



# Survey Feedback: Capping enrolments due to staff shortages





#BestStartInLife

March 2024



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# Executive Summary

## Staff shortages are severely reducing family access to early learning services Australia-wide.

This report illustrates the depth of the impact of the national workforce crisis in the early learning (childcare) sector.

Our February survey (672 respondents) showed that **67%** of respondents were capping their enrolment numbers and turning families away due to lack of staff, with a total of **16,300 places** removed from Australian families across one week alone in February.

Our second survey in May (428 respondents) indicated that **56% of respondents** were capping enrolment numbers, with a total of **10,961 places** withheld from families during the week of 8-12 May. Some ACA members reported that they did not have the resources to complete the survey, due to staff shortages.

Our third survey in October (477 respondents) indicated that **50% of respondents** were capping enrolment numbers, with a total of **11,123 places** withheld from families during the week of 9-13 October.

### Our fourth survey...

This data is just the tip of the iceberg. The feedback from many early learning service providers is that they simply do not have the resources to pause their operations to complete a survey and provide detailed feedback.

ACA believes the number of families impacted could be significantly higher than reported over recent months and the problem will continue to grow unless addressed.

These services were forced to cap enrolments as a direct result of the critical shortages of educators, in the context of the strict educator-ratio rules that govern how many children can be enrolled per staff member.

Without adequate numbers of entrants into the sector, **over 12,500 early learning service providers** across the country are struggling to meet the demand for places and to meet the regulatory requirements for the educator-to-child ratios.

As the backbone of the Australian economy, the early learning sector's viability and sustainability are **critical** components of achieving the Australian Government's objectives of full employment and productivity growth for the benefit of all Australians, along with women's economic participation and equality.

ACA is committed to supporting our sector provide **the best start in life** for Australian children, and to do this we need a **strong, reliable workforce**. After a decade of workforce issues the need for action has become **critical**.

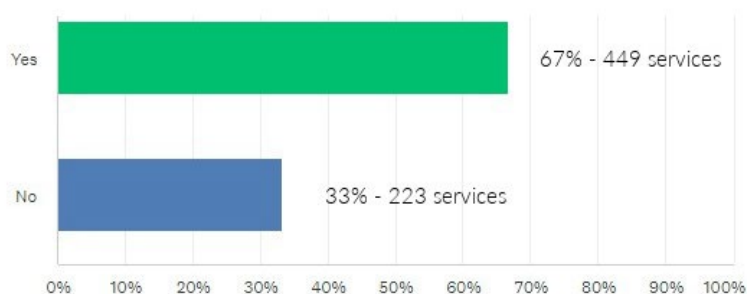
We have presented a suite of cost-effective solutions to the Australian Government via our [Pre-Budget Submission – Jan '23](#) and our ACA CCC Education Fund Proposal – Jan '23.

A timely and sufficient investment, by the Australian Government, to remedy the critical workforce shortages in the ECEC sector will ultimately contribute to the whole economy and our national wellbeing.

# Survey 1 Results – February 2023

## PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS CAPPING ENROLMENTS

Is your service capping the number of enrolments due to inadequate staff numbers or not enough of the correct qualification?

