

- Child Safety in early childhood settings: Insights from the sector and community

Minister's Roundtables on Child Safety in early childhood

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We respect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and their continuing culture and contribution they make to the Canberra region and the life of our city.

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Contents

Purpose	5
What we heard	7
Summary	12
Next Steps	13
Key contacts	15
Support services	17
Child safety resources	18

Minister's Foreword



As Minister for Education and Early Childhood, I am proud to present this report which captures the voices, experiences, and insights of educators, families, and sector leaders across the ACT.

In recent months, our community has come together to speak openly and honestly about child safety in early childhood education and care in the ACT. These forums were not just a response to national concern, they were a reaffirmation of our shared commitment to ensuring that every child in the ACT is safe, supported and able to thrive.

What we heard was powerful. Educators spoke with passion and clarity about the challenges they face, the reforms they hope to see, and the deep care they bring to their work every day. Families shared their reflections and concerns, and sector leaders offered thoughtful, practical solutions.

This summary highlights the need for stronger safeguards, better support for educators, and a renewed focus on quality and accountability. It also reinforces the importance of listening to those with lived experience in the sector.

I want to thank every participant for their time, honesty, and commitment to improving child safety in early childhood settings. Your voices will help to shape policy, inform reform, and help us build a stronger, safer, and more inclusive early childhood system.

The ACT Government remains committed to working alongside you. We will continue to advocate nationally, invest locally, and ensure that the needs of children and educators remain front and centre in everything we do.

Child safety is everyone's responsibility. Together, we are creating a future where every child is safe, every educator is valued, and every family is supported.

Yvette Berry MLA

Minister for Education and Early Childhood



Purpose

In response to recent national media attention and growing public concern around child safety in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services, the Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Yvette Berry MLA, initiated a series of round table forums.

The forums were designed to provide a structured and collaborative forum for stakeholders to share their perspectives, ensuring the ACT Government remains responsive and transparent in its approach to addressing child safety concerns.

They brought together representatives from across the ECEC sector including peak bodies, early childhood educators, and parents and carers from across the ACT, and acknowledged that child safety is everyone's responsibility. They served as an opportunity to reaffirm the ACT Government's commitment to child safety and wellbeing, reinforce that educators in the ACT are highly professional, dedicated and committed to keeping children safe, and to share information relating to work being undertaken locally and nationally to address child safety concerns.

This summary brings together the insights and perspectives shared during the forums, capturing the voices of participants and highlighting the key themes that emerged throughout the discussions. It outlines the most prominent topics raised, including identified challenges and areas for improvement. A curated list of key contacts, support services and resources is provided on pages 13-16 of the report to support continued community engagement in this important topic.

● Engagement

Throughout August and October, four forums were convened to foster meaningful engagement across the ECEC sector. These sessions brought together a diverse range of stakeholders, including peak bodies, early childhood educators, and parents and carers from across the ACT. This was an opportunity to provide a collaborative platform for participants to share experiences and voice concerns on strengthening child safety and improving sector-wide practices.

Sector Forum – 28 August 2025

The Sector Forum brought together over 80 representatives from peak bodies across the ACT ECEC sector. The forum featured an opening keynote address by Early Childhood Australia CEO Samantha Page, who emphasised the importance of child safety and the vital role that early childhood education plays in the lives of our children. Participants also engaged in a panel discussion featuring Minister Berry, Samantha Page, Children's Education and Care Assurance (CECA) Executive Branch Manager Sean Moysey, Executive Director, Children's Services at Communities at Work Kellie Stewart, and Koori Preschool Educator and 2024 Early Childhood Educator of the Year, Teegan Bonner.

Educator Forums – 29 September and 15 October 2025

Two Educator forums (one in person and one online) were delivered in collaboration with the United Worker's Union (UWU). Over 50 early childhood educators attended the forums, which featured addresses from Minister Berry, the UWU and CECA. Discussions reflected the deep sense of responsibility, dedication, and passion that ACT educators bring to their work and highlighted a shared commitment to strengthening child safety practices and ensuring that every child in the ACT has access to safe, high-quality early learning environments.

