



Inquiry into the Quality and Safety of Australia's Early Childhood Education and Care System

Federal Submission

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Body Safety Australia

Established in 2015, Body Safety Australia promotes childhoods free from violence, where children experience equitable, respectful relationships. We are committed to delivering inclusive, evidence-based body safety education that supports and celebrates all children, where *every child is in mind* and *no child is left behind*.

Body Safety Australia is uniquely positioned to speak on matters relating to early childhood education and care, childhood sexual abuse, technology facilitated abuse, and the intersection of these in within early childhood education and care settings. We deliver primary prevention programs in early childhood education and care environments nationwide, including in metropolitan, outer metropolitan, regional, rural and remote centres. Our work engages children, educators, parents, and carers, in their community to provide age appropriate, evidence-based body safety education. Through our professional development programs, we also address and dispel common myths and misinformation about child sexual abuse and perpetration (both in person and online) empowering communities to identify, disrupt and respond to child abuse.

Our work

In early childhood education settings, we deliver:

- Two Superstars sessions to preschool children between the ages of 3 and 5
- Parent, carer workshops focusing on body safety, grooming and hearing disclosures
- Professional development to early childhood educators and leaders focusing on body safety, understanding childhood sexual abuse, identifying and intercepting grooming, identifying behavioural and physical signs of sexual abuse, how digital technology is being used to groom and abuse children and responding to disclosures in a trauma healing manner
- Professional development on embedding the Child Safe Standards and National Principles for Child Safe Organisations in everyday practice
- Professional development in identifying and responding to suspected grooming or abuse of children in the early childhood workplace
- Professional development in collaborative child safety solutions with children from birth, their families and with diverse communities

Our policy approach

Body Safety Australia is committed to taking a child rights approach to everything we do. Children from all demographics across this country deserve early childhood experiences that are not only safe, but filled with joy, genuine connections, opportunities to develop confidence, and competence.

Much of the evidence informing policy in early childhood education and care is drawn from large scale and international studies (Talmon et al., 2024, AERO, 2022a, AERO, 2022b). To embed children's rights and voices, Body Safety Australia offers a unique approach to policy. Through rich and in-depth qualitative interviews with Australian experts who lead and deliver child sexual abuse primary prevention programs to children, we present new evidence to inform and guide legislative reform in Australian early childhood education and care settings. For this submission, six Body Safety Australia staff were interviewed on the 26/09/25 and 29/09/25, including Body Safety Australia's CEO, Head of Education and Community Development, Program Education Team Leader, Head of Research and two program educators. Our team of program educators work directly with children, and have backgrounds in early childhood education, primary and secondary education, sexology, social work, psychology and law. We are proud to have team members from First Nations, migrant, and LGBTQIA+ communities, whose experiences and

perspectives enrich our work and strengthen our reach and impact. Through our organisation's ten years of work in child sexual abuse primary prevention we are uniquely placed to speak on matters relating to safety in early childhood education and care.

Recommendations:

- 1. Address regulatory ritualism as it has compromised child safety**
- 2. Consider the safety needs and lack of services available to children living in non-urban areas**
- 3. Professional development must meet the needs of the early childhood education and care workforce to keep children safe**
- 4. Professional development must be mandatory, evaluated and funded appropriately to support early childhood education and care educators and keep children safe**

Introduction: best practice in early childhood education and care where “child safety is relational”

Body Safety Australia has operated for over ten years and through our direct work with children, educators and families in early childhood education and care we deeply understand that approaches to child safety must be relational (Cliffe & Solvason, 2022, Owens et al., 2024). The quality of relationships between our program educators and children, families, and other educators in early childhood education and care settings are crucial for child well-being and safety. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse evidenced that child safety is dependent on centring children’s voices and relationship building, where contextual safeguarding must incorporate a whole of community approach (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017). Best practice in early childhood education and care must be relational and designed from the outset to consider child rights, safety and prevention (eSafety Commissioner, 2025).

