

Early childhood education and care

Policy position

December 2025

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Acknowledgements

The National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse (National Centre) respectfully acknowledges and celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations and we pay our respects to ancestors and Elders past and present.

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culture and lore continue to lead Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and acknowledge the tireless work to pursue justice outcomes for children and young people.

The National Centre supports decisions affecting people's lives being fundamentally informed by those people. And upholds truth telling and agreement making for justice as essential components of healing.

We seek to honour the lived and living expertise of all victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, harnessing all ages, cultures, abilities and backgrounds, and commit to substantially addressing the harm of child sexual abuse, now and well into the future.

We recognise that there are children and young people today who are experiencing sexual abuse and dedicate ourselves to doing all we can to expedite and promote their effective protection and care.

Our Commitment

The establishment of a national centre to raise awareness and understanding of the impacts of child sexual abuse, support help-seeking and guide best practice advocacy and support and therapeutic treatment was a key recommendation (9.9) of the 2017 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The Royal Commission identified that ongoing national leadership is necessary to improve outcomes for victims and survivors of past child sexual abuse and prevent future child sexual abuse.

Established in late 2021, the National Centre is a partnership between three respected organisations with strong histories of leadership in responding to child sexual abuse - Australian Childhood Foundation, Blue Knot Foundation and the Healing Foundation (each a Founding Member). The National Centre has an integrated governance structure that embeds the expertise of adults with lived and living experience of child sexual abuse, the rich strength of knowledge of First Nations Peoples and the voices of children and young people, as well as the expertise of researchers, practitioners, justice organisations, corporate entities, government and policy leaders.

At its core, the National Centre is a symbol of hope and an essential vehicle for action for many victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. Its vision is for a community where children are safe and victims and survivors are supported to heal and recover, free of stigma and shame – a future without child sexual abuse.

To achieve its vision, the National Centre:

- ensures the knowledge and voice of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse is at the core of all of its activities
- commissions critical research
- builds the workforce capability of organisations working with victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.
- strives to raise community awareness of the nature of child sexual abuse and how to prevent it.

Sustained national action is needed to make Australia's childcare system safe for children

High-profile criminal prosecutions and sustained investigative journalism have revealed widespread instances of child sexual abuse in Australia's childcare system across 2025. The allegations raised have been distressing and shocking for many Australians. They represent an appalling failure of the systems designed to protect children.

The National Centre recognises the courage of the victims and survivors and their families who have come forward to share their experiences, many of whom have done so at significant personal cost. Victims and survivors have been thrust into complex police investigations, confronting health processes (including screening for infectious diseases)¹ and face the lifelong impacts of child sexual abuse.²

This must be a turning point for reform.

Systemic failures in childcare

Investigations and allegations have raised a host of concerns about systemic failures across Australia's childcare system that have allowed child sexual abuse to occur in environments that are meant to nurture and protect children. They include:

- The **lack of a strong national approach to child safety**, with inconsistent approaches across jurisdictions and a lack of national leadership.³
- **Fragmented, inconsistent and ineffective regulation** allowing perpetrators to exploit weaknesses;⁴ in some cases, centres are issued with numerous breaches without serious action being taken by regulators.⁵
- **Unsustainable growth in the for-profit childcare sector** without commensurate investment and oversight in quality and safeguards.⁶
- A failing **Working with Children Check system** with checks missing, expired or not shared effectively.⁷
- **Insufficient training and education to detect and respond** to child sexual abuse⁸ and high rates of children exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours with insufficient staff supervision and training to respond.⁹
- Evidence suggests the childcare sector is being **targeted by premeditated child sex offenders**. Offenders are sharing tips on the dark web and sharing child sexual abuse material from childcare settings on encrypted online platforms.¹⁰ Despite the high number of alleged abusers, most cases are never reported to police and of those, only a very small percentage are successfully prosecuted.¹¹

This is a sector in crisis and reforms are urgently needed.

Urgent reforms should be a national priority

The National Centre has urged unified national action on child safety in early childhood education and care, with strong nationally consistent measures including:¹²

- a mandatory national register of early childhood workers¹³
- improved information sharing within and between states and territories¹⁴
- strengthened and harmonised Working with Children Checks across jurisdictions¹⁵
- mandatory child safety training for all practitioners¹⁶
- stronger oversight of compliance with child safety laws and standards.¹⁷

The National Centre welcomed the recent Victorian Government commitment to urgently implement all 22 recommendations from Victoria's Rapid Child Safety Review.¹⁸ However, that review also exposed national-level weaknesses that demand strong federal leadership and a coordinated response. Key Victorian reforms with national implications include:

- the creation of an independent regulator
- a comprehensive overhaul of Working with Children Checks and introduction of an Early Childhood Worker Register with enhanced information sharing
- a best practice approach to recruitment and induction, updating training and expanding professional support programs for early childhood educators
- promotion of evidence-based advice for parents on prevention education, grooming and how to make complaints.¹⁹

These measures are vital to building a system that is proactive, accountable and capable of enforcing the highest standards of child safety.

