

Subject: Submission in Response to 'A Path to Universal Early Childhood Education and Care' Draft Report

Dear Productivity Commission,

I am writing to you as a seasoned Educator and Leader from the Early Childhood sector, to provide a submission in response to the draft report. In my current role, I advise Approved Providers across Australia on various aspects of business management and operations. This submission reflects not only my professional insights but also the voices of those directly impacted by the current challenges within the sector.

While the Commission's report on early childhood education and care is both thorough and admirable in its scope, it notably falls short in investigating the precise contributing factors leading to the current poor working conditions within the sector. The report commendably addresses wage standards, yet it stops short of delving into the pervasive issue of wage theft, a significant concern that continues to plague the industry. Beyond this, the report also misses a crucial opportunity to explore the psychosocial aspects of the working environment. Wages, while undeniably important, represent only one facet of the problem. The report fails to adequately highlight or propose solutions to the psychosocial abuse rampant within the sector, an issue that profoundly impacts the mental health and overall well-being of educators and staff. This oversight is significant, as addressing such abuse is paramount to ensuring a healthy, sustainable working environment for those dedicated to nurturing and educating our youngest citizens.

#### Operational Disengagement of Providers

A significant concern is the detachment of many approved providers, particularly those managing only one or two services. Their lack of involvement in day-to-day operations and, in some cases, their physical absence from the state where the services are located, creates a disconnect. This detachment often leads to underfunding and insufficient support for staff, forcing educators to use their own resources for the children's needs. The sector needs providers who are not only financially invested but also actively engaged in the operational excellence of their services.

#### Inadequate Licensing and Maintenance Standards:

While the licensing process has improved, the current system, which primarily relies on a knowledge test, is insufficient. Getting providers to understand the importance of addressing things such as maintenance issues, allocate time for program planning, or investing in safety provisions is exceedingly difficult. This lack of action on vital elements of the service not only undermines the quality of care but also the morale of the educators.

#### Impact on Directors and Educators:

Many directors, initially driven by a passion for education, find themselves trapped in a cycle of cost-cutting and enrolment pressures. This shift from educational focus to a purely business-oriented approach depletes their passion and reduces the role of educators to mere supervisors, rather than teachers and caregivers. The industry's culture of undervaluing educators' time outside of direct supervision is detrimental to both staff morale and the quality of education.

#### Wage Issues and Working Conditions:

The sector is rife with wage issues, including unpaid overtime and allowances being included in the hourly rate, often below the award rate. This ongoing wage theft, coupled with the expectation of unpaid work, such as setting up before paid hours, is alarmingly normalised. Educators often face moral dilemmas, choosing between unpaid work to maintain ratios or compromising on the care of children.

#### Lack of Provider Accountability:

Many services are operated by individuals with little to no interest in learning about the sector they are part of. This lack of accountability leads to a disregard for basic health and safety standards, viewed as burdens rather than essential components of quality childcare. The sector is often seen merely as an investment opportunity, with a focus on profit over quality of care.

#### Direct Feedback from Educators:

The comments from educators on my \*TikTok post paint a stark picture of the sector. Issues range from being left out of ratio, inadequate resources, and poor dietary provisions to systemic issues like wage theft and overwork. These firsthand accounts highlight the urgent need for reform and the importance of listening to those on the front lines of childcare.

\*See appendix

In light of these insights, I urge the Commission to consider these deeper systemic issues in its final report. The sector needs comprehensive reform that goes beyond policy changes to address the ethical and operational challenges faced by educators and directors. I recommend establishing a platform for direct anonymous feedback from educators and a more rigorous accountability framework for providers.

Thank you for considering this additional submission. I am available for further discussion and collaboration on these critical issues.

Yours sincerely,

Cheyenne Carter

## Appendix

Comments from my TikTok post about the price cutting issues in the sector:

- I find even when you tell the department they don't do service checks regularly. They need to step up. Not just wait for reports to investigate
- More educators need to speak up about being left out of ratio. We need to let providers know that we will not stand for it!
- I worked at a centre that "borrowed" resources from the owners FAV centre for A&R only to take it all back the second we got our score 🙄
- I worked in after school care and they gave frozen bread as a snack and told the kids "just eat it, it will defrost in your mouth" 😬
- I worked at a centre that required educators to buy gloves & wipes because \*checks notes\* it's too expensive to order more.
- my 2yr old broke his thigh at daycare and no one could tell me how! like wth! this was after a management change and it quickly changed again
- I had a Jewish child who couldn't eat pork and I questioned him being given the veggie and ham bone soup. The cook said I could pick out the ham 🙄
- We were the cleaners of a centre for a year before they finally hired cleaners. Always over ratio, understaffed and underpaid and injuries dismissed.
- 4years as a child care worker and not one day that I could leave on time.why ?over ratio ,every single day 😬
- The out of ratio is tooo real, I work in oshc and our is and stuff is often cut
- my old centre we were told I we had to buy our own resources
- I work In OSHC and our meetings have to come out of our Admin hours because they don't want to pay us for meetings :/
- I have seen children cry when they are served plain rice, because of allergies. Some centres buy expensive gluten free bread and make cakes vegan.
- Worked in a center where the allergy child had plain white rice as they did not want to make a meal without cream!
- I saw someone remove cotton balls from an art work to reuse them 🤢🤢🤢
- I worked for a centre who's credit card would often be declined meaning coles wouldn't deliver. Id have to pick up food so the kids could eat.
- At my first centre (7 years ago) our director wanted us to use chux cloths to wipe babies faces to save on wipes.
- water on cereal, no money for milk. feeding babies tacos - chef "I only cook 1 meal for all children"
- This is why all the passionate educators and leaders are leaving to be replaced with quick trained staff.