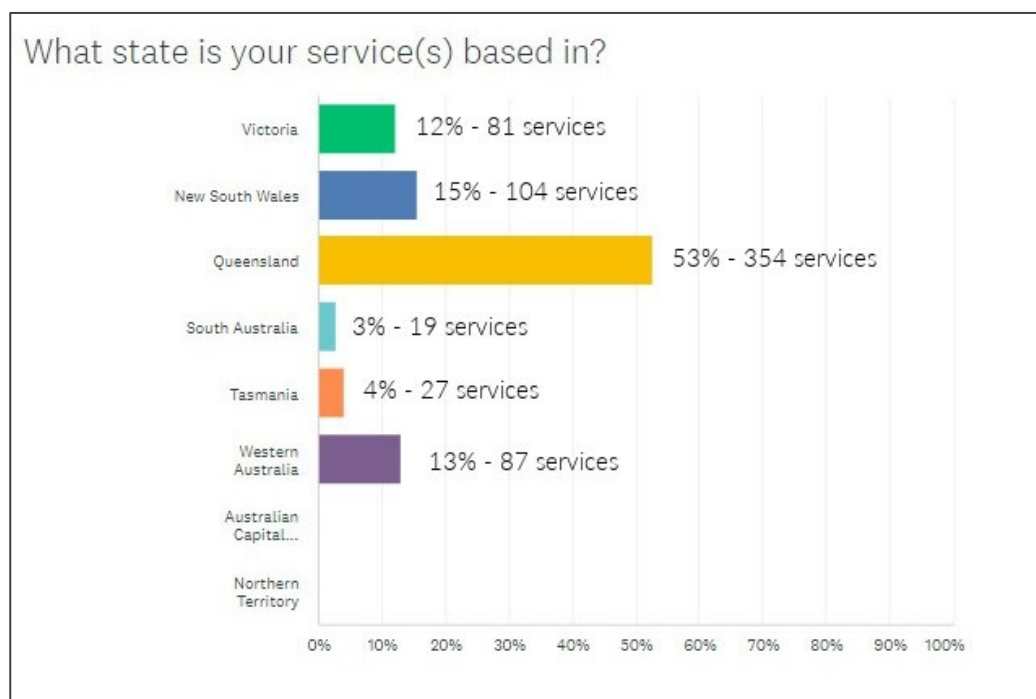


## TOTAL NUMBER PER WEEK OF CAPPED ENROLMENTS\*

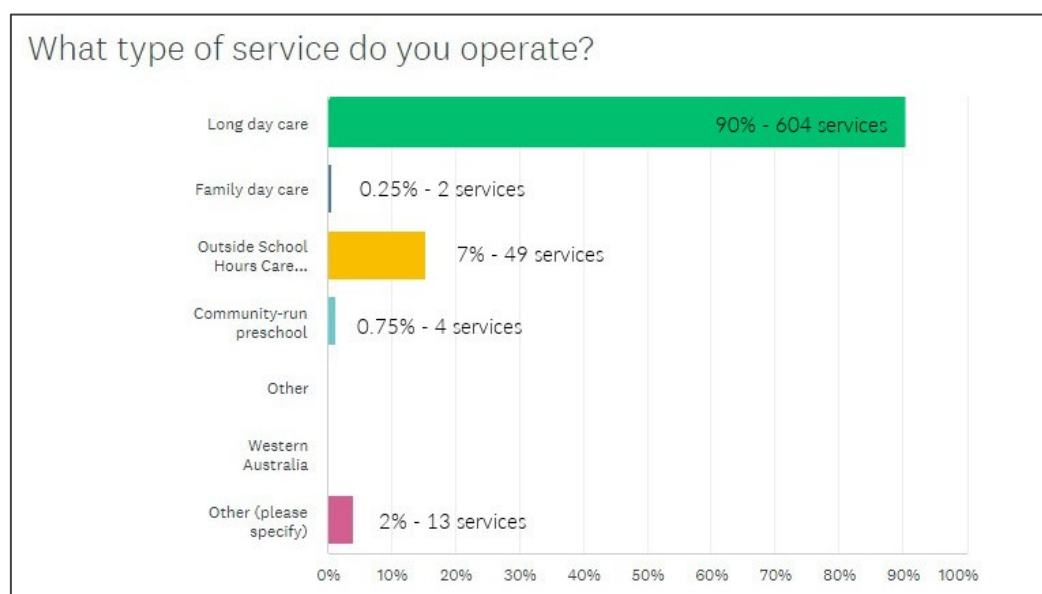
\*The complete data set for this question is available as an Excel spreadsheet on request.

If yes, how many places are NOT available across the WEEK compared to usual levels (Eg. 3 places every day is a total of 15 places across the week)		
#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	20	2/26/2023 9:26 AM
2	15-20 per day	2/24/2023 5:10 PM
3	aproximately 20	2/23/2023 12:26 PM
4	40	2/23/2023 10:52 AM
5	11 spaces on mondays and fridays	2/23/2023 9:53 AM
6	20	2/23/2023 9:44 AM
7	22	2/23/2023 9:34 AM
8	14	2/23/2023 9:03 AM
9	6	2/23/2023 8:58 AM
10	50	2/23/2023 6:21 AM
...		
672	350 places	2/9/2023 4:16 PM
Total number of capped vacancies per week based on 672 respondents = 16,353 places		

## SERVICE LOCATIONS ACROSS THE STATES & TERRITORIES

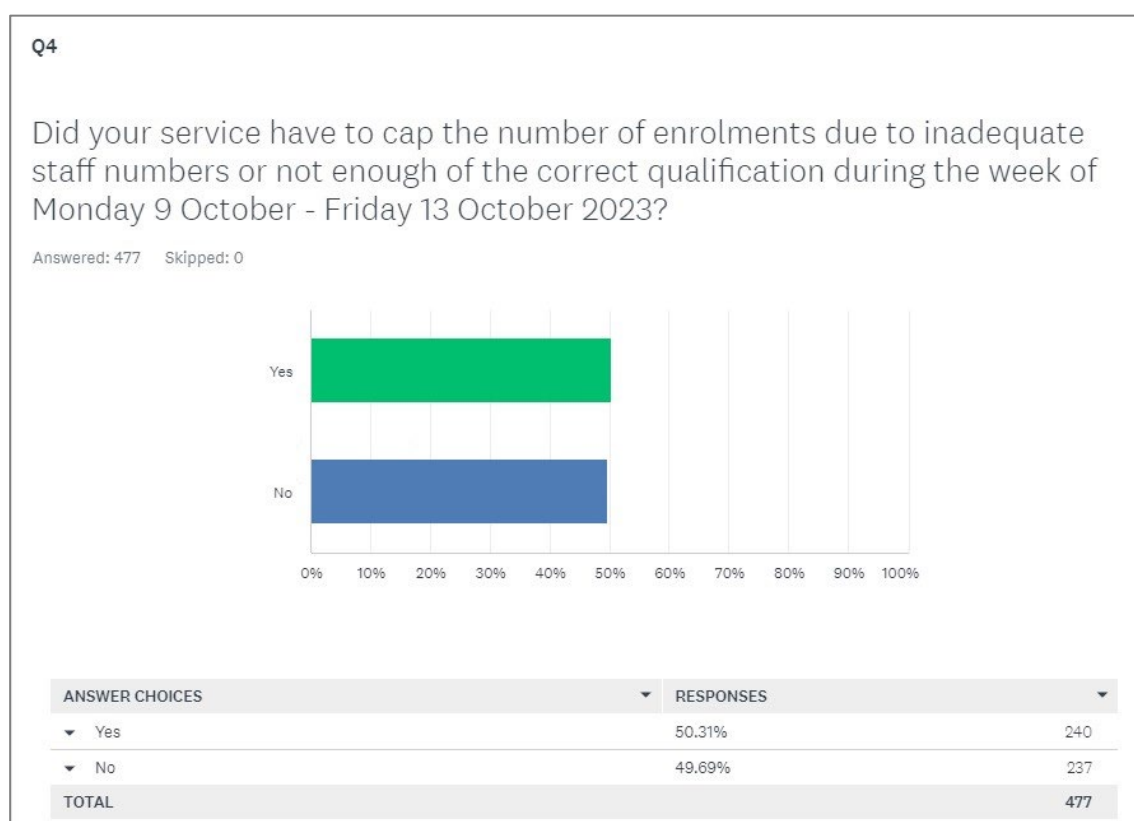


## SERVICE TYPE



# Survey 2 Results – May 2023

## PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS CAPPING ENROLMENTS



## TOTAL NUMBER PER WEEK OF CAPPED ENROLMENTS\*

Q5

If yes, how many places were NOT available on each day compared to when you have usual levels of staff? (Please provide a number for each week day below.)