Unified national action

The National Centre welcomes commitments made in August and October 2025 by the Standing Council of Attorneys-General²⁰ and Education Ministers²¹ towards unified national action, as well as reforms to the National Law passed in November 2025.²²

Each state and territory government has also individually adopted or committed to some important reforms over the course of 2025.²³ Further recommendations for reform are likely to flow from current inquiries into early childhood education and care, including by the Australian Senate and the NSW and Victorian parliaments.²⁴

While these initial reforms and commitments are welcomed, there remains much work to be done to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse and to ensure national consistency. The National Centre continues to call for reforms to be led by strong national leadership to ensure a robust and consistent approach across the country.

Unified national action is needed

The National Centre recommends that the Australian Government take a centralised leadership role in coordinating a suite of consistent, national reforms. The National Centre recommends:

- appointment of a Cabinet Minister for Children to drive reforms
- an annual child wellbeing budget, increasing accountability and transparency on national spend and commitments to children
- establishment of a national Early Childhood Education and Care Commission.

A blueprint for change

The National Centre stands ready to work with governments, regulators, the sector and those with lived and living experience to strengthen the frameworks that protect children from child sexual abuse. This blueprint for change sets out actions needed to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse in early childhood settings.

A Cabinet Minister for Children.

An annual child wellbeing budget statement.

Establishment of a national Early Childhood Education and Care Commission to lead and coordinate national reforms across all states and territories.

A review of the early childhood education and care system to ensure it prioritises safety and considers the funding and market model.

**National
Leadership**

The childcare sector should be subject to stronger regulation, independent monitoring and oversight, and enforceable child safeguarding measures.

Increased resources and stronger powers for regulators to act swiftly and to issue penalties for non-compliance.

Closer cooperation between regulators and police across jurisdictions to identify childcare staff engaged in online child abuse networks.

Regulation

A national review of staffing requirements in early childhood settings to ensure adequate supervision of children at all times.

Improved workforce conditions to attract and retain qualified, fairly paid, and well-supported educators.

Development of a national wellbeing strategy to address staff turnover and burnout.

Greater professional learning and support as well as practice guidance for early childhood educators.

Workforce

Improved 'lines of sight' in early childhood settings through a building grants program funded by the Australian Government.

A comprehensive national trial of CCTV in early childhood settings.

The Australian Government should invest in systems to ensure that the distribution of child sexual abuse material produced by childcare offenders and shared through online networks is being actively disrupted.

**Physical and
digital safety**

The Australian Government should lead work with states and territories to implement nationally consistent reportable conduct schemes, reflecting best practice.

The Australian Government should improve – and require providers and regulators to improve – the information available to parents about early childhood education and care providers relating to safety, quality and compliance.

Regulators and early childhood services should be required to gather and publish data relating to child safety, including on complaints and referrals to police.

**Information
sharing**

Endnotes

¹ See eg <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-07-01/childcare-worker-alleged-sexual-assaults-melbourne-west/105480228>.

² See Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. *Final Report: Impacts*. Commonwealth of Australia; 2017, at https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_-_volume_3_impacts.pdf.

³ See eg [From the childcare scandal to regressive 'tough on crime' policies, Australia is failing to protect its children | Anne Hollonds | The Guardian](#); [Child safety and wellbeing must be made a national priority | Australian Human Rights Commission](#).

⁴ See eg [National Centre urges unified national action on child safety in early childhood education and care - The National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse](#); [From the childcare scandal to regressive 'tough on crime' policies, Australia is failing to protect its children | Anne Hollonds | The Guardian](#); Australian Childhood Foundation, Submission to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee: Quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, p9, October 2025, at [Sub37_ACF \(2\).pdf](#).

⁵ See eg [Paedophiles exploiting Australia's broken childcare system as safeguards crumble, Adele Ferguson, Chris Gillett, Jade Toomey and Dylan Welch, 27 October 2025 at Paedophiles exploiting Australia's broken childcare system as safeguards crumble - ABC News](#); Hunting Ground, ABC Four Corners episode , 27 October 2025.

