

December 2020

What WA Parents Want What our Children need

An election policy snapshot

Overview

Our election policy manifesto looks beyond the current crisis to build a stronger future for our families, the communities in which they live and the economy of the state.

It is aimed at giving WA families hope. Hope that their children can continue to access our world-class early learning (childcare) services. Hope that the next government will ensure the best educators are available to nurture their children and for the ECEC sector to be recognized as the absolute bedrock of the WA economy.

Hope that the next State Government will finally empower parents to choose which quality early learning (childcare) service suits their need the best – one that helps mothers return to the workplace and one that allows emotionally vulnerable children to not be forced into inflexible, and potentially unsafe, school-based kindergarten programs.

Our families want to prioritise the educational and emotional needs of their children and to remind you that the early years are the most critically important.

Policy commitment #1

Resolve WA's ECEC critical workforce shortages

- Attract and retain 1,000 educators across WA

The issue:

If the educator shortage is not addressed immediately, WA children may miss out on places as Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services are forced to meet strict educator-child ratios.

Right now, WA childcare educators face exorbitant costs of up to \$10,000 to upskill.

Commitment needed:

1. WA Government fund traineeships for existing workers to upskill from Cert III to diploma and degree-qualified ECT.
2. Allow more time to find and train candidates (from current mandated three months to six months)
3. Support roster flexibility to allow services to better manage educator-child ratio restrictions over the quiet lunchtime period.
4. Tie training and upskilling to suitable candidates on JobSeeker and JobKeeper.
5. WA Government to subsidise trainee wages and incentives for employers and course costs for candidates.
6. WA Government create or silo 1,000 funded trainee wage subsidy places for the program.
7. Government-funded advertising recruitment and awareness campaign for ECEC sector.

Policy Commitment #2

- Align early learning service locations to support demonstrable need

Place the needs of parents ahead of profits of property developers

The issue:

Across WA, in particular, in our regional and rural areas, there are areas that are in dire need of a local, quality early learning service, yet is snubbed by property developers.

Conversely, elsewhere, the unchecked saturation of early learning services has led to many services experiencing lower occupancy rates.

This places upwards pressure on fees and downwards pressure on quality, therefore impacting the level of quality provided and the affordability to families.

Commitment needed:

1. Early learning services should only be made available where absolutely needed.
2. WA Government to implement a planning framework, similar to the residential aged care sector.
3. Independent authority/auditor to allocate places annually; taking into account the number of available places, the identified needs of a particular planning region and the applications' merits.

Policy commitment #3

Permanent payroll tax relief

- Create fiscal headroom to engage more educators and place downward pressure on costs for families

The Issue

Due to regulated educator-child ratios, the Early Childhood Education and Care sector endures higher than normal workforce costs (70% of overall costs with 5% being payroll tax)

With a critical workforce shortage, we now need those funds to attract and retain high quality educators and to keep downward pressure on costs for our families.

Commitment needed:

Extend payroll tax relief to the private long day ECEC sector

Create universal consistency and fairness across all of the centre-based community, private and not-for-profit services

Policy Commitment #4

Ensure Universal Funding follows the child to allow parents the choice of all early learning (centre based, long day care) services

- End the discrimination against working WA parents, in particular mothers.

Commitment needed:

1. Direct WA's portion of the \$4.2 billion Universal Access National Partnership (UANP) as it is intended: for all children to attend kindergarten for 15 hours a week.
2. Link the commitment to re-direct UANP funding to all WA children attending kindergarten (the year before school) with a commitment to then extend the UANP for five years (beyond the end of 2021).

Policy recommendation #5

Empower parents to decide when their child is ready for school

- Mitigate the long-term damage of childhood anxiety and developmental delays

The Issue:

In WA, parents are completely disempowered, by having no voice in determining when is best for their child to enter the formal school system.

We know that starting school before a child is ready can create stress and anxiety patterns that can also last for life.

Up to one in five children starting school experience emotional difficulties, which are likely to get worse as they get older and make it harder for children to learn.¹

Commitment needed:

- Ensure that existing legislation gives parents the flexibility to send their kids to school when they are ready and to delay their child's formal school start by six or 12 months if needs be.

Conclusion

WA parents want their child to have the best start in life. We know these policies will deliver on that.

On their behalf, we commit **What WA parents want. What our children need** to be adopted as a pre-election commitment.

Before the state election, we welcome you to come and visit your local ACA WA member service. Meet our providers, our educators and our families.

If you require further information please do not hesitate to contact:

¹ (O'Connor, Quach and Goldfield 2020; Shay and Wang 2018). Productivity Commission into Mental Health 2020

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Snapshot of WA

571 approved providers, this includes Private, NFP & Local Government, 1213 Centre Based Care services (LDC, OSHC, Pre-School) providing essential education & care to over 71,000 WA children, employing over 25,000 staff and assisting more than 37,000 families.

About ACA WA

ACA WA is the largest peak early learning association in W.A. The Association and its members are committed to bringing together (at state and federal level) industry, government, and community to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and families. ACA members are spread through metro, rural, regional, and remote communities of WA and are made up all service types & providers.