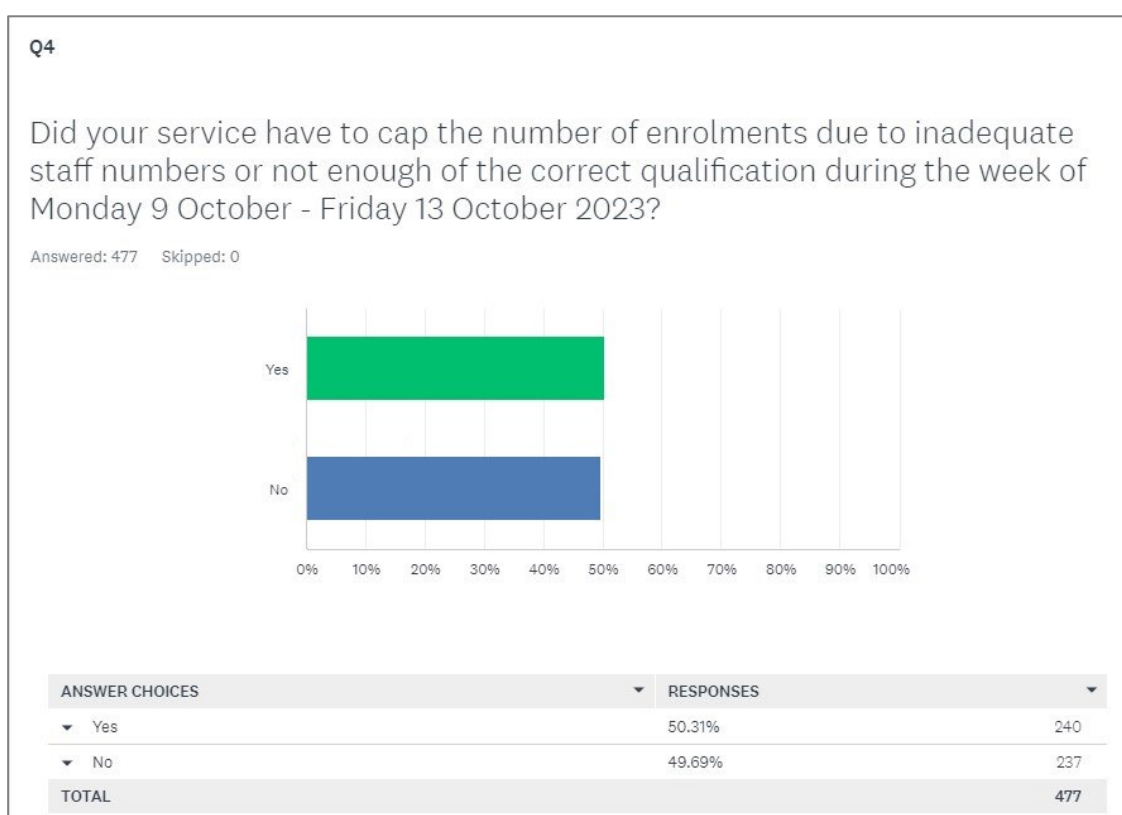
ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Monday - 8 May	Responses	100.00%	145
Tuesday - 9 May	Responses	100.00%	145
Wednesday - 10 May	Responses	100.00%	145
Thursday - 11 May	Responses	100.00%	145
Friday - 12 May	Responses	100.00%	145

**Total no of capped vacancies for the week based on 145 responses = 10,961 places**

\*The complete data set for this question is available as an Excel spreadsheet on request.

# Survey 3 Results – October 2023

PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS CAPPING ENROLMENTS (477 RESPONDENTS)



## TOTAL NUMBER PER WEEK OF CAPPED ENROLMENTS\*

Q5

If yes, how many places were NOT available on each day compared to when you have usual levels of staff? (Please provide a number for each week day below.)

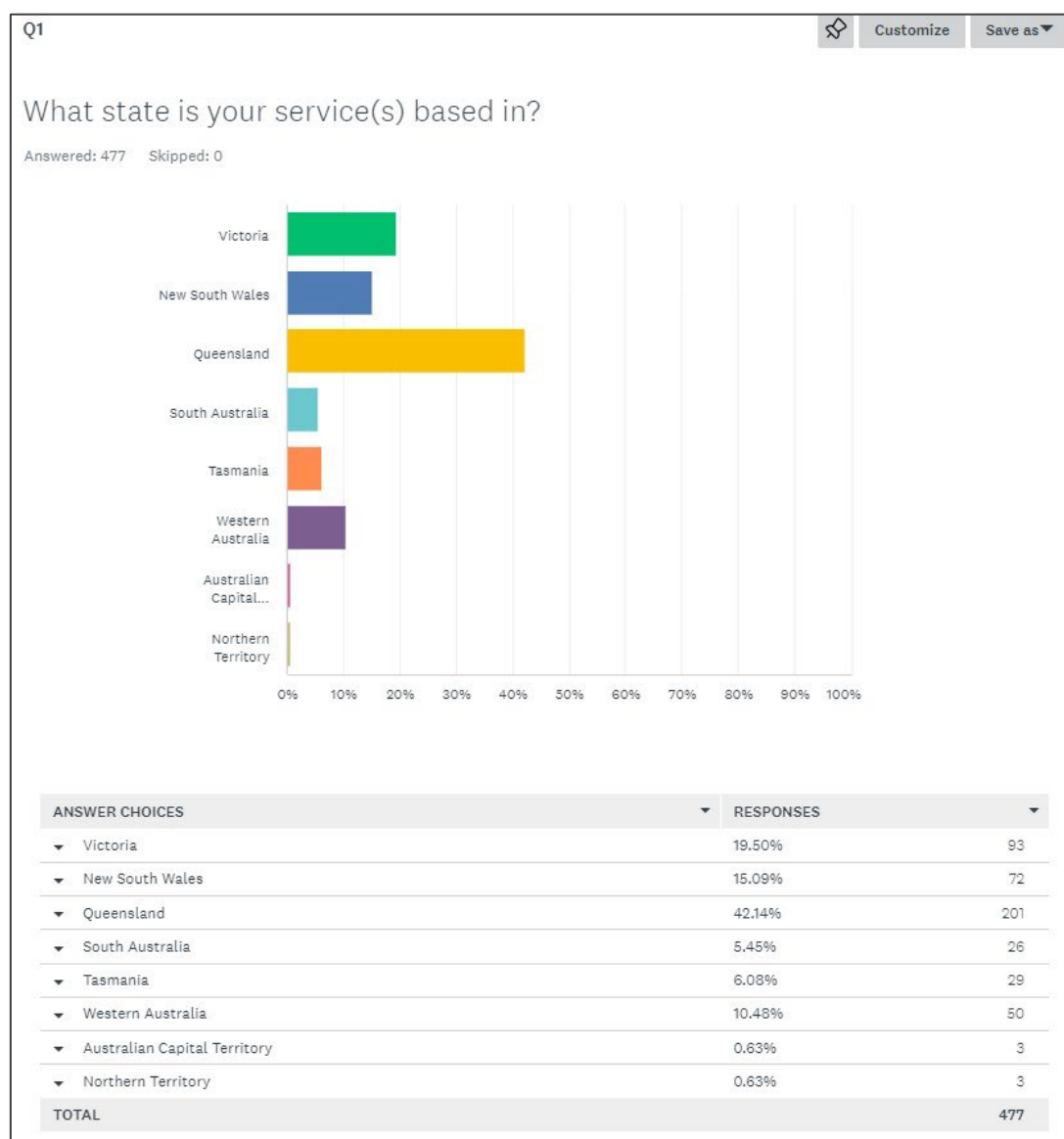
Answered: 160 Skipped: 317

ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Mon 9 October	<a href="#">Responses</a>	100.00%	160
Tues 10 October	<a href="#">Responses</a>	100.00%	160
Wed 11 October	<a href="#">Responses</a>	100.00%	160
Thurs 12 October	<a href="#">Responses</a>	100.00%	160
Fri 13 October	<a href="#">Responses</a>	100.00%	160