⁶ See eg [Paedophiles exploiting Australia's broken childcare system as safeguards crumble, Adele Ferguson, Chris Gillett, Jade Toomey and Dylan Welch, 27 October 2025 at Paedophiles exploiting Australia's broken childcare system as safeguards crumble - ABC News](#); Hunting Ground, ABC Four Corners episode , 27 October 2025; Childlight East Asia and Pacific Hub, Submission to the Education and Employment References Committee, Inquiry into the quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, October 2025, p2, at [Sub12_Childlight \(1\).pdf](#); Australian Childhood Foundation, Submission to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee: Quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, pp18, 20-21, October 2025, at [Sub37_ACF \(2\).pdf](#); Early childhood professors release six-point plan to fix 'broken' childcare system, Adele Ferguson & Chris Gillett, ABC Investigations, 11 November 2025 at [Early childhood professors release six-point plan to fix 'broken' childcare system - ABC News](#).

⁷ See eg [Paedophiles exploiting Australia's broken childcare system as safeguards crumble, Adele Ferguson, Chris Gillett, Jade Toomey and Dylan Welch, 27 October 2025 at Paedophiles exploiting Australia's broken childcare system as safeguards crumble - ABC News](#); Hunting Ground, ABC Four Corners episode , 27 October 2025; Australian Childhood Foundation, Submission to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee: Quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, pp9-12, October 2025, at [Sub37_ACF \(2\).pdf](#).

⁸ See eg [Paedophiles exploiting Australia's broken childcare system as safeguards crumble, Adele Ferguson, Chris Gillett, Jade Toomey and Dylan Welch, 27 October 2025 at Paedophiles exploiting Australia's broken childcare system as safeguards crumble - ABC News](#); Hunting Ground, ABC Four Corners episode , 27 October 2025; Childlight East Asia and Pacific Hub, Submission to the Education and Employment References Committee, Inquiry into the quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, October 2025, p4, at [Sub12_Childlight \(1\).pdf](#).

⁹ See [Hundreds of cases of child-on-child abuse are the fresh childcare system horror, Adele Ferguson, Chris Gillett, Jade Toomey, Dylan Welch, 30 October 2025, at Hundreds of cases of child-on-child abuse are the fresh childcare system horror - ABC News](#).

¹⁰ See eg [Paedophiles exploiting Australia's broken childcare system as safeguards crumble, Adele Ferguson, Chris Gillett, Jade Toomey and Dylan Welch, 27 October 2025 at Paedophiles exploiting Australia's broken childcare system as safeguards crumble - ABC News](#); Hunting Ground, ABC Four Corners episode , 27 October 2025; Childlight East Asia and Pacific Hub, Submission to the Education and Employment References Committee, Inquiry into the quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, October 2025, at [Sub12_Childlight \(1\).pdf](#).

¹¹ See eg [Paedophiles exploiting Australia's broken childcare system as safeguards crumble, Adele Ferguson, Chris Gillett, Jade Toomey and Dylan Welch, 27 October 2025 at Paedophiles exploiting Australia's broken childcare system as safeguards crumble - ABC News](#); Hunting Ground, ABC Four Corners episode , 27 October 2025; Childlight East Asia and Pacific Hub, Submission to the Education and Employment References Committee, Inquiry into the quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, October 2025, p4, at [Sub12_Childlight \(1\).pdf](#).

¹² See [National Centre urges unified national action on child safety in early childhood education and care - The National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse](#); [National Centre reaffirms urgent call for child safety reform following ABC investigation - The National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse](#).

¹³ See also [Rapid Child Safety Review](#), Jay Weatherill AO & Pam White PSM, 15 August 2025, recommendation 4, at [Rapid Child Safety Review | vic.gov.au](#); The Alannah & Madeline Foundation's response to Four Corners' report on sexual abuse in childcare, 28 October 2025, at [The Alannah & Madeline Foundation's... | Alannah & Madeline Foundation](#).

¹⁴ See also [Rapid Child Safety Review](#), Jay Weatherill AO & Pam White PSM, 15 August 2025, recommendations 7, 8, at [Rapid Child Safety Review | vic.gov.au](#); The Alannah & Madeline Foundation's response to Four Corners' report on sexual abuse in childcare, 28 October 2025, at [The Alannah & Madeline Foundation's... | Alannah & Madeline Foundation](#); Knowmore Legal Service, Quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, Submission to the Education and Employment References Committee, recommendation 12, 3 October 2025, at [submission-quality-and-safety-of-australias-early-childhood-education-and-care-system-cth.pdf](#); Australian Childhood Foundation, Submission to the Senate Education

and Employment References Committee: Quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, pp9-12, October 2025, at [Sub37_ACF \(2\).pdf](#).

