

Joint Statement from Not-for-Profit Early Childhood Education and Care Providers in Response to ABC Four Corners

Early learning services exist to uphold children's rights and honour their childhood. Recent ABC reporting has laid bare failures that have enabled egregious breaches of trust and safety in some of those services.

We share the outrage of the community at these and other reports of child sexual abuse, and our thoughts are with the children and families affected. We remain committed to working with governments across the nation to do everything possible to keep children safe.

While State and Commonwealth Governments have taken significant action to address child safety, it's clear more is required to build a system that knits together to ensure strong child safety and quality outcomes – from service planning and approvals, to who gets to work in the sector, to how regulators work with providers to address issues when they arise.

A National Childhood Education and Care Commission is urgently required and could take a lead role in driving consistently world class access, quality, and safety across the nation.

As purpose-driven organisations, we reaffirm our unwavering commitment to child safety and wellbeing. We believe that safeguarding children is not just a regulatory obligation - it is a moral imperative. In response to the issues raised, we call for and commit to the following:

- **Embedding a Culture of Vigilance:** Child safety is at the heart of every decision, policy, and practice in our services. We are committed to fostering environments where vigilance is second nature and where every adult understands their role in protecting children.
- **Strong Governance and Accountability:** Our organisations embed robust, transparent governance frameworks that ensure accountability at every level. We invest in and demand rigorous recruitment, induction, and supervision processes, and zero-tolerance of misconduct.
- **Ongoing Professional Development:** We make substantial investments in continuous professional learning to ensure our educators and staff are equipped to recognise, prevent, and respond to signs of grooming and abuse. This includes rigorous and ongoing mandatory child protection training.
- **A Culture of Speaking Up:** We are committed to creating psychologically safe workplaces where staff feel empowered and supported to raise concerns without fear of reprisal. We each provide strong protections for whistleblowers and mandatory reporters, and support efforts for sector-wide protections.
- **Listening to Children:** We recognise that children are often the first to disclose harm. We train and resource our staff to listen carefully and act swiftly and appropriately on any concerns raised by children in our care.
- **Sector-Wide Reform:** We support the government in their stewardship role to provide oversight, drive continuous improvement, and ensure that child safety is never compromised.

We know many providers already share these actions and commitments. We urge all providers to join us in placing children's safety and wellbeing above all else. Families place significant trust in our sector, and we must uphold it through consistent action, transparency, and an unwavering commitment to continual improvement.

Signed,

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Big Fat Smile



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