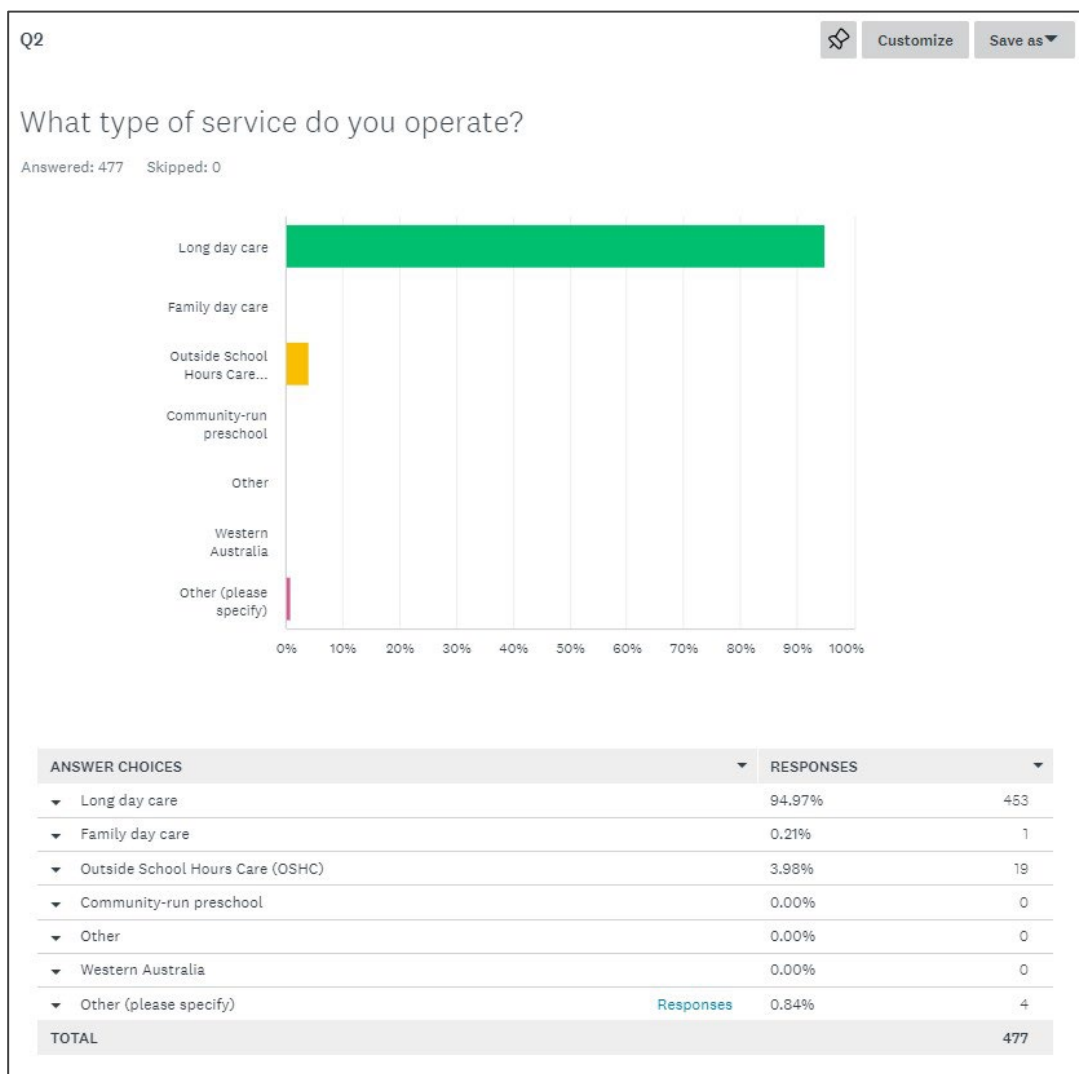
**Total no of capped vacancies for the week based on 160 responses = 11,123 places**

\*The complete data set for this question is available as an Excel spreadsheet on request.