“Child safety is relational. Good educators will know how to support each child in the space due to the relationships they build. For example, they’ll know their favourite fidgets, how to engage them during the session, rather than removing them or constraining them because they’re going to distract other children.”

-Karol Crvenkovic, Body Safety Australia’s program educator and team leader

Best practice in early childhood education and care creates organisations that embed child safety in everyday thinking and practice, and where the importance of relational pedagogies for children’s optimal learning, development and safety is championed (CCYP, 2025, Cliffe & Solvason, 2022). Through secure relationships, children develop confidence and feel safe, respected and valued (Cliffe & Solvason, 2022, Sandseter et al., 2019). Educators who prioritise nurturing relationships through culturally safe and responsive interactions, provide children with consistent emotional support. We see relational safety between children and educators in early childhood education and care when children can name their educators as safe adults, reach out to educators when they are hurt, settle into an environment safely and securely, experience low conflict with other children, and educators are attuned to risk or conflict in the setting.

“If you have a child that has a particular safety with an educator that’s there, that is felt by us as educators, and that safe space. Whereas, when there’s casuals, high turnover, they don’t know the children as much, there isn’t a strong relationship base. So, if you bring up a safety concern with them, they won’t know what to do, whereas the educator will likely know the child. And have built rapport with that child that will allow them to state if they are feeling unsafe.”

-Karol

To keep children safe, educators must balance nurturing individual needs, fostering group dynamics and keeping in mind children’s diverse personalities, developmental needs and cultural backgrounds. Educators who build genuine trust and value every child individually create an emotionally safe environment. This involves not just offering consistent support and encouragement but also modelling pro social behaviour and effective communication. Consistent and safe relationships between educators and children define safety and protect children from harm. This approach to child safety has been severely undermined in recent years. In part this is due to low wages, staffing shortages, high turnover, lower qualification requirements, issues with meeting ratios, among other factors. More recently regulatory ritualism has contributed to this growing list of factors creating vulnerability in the sector.

1. Address regulatory ritualism as it has compromised child safety

Body Safety Australia’s program educators have seen an increase in regulatory ritualism, where the sector has lost sight of child safety and rights (Rogers, 2021). Regulatory ritualism has meant that educators have been pushed to prioritise compliance and regulation, without being given

adequate resources, support and funding to upskill educators and keep children safe. In effect initiatives that aim to improve safety and reduce harm are failing to address the underlying social and cultural conditions that enable abuse and neglecting to promote and facilitate the relational aspects that increase safety and wellbeing.

Recent attempts to create sector wide change relating to child safety through and compliance with the National Quality Standards (NQS) mean that funding could be stripped from centres who do not meet these (Harper, 2025). Educators and staff are expected to be aware of their roles and responsibilities in identifying and responding to children at risk of abuse, neglect and sexual abuse. However, compliance checks required of centre directors have fed a culture of distrust in professionals and have created a generalised fear amongst educators, especially men. Educators feel the weight of responsibility, are heavily scrutinised and vulnerable to criticism, and many are thinking of leaving the already depleted profession. This hyper focus on safety compliance has created a risk adverse environment for educators, where they are left feeling fearful, undermining children's rights and safety (Roberts, 2017).

We believe that regulators are only as good as the power and independence they have to regulate the early childhood education and care sector. However, they must also be expected to enforce more than the minimum standards and requirements. For example, too many centres are labelled as 'Working Towards NQS'. Centres must be expected, and appropriately resourced, to achieve beyond this minimum. Currently, providers who don't meet appropriate standards are given 48 hours to notify families of the compliance action and have up to six months to demonstrate improvement. However, this easily becomes a compliance tick box exercise to demonstrate improvement, over implementing much needed long lasting structural and cultural change to keep children safe. Children's safety must not be viewed as a tick box exercise, as this sets a low bar.

