Child Safe Practices.

Recommendation 23

The committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments, undertake a comprehensive review of the appropriateness of the National Quality Framework as it applies to Outside School Hours Care, with a view to developing a fit-for-purpose regulatory framework that reflects the distinct nature of school-aged care.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation. The elements relate to either matters of state and territory responsibility or matters for which responsibility is shared by the Australian Government with state and territory governments.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, highlights a range of actions and investments to improve quality and safety in ECEC.

Labor Senators' Dissenting Report Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Government Senators recommend consideration of opportunities to provide increased system planning and coordination between the Commonwealth, states and territories in the development, and delivery of a universal early childhood education and care system.

The Australian Government **supports** this recommendation.

Australian Greens' Dissenting Report Recommendations

Recommendation 1

That the Australian Government, in consultation with states and territories, establish an independent national ECEC Commission. Its mandate, scope and duration should be developed in close consultation with the sector to guide the transition to universal ECEC, with a focus on improving safety and quality as well as access and affordability across all jurisdictions.

The Australian Government acknowledges the range of views on an ECEC Commission presented to the inquiry and **supports in principle** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, highlights work underway with state and territory governments on the development of a national Early Education and Care Commission.

Recommendation 2

That the objectives of early childhood education and care system should be explicitly stated and a framework developed to regularly report on system performance, including the extent to which objectives are being met. A Commission could take on this as an immediate task.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation. The recommendation relates to matters where the Australian Government shares responsibility with states and territories or matters where states and territories have sole responsibility.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, highlights work underway with state and territory governments on a potential Commission.

Recommendation 3

That there be a national settlement of roles and responsibilities between Commonwealth and state and territory governments to create clarity and accountability.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation. The recommendation relates to matters where the Australian Government shares responsibility with states and territories or matters where states and territories have sole responsibility.

Recommendation 4

That the Australian Government legislates to require excessive profits by for profit ECEC providers be reinvested back into improving quality and lifting wages and conditions for staff.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, highlights a range of actions and investments to improve quality and safety in ECEC and to lift wages for ECEC workers.

Recommendation 5

That the Australian Government increase funding to state and territory regulators over the long term, potentially through a new National Partnership.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, highlights a range of actions and investments to improve quality and safety in early education, including funding for state and territory regulators through the Joint Compliance and Monitoring Program.

Recommendation 6

That the assessment and rating process be revised to be more collaborative, transparent and frequent. Assessors should be trained and equipped to look beyond policies and examine the translation of these into everyday practice.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation. The recommendation relates to matters where the Australian Government shares responsibility with states and territories or matters where states and territories have sole responsibility.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, highlights a range of recent actions and investments to improve quality and safety in early education.

Recommendation 7

That the Australian Government, in consultation with states and territories, create a nationally consistent reportable conduct scheme, including aligning thresholds for what constitutes reportable conduct.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

Recommendation 8

That the Australian Government develop and fund a national quality improvement program with expert coaching to improve quality in services receiving the Child Care Subsidy, starting with services that are not meeting the National Quality Standard.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation. The recommendation relates to matters where the Australian Government shares responsibility with states and territories or matters where states and territories have sole responsibility.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, highlights a range of recent actions and investments to improve quality and safety in ECEC.

Recommendation 9

That the Australian Government review the National Quality Framework to consider the inclusion of food quality and quantity and cultural safety.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation. The recommendation relates to matters where the Australian Government shares responsibility with states and territories or matters where states and territories have sole responsibility.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, highlights a range of recent actions and investments to improve quality and safety in early education and care.

Recommendation 10

That the Australian Government, over the medium term, implement supply side funding to publicly fund the delivery of quality early childhood education and care services. The Government should begin this transition by first implementing needs-based funding to children who need higher intensity supports or more enriched environments.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, highlights a range of recent actions and investments to improve quality and safety in ECEC.

Recommendation 11

That the Australian Government lift wages to comparable levels in other education sectors and create more sustainable working conditions that support educators and reduce burnout, including:

- **Permanent relief educators who undertake the same training and professional development as regular staff to help maintain ratios, cover breaks and support colleagues to take planning time; and**
- **Increase paid planning time to five hours per educator per week.**

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation. The recommendation relates to matters where the Australian Government shares responsibility with states and territories or matters where states and territories have sole responsibility.

The Australian Government's response, as outlined above, highlights a range of recent actions and investments to improve quality and safety in early education and care and to lift wages for ECEC workers in CCS-approved services.

Recommendation 12

That the Australian Government address inclusion in early childhood education and care by:

- **Immediately increasing funding to the Inclusion Support Program to meet immediate unmet need and while the Service Delivery Price project reaches its conclusion, including increasing the additional educator hourly rate to meet award levels. The subsidy cap should also cover a child's full attendance of hours at a service;**
- **Over the short term create an Early Childhood and Education Fund with both a disability specific stream and mainstream inclusion support stream;**
- **Over the medium term develop and implement a needs-based funding model to support the inclusion of children with additional needs and developmental delay; and**
- **Collate data on how many children with disability are denied enrolment in ECEC services or supported through the Inclusion Support Program.**

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government acknowledges the importance of inclusion of all children in early education and care. The 2026-27 Budget provides a further \$54.8 million in supplementary funding

for the Inclusion Support Program for 2026-27, bringing total additional funding for 2026-27 to \$114.0 million. This is in addition to the \$133.3 million ongoing appropriation for the program.

The 2026-27 Budget also provides up to \$139.7 million over five years from 2026–27 to facilitate state-delivered Thriving Kids services for children in ECEC settings, with funding held in the Contingency Reserve pending consultation and design with states and territories.

Recommendation 13

That the Australian Government support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by:

- **Developing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Years Workforce Strategy with the aim of achieving full workforce parity in remuneration and employment; and**
- **Implementing a dedicated supply-side, needs-based, reliable and sustainable funding model for early years' Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, along with 'comprehensive sector scaffolding and backbone support.'**

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.