## SERVICE LOCATIONS ACROSS THE STATES & TERRITORIES

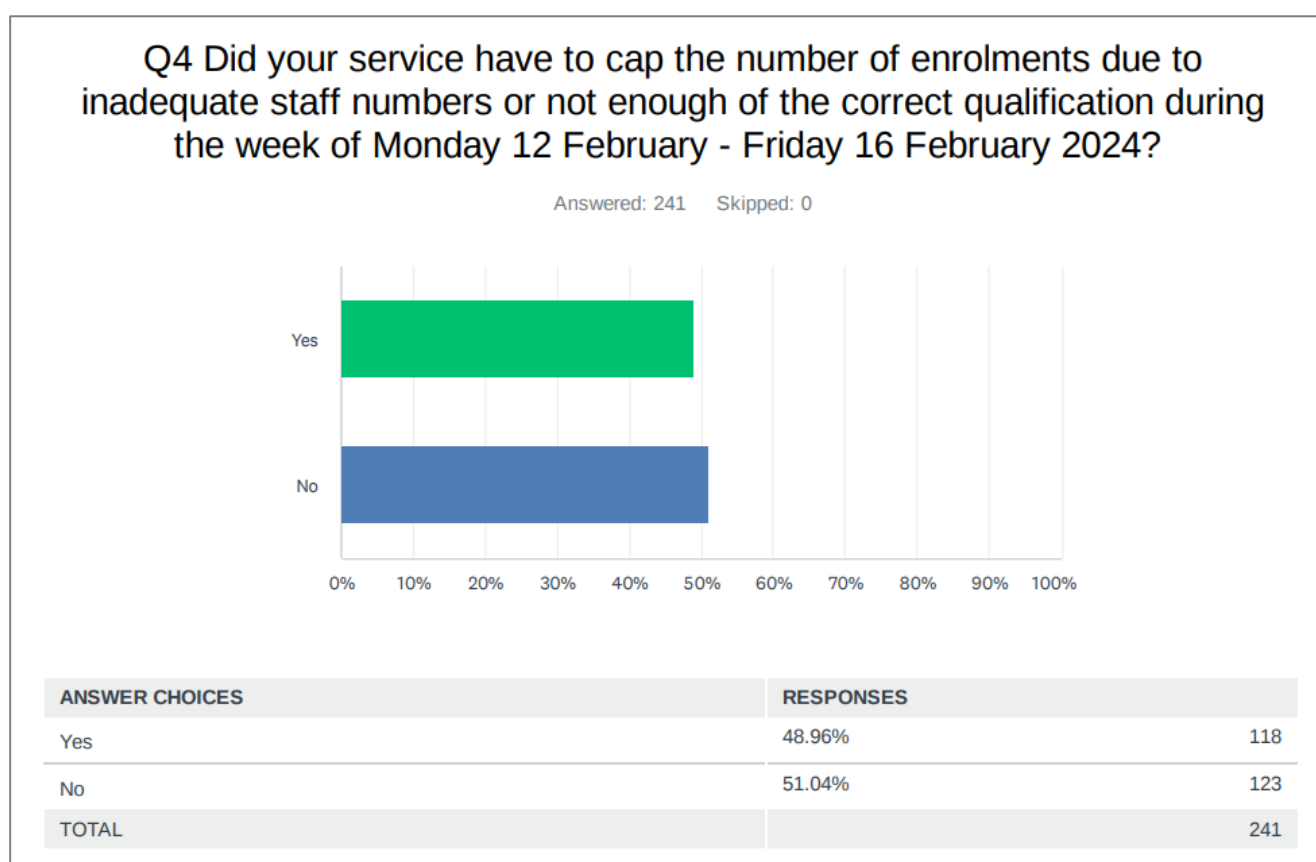


## SERVICE TYPES



# Survey 4 Results – March 2024

PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS CAPPING ENROLMENTS (241 RESPONDENTS)



- “Our centre is closed every Friday and we currently cannot take under-2s as we do not have enough staff.”
- “We have had to voluntarily suspend service due to staff shortages.”
- “We had to refuse to take in a child with additional needs due to lack of support staff and could not offer any extra days to requesting families due to staff on annual leave for Lunar New Year and being sick.”
- “Families desperate for care but no Diplomas to take them in.”
- “Trying to find new educators with zero luck”

## TOTAL NUMBER PER WEEK OF CAPPED ENROLMENTS\*

Q5 If yes, how many places were NOT available on each day compared to when you have usual levels of staff? (Please provide a number for each week day below.)

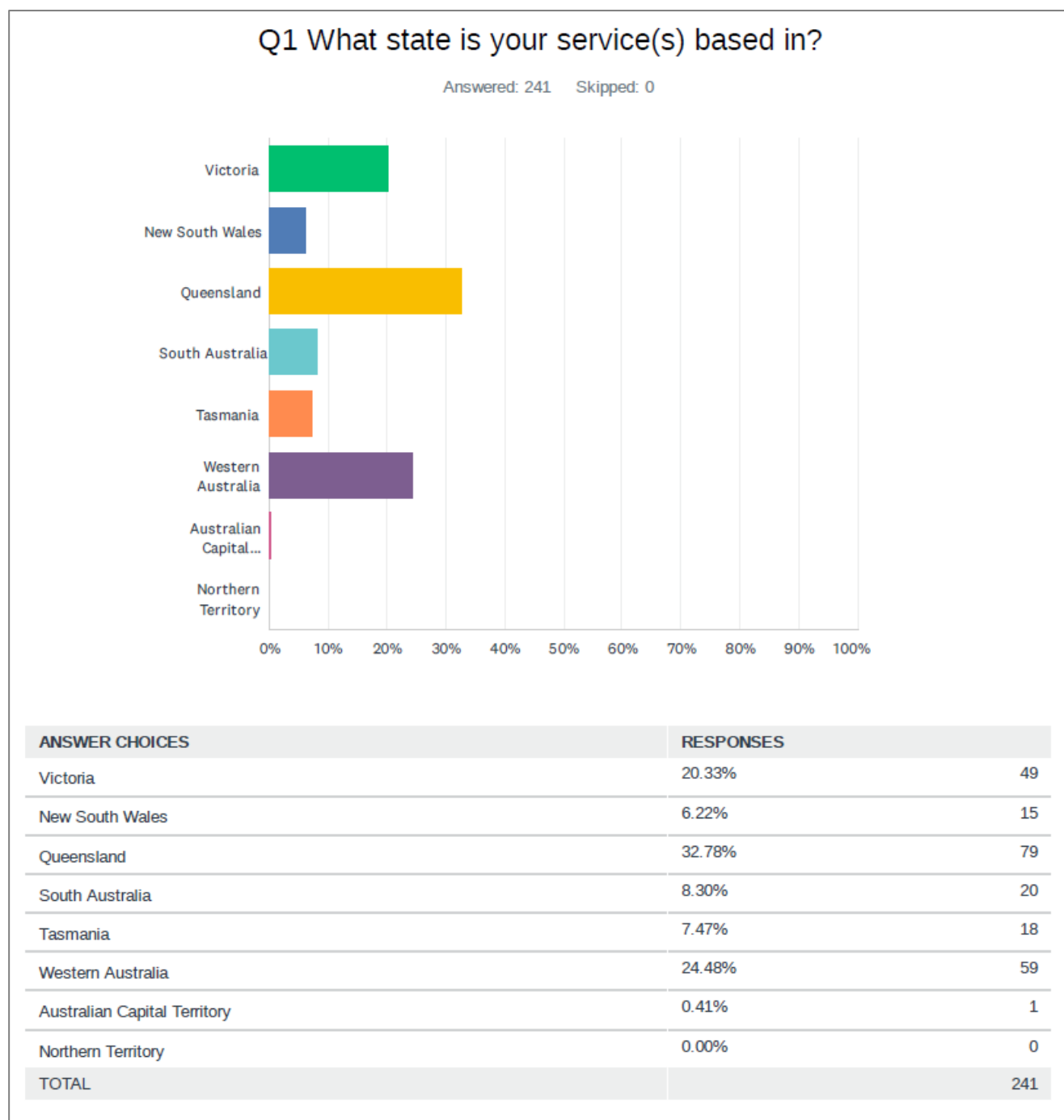
Answered: 91 Skipped: 150

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Mon 12 February	100.00% 91
Tues 13 February	100.00% 91
Wed 14 February	100.00% 91
Thurs 15 February	100.00% 91
Fri 16 February	100.00% 91