"Meeting compliance with the National Quality Framework Standards often results in working towards compliance, and this has become the primary aim for centres. However, we have lost sight of the fact that a centre has not met the safety standards, highlighting a very real issue. This means that our standard around improving services is to meet minimum standards. Children's safety must not be viewed as a tick box for compliance or something that sets a low bar. This has meant that child safety is not about constantly improving standards, it's more about reaching the minimum standards."

-Lauren French, Body Safety Australia's Head of Education and Community Development

In recent years when cases of alleged child sexual abuse have been reported in the media, questions have been raised around why educators have failed to report abuse. Policy and procedures relating to reporting child sexual abuse are often unclear to educators, where training has not equipped educators to be able to confidently identify and report child sexual abuse. We have seen centre educators defer to senior staff over managing disclosures themselves. This highlights how a disclosure can become lost in a policy process when not actioned by the person who originally observed the disclosure. Professional development is integral.

"Some educators become almost paralysed with indecision due to being scared of repercussions, due to not knowing the process or what the next steps are."

-Lauren

Through our work we see how experienced and trusted educator relationships with children positively impact child safety and development. Due to fears relating to safety and compliance we have seen an increase in individualised approaches to child safety, where a heavy responsibility is being placed on educators, leading to an increase in hypervigilant supervision over children. An over reliance and focus on supervision decreases an educator's capacity for connection. It also reduces educator capacity to be available for a child who is needing safety, in particular to disclose grooming or abuse.

“If the workforce is empowered and supported, then building in child rights and meaningful relationships into supervision over children occurs organically. However, without these, supervision becomes hypervigilant and disconnected supervision, where children are maybe less likely to get hurt but also less likely to learn and experience care.”

-Deanne Carson, Body Safety Australia’s CEO

Relationship building is important when bringing in external providers to ensure the safety of children. It is important that we have discussions with centres before and after our sessions to understand the needs of the centre and the children. In addition, it is critical that we can discuss child safety, especially after a disclosure. However, structural issues within the sector, such as the privatisation of the sector and the casualisation of the workforce, prevent us from developing relationships and discussing child safety. We have noticed an increase in centre inductions relating to child sexual abuse for external providers, new staff and visitors, through online educational modules, which do not include building communities of safety and are perfunctory in nature.

“The new induction that a lot of centres are doing are very basic, and you’ll easily induct yourself about child safety.”

-Karol

In addition, the sign-in process to kindergartens has intensified, creating anxiety for our program educators because it is preventing us from having conversations with centre staff, in particular after a session. While these new ‘check in’ practices have only been in place for a short period of time, and we have already seen a decrease in community engagement due to the onerous nature of compliance checks. This includes decreases in volunteering and reluctance from local businesses to supply resources. We are concerned that without evidence that these processes are effective, we are losing essential connections for children in early childhood education and care.

“However, the sign in process to the centre is intensive. When I leave a centre though, there is no time for a conversation or feedback. We are teaching body safety to children, and it feels like a tick exercise only as you arrive.”

-Karol

Maintaining confidentiality in early childhood education and care is crucial for building relationships based on trust between families and educators. By adhering to legal requirements and ethical standards, early childhood education and care services must protect the privacy of all individuals involved in an incident, ensuring a safe and supportive environment for children to learn and grow. However, this risk averse environment has created a lack of transparency within early childhood education and care and the child protection system. These systems of safety were created to ensure confidentiality for victims; but the reality of this means that child safety becomes a gatekeeping and compliance exercise, failing to keep children safe. As child safety experts, we are often left unable to support children due to confidentiality concerns and parents, carers and educators are not always made fully aware of an incident. When parents and educators can work collaboratively in partnership and have the right information, the community is better supported to act decisively to identify risks, raise concerns and protect children (Lima et al., 2024).

“Child safety becomes a gatekeeping and compliance exercise, which isn’t necessarily taking in what’s best, and for us as external providers, coming in with child safety expertise and focus, it’s not always seen as a benefit, or help, or a support to this child’s safety and context. But rather, you’re not part of the group that gets to know or gets to get informed or is allowed to have the knowledge to adequately support a child. I’m sure it was set up with almost the idea of transparency, but I don’t think it considers real world situations.”

