

## Comparison of major political parties: A close look at each party's early learning (child care) policy

An upcoming federal election is always an enormous priority for the Australian Childcare Alliance – our aim is to ensure that all political parties understand the importance of ensuring that every child in Australia has access to high quality, affordable and sustainable early learning services, and therefore the **best start in life**.

As the peak body for long day care service owners and operators, representing more than 2,500 members and approximately 360,000 families throughout Australia, our aim is to ensure that all political parties recognise the critical issues facing our sector and understand the best ways these can be addressed.

As the federal election draws nearer, ACA's top four election priorities are to:

1. **End the educator shortage crisis**
2. **Increase affordability for all families**
3. **Improve support for the inclusion of all children, especially those with a disability.**

In addition to our ongoing advocacy around the importance of a viable early learning sector, this election year we invited the major political parties to summarise their policy positions on Australia's early learning (child care) services. Below is an overview of the policies outlined by each major political party. We present this to you in a non-partisan manner and invite you to judge for yourselves which party best serves the need of our children and the educators and service providers who care for them.

### LIBERAL NATIONAL COALITION GOVERNMENT

The incumbent Australian Government announced in its 2022-23 Federal Budget, a range of measures that also build on the ones already outlined in the previous year. Many of these initiatives are ones we actively sought on behalf of our families and provider members. These include:

- the Higher Child Care Subsidy (a higher Child Care Subsidy (CCS) for those families with more than one child aged 5 or under in care);
- the removal of the annual cap on the CCS;
- the Preschool Reform Agreement (a four-year national reform agreement to strengthen the delivery of preschool and better prepare children for the first year of school);
- The discounts on early learning services for staff at the service; and
- support for trainees and apprenticeships, including up to \$15,000 (over a three year qualification) in wage subsidy support for child care workers and their employers.

### AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY

Again, in response to our active and consistent engagement, the ALP has announced that if it wins Government, it will:

- lift the maximum CCS rate to 90 per cent for families with one child in care;
- maintain a higher CCS subsidy rate for the second and additional children in care;
- extend the increased subsidy to children attending Outside School Hours Care (OSHC);
- request the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission (ACCC) to design a price regulation mechanism to drive down out of pocket costs for families ;
- ask the Productivity Commission to conduct a comprehensive review of the sector with the aim of implementing a universal 90 per cent subsidy for all families; and
- develop and implement a whole of government Early Years Strategy to create a new integrated approach to the early years and develop of program of action.

### AUSTRALIAN GREENS

The Australian Greens has announced it wants the following policies adopted by the next Government. ACA continues to advocate strongly against their **clearly stated aim to phase out privately-owned operators**. The Greens want:

- Universal access to free early childhood education and care;
- increased and targeted funding for the establishment and ongoing operation of not-for-profit early childhood education and care facilities, which are community-based or government-run, especially in areas of high unmet demand or growth and areas of high disadvantage;
- phasing out of private for-profit early childhood education and care operators, to be replaced by government and community non-profit operators;
- increased pay rates and improved working conditions for early childhood education and childcare workers reflecting the education, skill level, and importance of the work; and
- free and improved access to the highest quality early childhood education and care services and wrap around supports for First Nations families.

Whilst we certainly can't predict who will win the upcoming federal election, by engaging with key political stakeholders from all political parties, we can ensure that our incoming Australian Government and all Members of Parliament and Senators all recognise that a strong and sustainable early learning sector is critical to the economic health of this nation, as well as the wellbeing of our youngest generation.

We look forward to working with the incoming Australian Government in the context of ensuring that every child in Australia has access to high quality, affordable and sustainable early learning services, and therefore the **best start in life**.