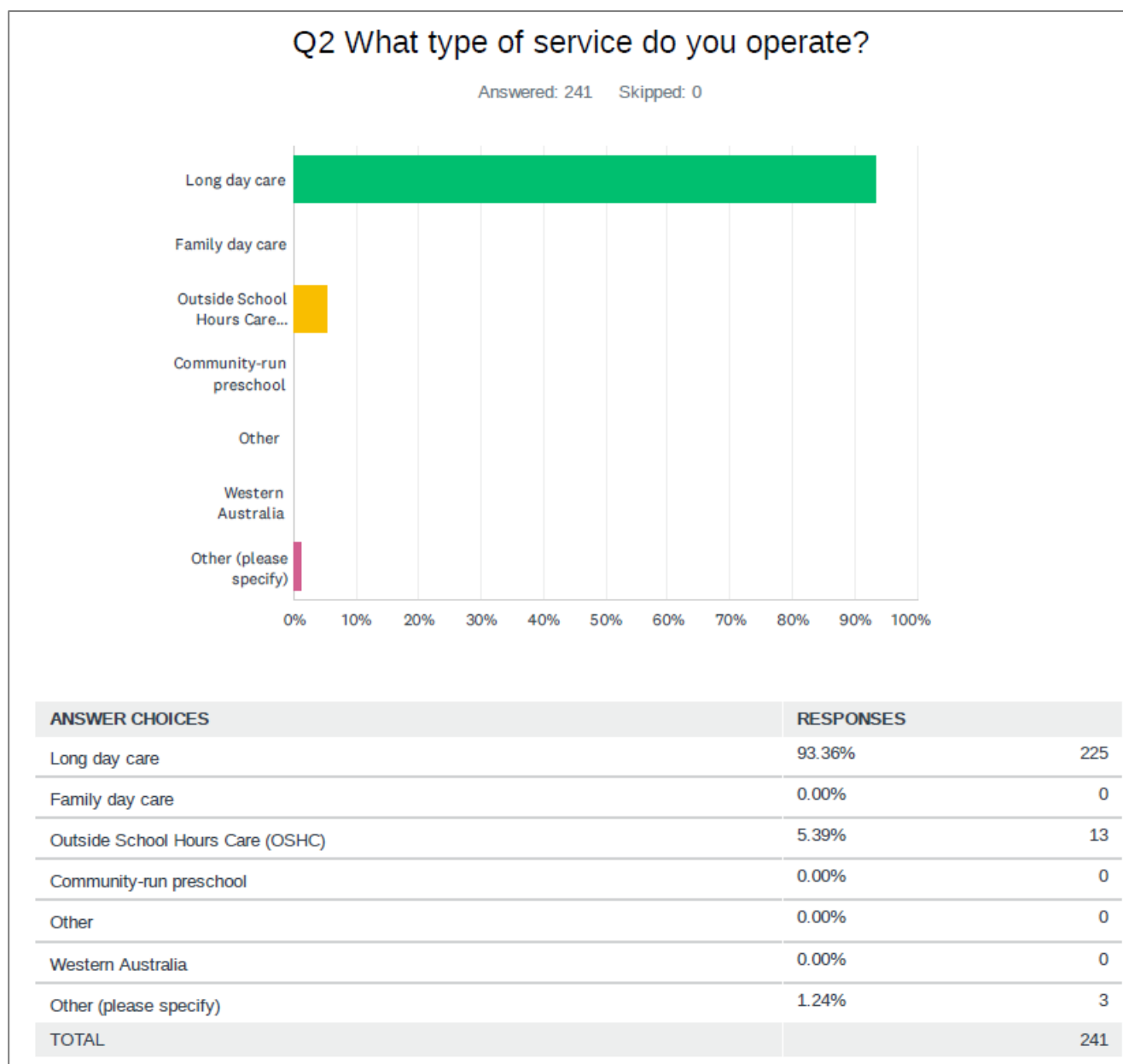
**Total no of capped vacancies for the week based on 91 responses = 5,681 places**

\*The complete data set for this question is available as an Excel spreadsheet on request.

## SERVICE LOCATIONS ACROSS THE STATES & TERRITORIES



## SERVICE TYPES





# In their own words

## Service providers talk about the impact of staff shortages on their centre

Service providers were invited to comment about the impact of staff shortages on their service. Below are some of their statements. These individual stories are just the tip of the iceberg and demonstrate the devastating impact of the staff shortages on families and service providers Australia-wide.

### Impact on families

*"Families are frustrated and at times have placed blame on our educators for them losing work because their child can't attend care."*

**Linda Hutchison, TG's Child Care- High Street, Wauchope NSW**

*"When we call the parents to let them know we can't take their child on a particular day, they often respond with anger and disbelief as to how ratio requirements apply. Our parents have very little understanding of the requirements within our environment. We consistently explain our difficulties, but I honestly believe they do not see the full picture."*

**Donna Player, Squeakers Child Care, Mudgee, New South Wales**

*"The problem is impacting our local families, with some parents understandably becoming upset as they are not able to attend to their work on the days they intended to. It's a difficult task calling parents to tell them you don't have the capacity to take their child that day."*

*"We're also finding that some parents are reducing their permanent bookings due to the fact that we have had to increase our fees under the pressures of current inflationary effects on cost and wages. However these families then frequently ask for additional casual bookings, which we are not able to accommodate. Some families still drop their children off having been told that we can't accommodate them, and this can put our centre out of the required child-to-educator ratio unexpectedly."*

**Shan Kuo, Avenues & Little Lane Early Learning Centre, Hawthorn, Victoria**



## Impact on staff

*"Staff are feeling stressed and under pressure as they are trying to pick up the slack where they can. Float team members have also been hard to find so breaks and other support backfill has been a challenge. The Director and AP have been spending time in rooms to assist with compliance requirements, but that in turn has put huge pressure on the Director with her admin work which is relentless as well.*

*Our team of staff is a wonderful group of people and they are doing everything they can to support us all as a team, but it does come at a price. They are tired, feeling pressured and worried about what the future holds for them."*

***Pam Maclean, Out & About Care & Education, Maroochydore, Queensland***

*"My Team are stretched. They are emotionally and physically drained and pushed to their limits. Educators have been working overtime hours and missing out on Annual Leave requests at times.*