-Lauren

Risk avoidance and confidentiality inadvertently create a barrier to knowledge sharing, particularly relating to body safety and consent. For example, a child may witness another child being harmed, and due to confidentiality, parents are not informed their child witnessed an incident to protect the victim's privacy. However, this prevents communities from responding to an incident as it arises and speaking to children about harm.

"I'm speaking to this hyper focus on risk and avoiding any risk and how that intersects with the practicalities around safety and knowledge sharing. For example, parents are not being informed that something has happened at a centre because their child was not directly harmed, but what if their child witnessed it? The parent doesn't know what their child has witnessed something, and we know that when children witness things they are also impacted. How can parents talk to their children about what they witnessed? It would be breaching the confidentiality of the other child for them to be told that. So, there's a tricky line there, who gets to know."

-Deanne

An overreliance on compliance, without consistent staffing and safe relationships with children, creates unsafe environments for children. Relationship building in early childhood education and care is integral to child sexual abuse primary prevention approaches, where whole of communities are required to do the work together to keep children safe.

2. Consider the safety needs and lack of services available to children living in non-urban areas

Body Safety Australia is committed to the premise that all children deserve safe and equitable access to early childhood education and care regardless of their postcode. We operate in a variety of settings nationwide, including metropolitan, outer metropolitan, rural, regional and remote areas, including on Country in Aboriginal communities. We believe early childhood education and care in non-urban areas is often overlooked yet offer important insights for child safety. For example, educators in rural communities often have a greater understanding of the context situated around a child, their family setting and needs, as educators are often related to or know the children socially.

Children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families, regional and remote areas, and migrant communities, are more likely to attend low quality early childhood education and care services. This is due to issues of affordability, limited availability, and workforce shortages. This is despite being the ones who would benefit most from high quality early childhood education and care (Melhuish et al., 2015, Hurley et al., 2024).

"How quickly the government have moved and how they haven't consulted comprehensively. They haven't done a full consultation with rural, regional, remote spaces that this has come very much from a middle-class lens where this idea of choice is embedded in the conversation."

-Deanne

High quality early childhood education and care services are not available to all children, and particularly those living in non-urban areas. There is a concentration of for-profit early childhood education and care services in metropolitan areas, and 'childcare deserts' have been created in outer urban areas where three or more families are competing for one enrolment space (Hurley et al., 2024). This has been recognised by the Victorian Government, who through 'Best Start, Best Life' have started to deliver childcare centres where Victorians need it most (Victoria State Government, 2025). To address Australia's housing shortage, the Albanese Labor Government is making it easier to buy, build and rent housing, where new homes are being built in outer urban areas. It is in these expanding areas on the outskirts of major cities, where new homes and childcare centres are being built to meet demand, that we have great concern for child safety.

Children are missing out on learning opportunities from experienced educators and are at greater risk of child maltreatment (Rogers et al., 2025).

“This idea of choice isn’t real, and when we talk about the geographic areas, we actually fail to see that the outer metropolitan regions are much more vulnerable than rural and regional areas because they are filled with brand new centres that are filled with educators who have been in the workforce less than a year. A lot of directors are young and under supported and have been in the workforce, in the profession for less than two years. You know, so they’re inexperienced and there isn’t choice.”

-Deanne

Services in non-urban areas are inundated with demand, creating high levels of stress and burn out, contributing to experienced educators leaving the sector (CELA, 2024). In addition, in outer metropolitan areas there is a lack of qualified and experienced staff, where they are not adequately equipped to recognise when children are struggling (Stein et al., 2022). For example, it is common to see children being ‘disciplined’ through our programming, where stressed staff, who are under resourced, physically remove children, so as to not distract other children. However, this means that children are missing out on important body safety education.