¹⁵ See also Rapid Child Safety Review, Jay Weatherill AO & Pam White PSM, 15 August 2025, recommendation 6, at [Rapid Child Safety Review | vic.gov.au](#); Knowmore Legal Service, Quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, Submission to the Education and Employment References Committee, recommendation 2, 3 October 2025, at [submission-quality-and-safety-of-australias-early-childhood-education-and-care-system-cth.pdf](#); Australian Humna Rights Commission, Inquiry into the quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, Submission to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee, recommendation 5, 3 October 2025 at [Sub35_AHRC.pdf](#); Australian Childhood Foundation, Submission to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee: Quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, pp9-12, October 2025, at [Sub37_ACF \(2\).pdf](#).

¹⁶ See also Rapid Child Safety Review, Jay Weatherill AO & Pam White PSM, 15 August 2025, recommendations 19, 20, at [Rapid Child Safety Review | vic.gov.au](#); The Alannah & Madeline Foundation's response to Four Corners' report on sexual abuse in childcare, 28 October 2025, at [The Alannah & Madeline Foundation's... | Alannah & Madeline Foundation](#); Knowmore Legal Service, Quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, Submission to the Education and Employment References Committee, recommendation 8, 3 October 2025, at [submission-quality-and-safety-of-australias-early-childhood-education-and-care-system-cth.pdf](#); Australian Humna Rights Commission, Inquiry into the quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, Submission to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee, recommendation 8, 3 October 2025 at [Sub35_AHRC.pdf](#). See further Janise Mitchell, CEO of Australian Childhood Foundation, We could have prevented abuse in the childcare centres, 7 October 2025, at [We could have prevented abuse in the childcare centres - Australian Childhood Foundation](#) calling for WWCC holders to have comprehensive mandatory child abuse prevention training, shaped by those with lived experience; Childlight East Asia and Pacific Hub, Submission to the Education and Employment References Committee, Inquiry into the quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, p5, October 2025, at [Sub12_Childlight \(1\).pdf](#) calling for specific pre-service training, in-service training and training on reporting protocols; Australian Childhood Foundation, Submission to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee: Quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, pp16-17, October 2025, at [Sub37_ACF \(2\).pdf](#).

¹⁷ See also Knowmore Legal Service, Quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, Submission to the Education and Employment References Committee, recommendation 6, 3 October 2025, at [submission-quality-and-safety-of-australias-early-childhood-education-and-care-system-cth.pdf](#); Childlight East Asia and Pacific Hub, Submission to the Education and Employment References Committee, Inquiry into the quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, October 2025, p5, at [Sub12_Childlight \(1\).pdf](#), calling for all states and territories to adopt a nationally consistent safeguarding framework for childcare with specific provisions addressing the risk posed by premeditated child sex offenders; Australian Childhood Foundation, Submission to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee: Quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, pp12-14, October 2025, at [Sub37_ACF \(2\).pdf](#).

¹⁸ Rapid Child Safety Review, Jay Weatherill AO & Pam White PSM, 15 August 2025, at [Rapid Child Safety Review | vic.gov.au](#).

¹⁹ Rapid Child Safety Review, Jay Weatherill AO & Pam White PSM, 15 August 2025, at [Rapid Child Safety Review | vic.gov.au](#).

²⁰ See Standing Council of Attorneys-General, Communique, 15 August 2025, at [Standing Council of Attorneys-General \(SCAG\) Communiqué – 15 August 2025](#); Albanese Government announces \$37 million to support Working with Children Check reform, Media release, Attorney-General, Hon Michelle Rowland MP, 14 November 2025; Standing Council of Attorneys-General, Communique, 14 November 2025, at [SCAG Communiqué – 14 November 2025](#).

²¹ Education Ministers Meeting Communique – August 2025, at [Education Ministers Meeting Communiqué - August 2025 - Department of Education, Australian Government](#).

²² See Landmark national legislation passed to strengthen child safety in early education, Australian Government, Department of Education, 3 December 2025 at [Landmark national legislation passed to strengthen child safety in early education - Department of Education, Australian Government](#).

²³ See eg a list of actions taken or committed to by individual jurisdictions in Education Ministers Meeting Communique – August 2025, at [Education Ministers Meeting Communiqué - August 2025 - Department of Education, Australian Government](#); Expanded Powers To Overhaul Child Safety System, Media Release, Victorian Minister for Children and Minister for Disability Lizzie Blandthorn, 12 November 2025 at [Expanded Powers To Overhaul Child Safety System | Premier](#).

²⁴ Current inquiries include: the Australian Senate Education and Employment References Committee inquiry into the quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system, due to report by 10 March 2026, at [Quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system – Parliament of Australia](#); the NSW parliamentary inquiry into the early childhood education and care sector in New South Wales, due to report by 31 March 2026, at [See Early childhood education and care sector in New South Wales](#); and the Victorian parliamentary inquiry into the early childhood education and care sector in Victoria, due to report by 30 July 2026, at [See Inquiry into the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector in Victoria - Parliament of Victoria](#).