*The reduced numbers only require 2 educators in the 0-2 year old room and 2 educators in the 2-3 years room. This is a stretch on educators at particular times. For example, nappy change times or when a child needs rocking to sleep or a bottle as it leave one educators to control the room."*

***Linda Hutchison, TG's Child Care- High Street, Wauchope NSW***

*"Educators are frequently putting off leave entitlements, family functions and commitments to ensure that the centre is adequately staffed. This is placing further mental strain on our very dedicated educators to please absolutely everyone to their on physical and mental detriment. Several team members have ongoing plans in place due to mental health/impacts with having no real relief from the anxiety that we continue to deal with on a day-to-day basis and the ever-increasing workload. Several of our educators have left the industry, never to return."*

***Donna Player, Squeakers Child Care , Mudgee, New South Wales***

*"We tend to work to 70% of possible enrolments so that we can keep our staff fit and well for the entire year as we no longer have a bank of relief staff to cover leave, sickness or emergencies."*

***Jane Lieu , Wongan Cubbyhouse Incorporated, Wongan Hills, Western Australia***



# Methodology

## Survey Background

The Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) ran a short online survey to members and the broader early learning sector to gain insights into the proportion of Australia's Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) services which are capping enrolments due to staff shortages.

## Survey Goals

The aim of the survey was to obtain some quantitative, national data about the proportion of the early learning sector capping enrolments due to staff shortages, and also the volume of child enrolment places being removed from the sector as a result of staff shortages.

## Survey Target Population

The survey was promoted directly to the ACA member base via email, as well as to the broader early learning sector via social media, with a total of 672 service providers completing the survey. The majority of the survey sample is privately-owned long day care services.

## Survey Content

Survey respondents were asked a short set of questions which have been set out in Annexe 1 overleaf.

## Survey Timing

The online surveys was open to prospective respondents for a two week period:

- Survey 1 - From 9 – 22 February 2023.
- Survey 2 – From 13-26 May 2023
- Survey 3 – From 13 - 22 October 2023.
- Survey 4 – From 16 February – 1 March 2024

## Survey Data Collection

The survey was produced in Survey Monkey using a self-administered online response process.

In order to calculate the total number of places per week removed from the sector due to staff shortages, the responses (individual totals) to Question 4 of the survey (please refer to Annex 1 on page 20) were added together to form the grand total. The complete data set for this question is available as an Excel spreadsheet on request.



## Annex I: Questionnaire

### Survey Introduction

We know that staff shortages are a key issue impacting our sector, but some services will be impacted more severely than others, depending on their individual circumstances.

We would like to be able to demonstrate the direct impact the lack of staff is having on enrolment numbers by showing the government some real figures from our members across the country.

To this end we urge you to participate in a quick poll to let us know to what extent your service and your local families are impacted. (If you have more than one service, please complete the survey for each service.)

It will only take a few minutes to complete and your feedback will assist us greatly as we continue our discussions with the Federal Government on this critical issue.

### Are your occupancy levels being directly impacted by a lack of staff?

\* 1. What state is your service(s) based in?

- |                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Victoria        | <input type="radio"/> Tasmania                     |
| <input type="radio"/> New South Wales | <input type="radio"/> Western Australia            |
| <input type="radio"/> Queensland      | <input type="radio"/> Australian Capital Territory |
| <input type="radio"/> South Australia | <input type="radio"/> Northern Territory           |

\* 2. What type of service do you operate?

- ☐ Long day care
- ☐ Family day care
- ☐ Outside School Hours Care (OSHC)
- ☐ Community-run preschool
- ☐ Other (please specify)



\* 3. Are you an ACA member?

☐ Yes

☐ No

\* 4. Did your service have to cap the number of enrolments due to inadequate staff numbers or not enough of the correct qualification during the week of Monday 9 October - Friday 13 October 2023?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Comments (not mandatory)

### Were your occupancy levels directly impacted by a lack of staff during the week of 9 - 13 OCTOBER 2023?

\* 5. If yes, how many places were NOT available on each day compared to when you have usual levels of staff? *(Please provide a number for each week day below.)*

Mon 9 October

Tues 10 October

Wed 11 October

Thurs 12 October

Fri 13 October



\* 6. Would you be happy to be interviewed by the media to help show the government how serious the situation is?

☐ Yes

☐ No

7. If yes, please provide your contact details below

Your full name

Name of service provider

City/Town

State/Territory

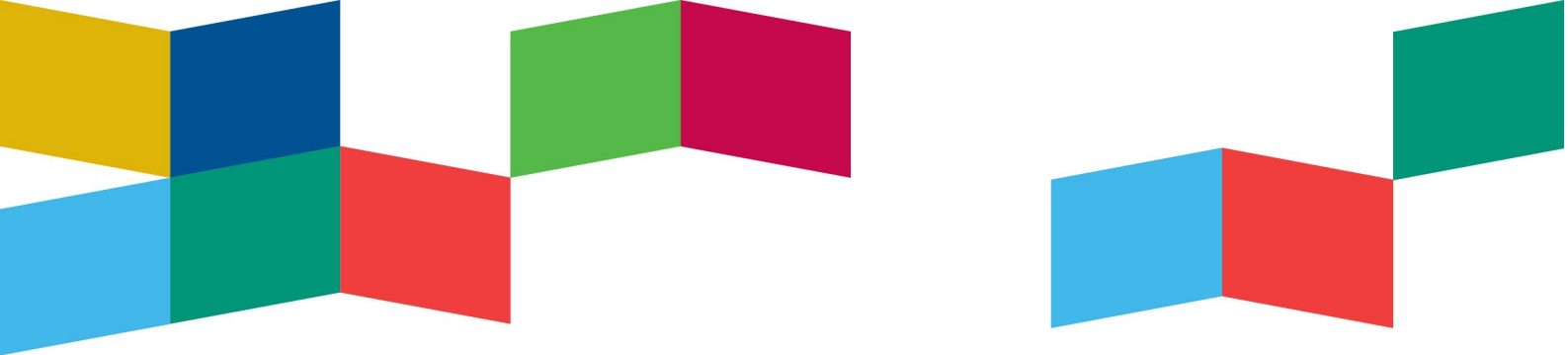
Postcode

Metro OR Regional OR  
Remote?