“Sometimes we visit centres in the outskirts of Melbourne where most of the educators themselves are displaying behaviour consistent with vicarious trauma. They are numb to disclosures of abuse; they seem unaware when children are expressing distress or seeking comfort. When we ask about self-care, they can’t think of a single thing they do outside work that brings them joy. These educators are really burnt out.”

-Deanne

In border town areas between states and territories, child protection becomes even more complicated due to predators taking advantage of being situated between jurisdictions. This could be greatly reduced by having a national working with children check and information sharing system. Until then, perpetrators will continue to border-hop to avoid detection and escape justice. This highlights how responses to such crimes can be ineffective when authorities lack the ability to collaborate and share resources across border and territory boundaries, greatly impacting child safety in these areas. In addition, due to the under resourcing of the child protection system, we also see regional educators become disillusioned due to not seeing positive outcomes for children after reporting.

“When we work in towns that border two or more states, we often hear educators’ express reluctance to raise concerns about a child’s welfare. They say that the minute they do, the child disappears over the border into a different jurisdiction.”

-Deanne

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities continue to face significant challenges due to the impacts of colonisation, including historic and ongoing discrimination and exclusion, systemic removal, intergenerational trauma, dislocation from land and culture, and community disempowerment (Sydenham, 2019). Child Safe Standards and National Principles for Child Safe Organisations reinforce that cultural safety is vital, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people (CCYP, 2025). Early childhood education and care services that work in community or closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families must ensure that services are able to build trusting relationships and partner with families in culturally safe ways to protect children from unnecessary removal (French, 2023, Rogers et al., 2025, Bronfenbrenner, 1994, Sydenham, 2019). However, fears relating to the removal of children for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families continue to exist (Sydenham, 2019).

Lauren, Body Safety Australia’s Head of Education and Community Development and a proud Karajarri woman, spoke to the challenges associated with the rigidity of the child protection

system, the complexities for community and how it relies on individual educator confidence to recognise and report on child sexual abuse. Lauren is also insistent on taking a strengths-based approach to working with First Nations and other minority communities (French, 2023).

“When you're in a safe space to actually unpack the very real risks around child safety, reporting and over representation, risk of child removal, talking through that as a team, and with educators want to do their job well and meet their mandatory requirements but are also keeping children at the forefront and can ask in these trainings, how do we actually do wraparound support? How do we do this from a community lens? Because they do know the community they work with and it's not as simple as call child protection. It is about what are the factors surrounding it. But if all they had is modules on an online space, that put all children in one box and all communities and families in one box, then they're never going to be able to meet the needs.”

-Lauren

At Body Safety Australia our professional development for educators encourages exploration of these challenges in culturally safe, considered and informed ways. We prioritise support and tailor our programs to meet the specific needs of each community. In addition, the facilitator must create safe spaces so that educators can openly explore challenging topics, again highlighting how integral relationships building in early childhood education and care is for child safety.

3. Professional development must meet the needs of the early childhood education and care workforce to keep children safe

We understand that relationships in early childhood education and care are integral to child safety, however due to structural issues, educators are currently under resourced and not provided with evidence based professional development, in particular relating to child safety. Our long-term vision is to equip educators with the resources, knowledge and confidence required to keep children safe from child sexual abuse. We have been delivering in-person, on-site abuse prevention professional development for over ten years. In that time, we have seen the sector shift and move cautiously from conceptualisations of ‘stranger danger’ to now understanding that it is those closest to children, including family members, who are statistically most likely to cause harm to children (Mathews et al., 2023). The Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS) showed that over two generations child sexual abuse incidence has reduced when involving abusive fathers, male relatives living in the home, male relatives not resident in the home, and other known male adults (Mathews et al., 2024). This downward trend has been in part attributed to primary prevention programs and efforts (Mathews et al., 2024).

Through the delivery of our Superstars child sexual abuse prevention programming our program educators receive disclosures from children of experiences of violence and child sexual abuse. In term 3, 2025, our staff documented signs of concerning atypical behaviour in 20 children, resulting in six calls to The Orange Door, and 12 reports to child protection. The Orange Door provide help for people who are experiencing or using family violence or who need support with the care and wellbeing of children and young people. We also identified two cases of reportable conduct within centres. Due to confidentiality, we rarely have access to identifying information on the child and therefore work collaboratively with centre staff to make reports.