Email Address

Best contact phone number  
(with area code if applies)

8. If your capped enrolments are impacting the local community in some way, please provide a very quick overview of this here. (Eg. Does it mean the local pharmacy or GP can't operate on certain days due to lack of childcare?)



9. Do you have any families who would be happy to talk to the media?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Comments (not mandatory)



## Conclusion

The **single most pressing issue** facing our sector Australia-wide right now is the **critical workforce shortage of qualified educators**. There are simply not enough entrants into the sector to meet the demand and to meet our regulatory requirements for the child-educator ratios.

Without a strong and reliable workforce, the early learning (childcare) sector cannot deliver high-quality, affordable services to all Australian families who so urgently need it.

The workforce shortages are impacted families and in turn impacting their local economies.

The Australian Childcare Alliance calls upon the Australian Government to implement a government-funded wage increase which invests in sector longevity and value, responds to growing population needs and ensures that the stabilisation of the ECEC workforce does not come at the cost of parents.

Whilst building a strong workforce of highly skilled early childhood educators and teachers, this cannot come at an increased cost to families.



# Background

## Who we are

As the national peak body in the Australian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector, the Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) represents more than 2,500 members with over 4,500 early learning services, which educate and care for more than 360,000 families throughout Australia.

We work on behalf of early learning service owners and operators, predominantly private, as a reputable source of evidence-based advice to policy makers and a trusted source of practical guidance and support to service operators and educators.

## The problem

The **single most pressing issue** facing our sector Australia-wide right now is the **critical workforce shortage of qualified educators**. There are simply not enough entrants into the sector to meet the demand and to meet our regulatory requirements for the child-educator ratios. Right now, we urgently need at least 10,000 well-trained, competent early childhood educators and Early Childhood Teachers to fill vacancies.

The National Skills Commission's Labour Market Insights indicate a national shortage of both Early Childhood Educators and Early Childhood (Pre-primary School) Teachers, with overall employment in Education and Training projected to grow by 149,600 (or 13.4%) over the five years to November 2026<sup>1</sup>.

A 2021 report<sup>2</sup> produced by CELA (Community Early Learning Australia), ELAA (Early Learning Association Australia) and CCC (Community Child Care Association) revealed that over 4,500 job vacancies (minimum) were advertised in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector in the first six months of 2021 and nearly half of all vacancies remained unfilled during that period. In 2022 the problem grew exponentially for the sector, compounded by low unemployment rates and the lasting economic and social impacts of COVID-19.

The latest National Skills Commission data shows there were over **7,000** ECEC roles advertised nationally at the end of September 2022.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile national figures from employment marketplace Seek.com show a **40 per cent increase** in job advertisements for early childhood teaching jobs and a **34 per cent increase** for childcare and outside school hours care jobs from April 2021 to April 2022<sup>4</sup>.

The Australian Government's 'Cheaper Child Care' legislation to improve affordability for families was successfully passed through Parliament in late November and is set to take effect in July 2023. Once implemented, these affordability measures are expected to increase demand for children's places in early learning services by **37,000 extra places** nationally.

This welcomed additional support for families was voted into law at the same time as the Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Secure Jobs, Better Pay) Bill 2022 (the Bill).

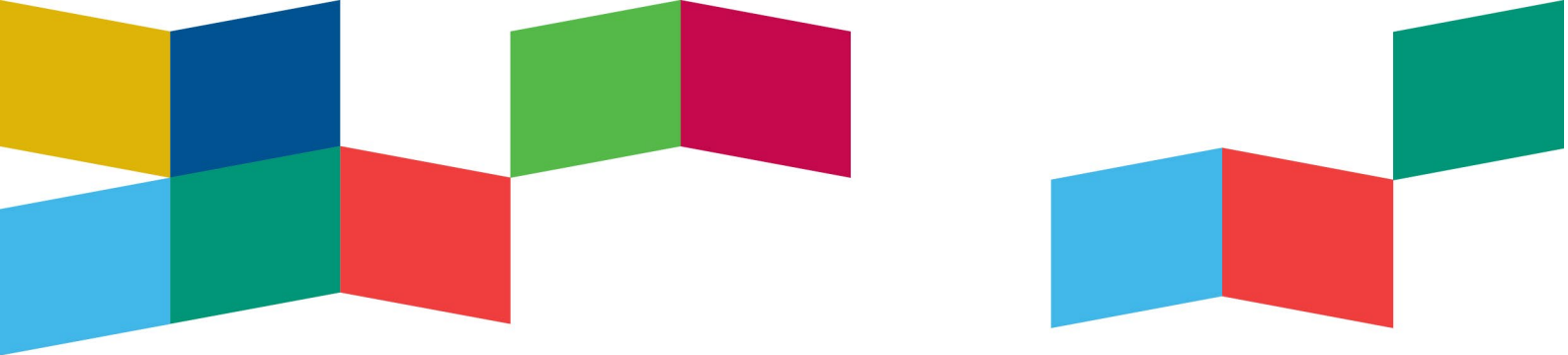
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<sup>1</sup> <https://labourmarketinsights.gov.au/industries/industry-details?industryCode=P>

<sup>2</sup> <https://bit.ly/CELAWorkforceReportNov2021>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/insights/2022-skills-priority-list>

<sup>4</sup> <https://thesector.com.au/2022/05/31/ecec-job-advertisements-have-doubled-since-covid-19-illustrating-the-depth-of-staffing-crisis/>



ACA commends the new Labor Government for its commitment to ensure greater affordability to families, via a higher Child Care Subsidy (CCS) rate. However, we urgently need **immediate** and **long-lasting** solutions to the workforce shortages to ensure that we maintain high quality, affordable early childhood education across the nation.

Whilst we applaud the Government's objective to 'get wages moving' but, like many other ECEC peak bodies, ACA is concerned that the multi-employer bargaining provisions of this new legislation could result in the imposition of higher wages across the whole sector without government planning or financial support.

This substantial investment to deliver greater affordability under the 'Cheaper Child Care' legislation will be negated if parents are **forced to bear the increase in costs from wage rises**.

Other state-based initiatives for pre-school and kindergarten will also create extra demand. Together, these initiatives will exacerbate the workforce crisis in long day care services as they are collectively rolled out in 2023.

**Across the board, there is a critical shortage of Cert III, Diploma and degree-qualified ECEC candidates.**

We know wage increases – amongst many other training and retention initiatives – are a central pillar to attracting and retaining the educators we urgently need.

But without government funding any wage increase, the resulting **cost impacts on families will be unbearable**.



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