Too often we observe that, despite having completed recent mandatory training online modules, early childhood education and care educators cannot identify signs of possible child sexual abuse, do not understand the process of reporting, and sometimes actively downplay signs of child sexual abuse. While often the child we identify as needing support has already been identified by early childhood education and care staff, too frequently they have not. There is too much confusion and a demonstrated underreporting of child sexual abuse. This is less evident in centres where staff have consistent relationships with children, are an empowered and

supported workforce, have received thorough, in person, ongoing professional development, and can focus on centring children's rights and relationship building.

"When a disclosure or a concern about a child comes up and an educator directs me to the manager, that's concerning because it's clear there's no relationship with the child and they are unclear on reporting. Whereas if I do bring up a concerning behaviour and an educator goes, yep, they're going through this, or this is the context, I know that child is safe because these people know what's going on for the child."

-Karol

Through the pilot evaluation of our *See It, Say It* professional development program it was clear that the greatest hurdle for educators to responding to reportable conduct is not just a lack of access to comprehensive professional development, but also a fear of consequences to reporting and a lack of confidence. Before our training, only 5% of educators reported having no barriers to reporting and said they would always act on a concern that a colleague was grooming, abusing or neglecting a child. However, after training, 74% felt very confident to act, while the remaining 26% reported improved confidence. Early childhood education and care staff confidence is important. Without it, incidences of child maltreatment will continue to go unreported, children will continue to be overlooked for care and support, and predators will continue to abuse other children in their care.

Early childhood education and care staff want to access further training and development (McFarland et al., 2025) Since July 2025 we have experienced a staggering increase in requests for professional development, specifically around grooming, reportable conduct and educator behaviour. For many, though, this hasn't been seen as just one part of a multilayered shared solution but just greater accountability on the shoulders of individual educators. This highlights how pervasive systemic issues are in early childhood education and care, where educators are not feeling supported at their places of work.

"We might be having more educators reaching out at the moment for professional development but also there's a great deal pressure on educators individually to address all of the safety concerns without feeling supported, and this being either the perception or the reality of being unsupported by their employer."

-Deanne

It is important to identify what kind of professional development is needed, how it is delivered and what makes it accessible for educators. Factors that influence decisions about professional development are more often those of cost, ease of access and with the lowest administrative burden. As a result, early childhood education and care workplace inductions and professional development are often pre-recorded modules, however if training does not include opportunities for multiple delivery modes, dialogue and connection, and the integration of authentic reflection exercises, it can have a negative impact on information retention and motivation (Sakr et al., 2022). We know that even when we deliver parent/carer and educator workshops to a single service in a live online format rather than face-to-face, participants are less likely to engage with the content and ask questions. Cost cutting decisions, such as live online delivery to large numbers of staff across multiple services or pre-recorded content (that doesn't allow for adaptation of interaction), fails to capacity build educators to create child safe environments.

This is compounded further by the fact that a significant percentage of early childhood education and care educators, teachers and managers are migrant workers, many of whom have English as their second or third language. Professional development relating to abuse prevention and reporting must allow for relationship and trust building, adaptation to the needs of the educators including promoting cultural competence and where possible, be delivered in-person. It is these kinds of rich conversations that open space for learning and development without judgement or

shame. Online course content fails to support educators and while significantly more affordable, offer poor value for that investment.

“I was at a centre where there was a lead educator who was from Russia and her staff were significantly younger than her and culturally she told me that it’s not appropriate that older staff would talk to younger staff about private parts. It was deemed inappropriate. So, I came in and supported her to have that conversation and remove that cultural barrier so that they could feel comfortable talking to the children about it.”

-Karol

This year we have received greater numbers of requests for professional development. We are, paradoxically, also aware that some employers and educators fear that seeking support and education may be interpreted as an admission of poor practice rather than a commitment to best practice. Professional development must offer more than a tick box exercise for child safety and ought to be viewed as a holistic part of an ongoing commitment to child safety, rather than implemented only when needing to respond to harm.

“The other piece of fear and the barrier that that fear causes, is that no one wants to name that they aren’t doing it well (professional development) because of the risk of media backlash, family, parent backlash and not feeling supported by their employer. Also, all that funding is wrapped up again in a compliance and box ticking model and there’s not space to move beyond, for it to be an ongoing part of educator professional development. There’s no funding to empower, educate and build confidence in a team beyond a minimum requirement.”

-Lauren

A safe and supportive workplace is dependent on the broader culture of the centre or institution, and this has an impact on the quality and safety of the service, impacting both educators and children alike (CCYP, 2025). Employment practices and organisational responses to child sexual abuse often focus on the responsibilities of individual educators to identify, respond to, and create child safe environments. However, for educators many barriers exist to implementing child safe standards, due to many competing priorities; a lack of time, lack of awareness of standards and a lack of training (McFarland et al., 2025). Thus, accessible, streamlined, whole-of service approaches to professional development will reduce the burden on early childhood education and care professionals and create safer environments for children. However, to achieve best practice professional development and support for early childhood education and care, funding must be prioritised.

4. Professional development must be mandatory, evaluated, and funded appropriately to support early childhood education and care educators and keep children safe

Best practice in early childhood education and care means that child safety must be relational and designed from the outset to consider child rights, safety and prevention (eSafety Commissioner, 2025). We have evidenced in this policy submission why relationships in early childhood education and care are integral to keeping children safe. In addition, we highlighted how regulatory ritualism over burdens educators with process and compliance measures, inevitably preventing educators from keeping children safe due to structural issues impacting the sector and a lack of support and funding. We have showcased how important professional development is for the sector, however, also why it must be delivered in person, and be responsive to educator need, in particular relating to accessibility. Training and professional development in early childhood education and care sector must be mandatory and funded by the government. In addition, funding must be provided to ensure equitable access of training including costs associated with travel, centre closure or backfill and based on the needs of the children the service supports.

“We’ve had people wanting our training where it’s very clear that this is coming out of other areas of budget because it can’t come out of other funding. They’re moving funding around and taking money out of somewhere else. Or it’s viewed as something that’s almost so advanced that it can’t be put in standard budget funding.”

-Lauren

Funding professional development for early childhood education and care means also investing in the those delivering professional development to the sector. It is important that organisations are safeguarded and can experience quality assurance and training. The early childhood education and care sector ought to have choice relating to the kind of professional development they require and to best keep children and their educators safe. To do this, a minimum evidence-base for professional development must be established. There also must be an investment in academic research to define what ‘child safety’ training is required and what best practice is in the delivery of this training. Currently, research relating to the prevention of harm is lacking and relegated to silos based on sector or the harm we intend to prevent. Effective prevention of child sexual abuse and violence in early childhood education and care must be interdisciplinary drawing on the expertise of early childhood education, violence prevention, health promotion, child psychology, cultural knowledges, law enforcement, digital safety practitioners, and inviting the participation of parents, carers and children. Therefore, the government must not only invest in ongoing research and development of what best practice looks like but ensure that this investment draws from an already established wider body of knowledge.

To achieve best practice in child safety, and to ensure that educators are afforded evidenced based training, a national register of providers ought to be established. These providers must showcase they meet the independently set criteria. We support the Federal Government providing funding to the states and territories specifically for one of the following:

- Have an open tender process that allows for major providers but also supports the evaluation and application from First Nations, LGBTQIA+, migrant and refugee, faith and disability specialists.
- Have a menu of approved providers who meet rigorous evaluation criteria that early childhood settings can select from. In this case, funding would be provided to the early childhood education and care centre rather than directly to the provider, like Victoria’s School Readiness Funding or South Australia’s Pre-school Boost.

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