Parent and Carer Forum – 13 October 2025

The Parent and Carer Forum was delivered in collaboration with the ACT Parents and was designed to empower families to support their children to understand child safety. Over 30 parents and carers attended the forum, which featured an open Question & Answer session with Minister Berry, Body Safety Australia CEO and Founder Deanne Carson, Manuka Occasional Childcare Centre Association Director, Kara Bromley and CECA. Panel members provided attendees with a range of practical strategies for teaching body safety and protective behaviours

to children, responding to and reporting child safety concerns, and engaging with ECEC services on child safety matters.

What we heard

Key themes and messages that emerged from the forums are outlined below. These themes reflect the varied perspectives, experiences, and priorities expressed by participants.

Working with Vulnerable People checks must be strengthened

Educators and service leaders' voiced frustrations relating to the delays in processing Working with Vulnerable People (WWVP) checks in the ACT. Participants highlighted that there should be a strict 'no check no work policy', to ensure that anyone working with children have completed the necessary screening prior to commencing employment. During each forum participants highlighted that permitting individuals to commence work prior to their WWVP approval being finalised is a risk, with potential implications for child safety and the integrity of protective systems.

There was strong support for streamlined processes related to WWVP checks, 'No check, No work' policies and work underway at a national level to develop a National Educator Register, due to be launched in February 2026.

"Allowing individuals to work before WWVP approval is finalised poses a significant risk to child safety and undermines the integrity of systems put in place to protect children."

Proactive reporting is essential

At all forums the importance of fostering a proactive reporting culture was emphasised. A common view was shared that when educators feel confident and supported to report concerns, whether related to child safety, wellbeing, practice issues, or workforce dynamics it strengthens the overall quality and integrity of a service. Some educators expressed that there is a fear of retaliation for reporting concerns and noted that continued advocacy, campaigning and support from unions and CECA was important in this regard.

Participants agreed that a proactive reporting culture encourages transparency, early intervention, and continuous improvement, helping to identify and address risks before they escalate. Embedding such a culture is essential to safeguarding children, supporting staff wellbeing, and maintaining trust with families and the broader community. There was advocacy for anonymous reporting tools to expose systemic issues and an emphasis on the importance of speaking up to protect children and improve the sector.

“[At my service] we will never be 'in trouble' for reporting. It's the right thing to do and better to result in 'nothing' than to have it be something and be missed. But I have seen that [in some services], staff are afraid to report things because they believe that if they do, they will be personally targeted, and unfortunately, that does happen.”

Staffing ratios must reflect day-to-day realities

Challenges relating to “under the roof” ratios were consistently raised by sector leaders and educators across the forums. While the ratios are designed to ensure adequate supervision and safety across a service, educators noted that they often do not reflect the dynamic and unpredictable nature of working with young children. For example, ratios may technically be met across a service, but not in specific rooms or during high-need moments such as transitions, toileting, or behavioural incidents which can impact educators’ ability to provide responsive care, manage transitions and support individual learning and wellbeing.

While staffing ratios are set under the National Quality Framework, services can choose to employ additional staff to better support educators to deliver high-quality, safe and inclusive education and care. There was a consistent view that minimum standards do not guarantee quality or safety, and that staffing ratios should be reviewed. Many educators called for service leaders to lead the way in ensuring that children’s complex needs are considered in staffing decisions.

Educators also spoke candidly about the emotional and physical toll of their work, noting that burnout is increasingly common due to high workloads, staffing pressures and the complex needs of children and their families.

“The “under the roof” staff to child ratio is very challenging. Sometimes we have five children with only one staff member. That one staff member has to feed the children, change their nappies, and supervise them – but while they're attending to one child, the others are left without supervision.”

CCTV cannot replace human care

Concerns were raised at all forums regarding the introduction and/or mandating of CCTV in ECEC services. While it was acknowledged that there are potential benefits to CCTV in terms of safety and accountability, participants highlighted several issues, including the administrative burden associated with managing footage, maintaining privacy and ensuring compliance with data protection regulations. Parents, carers and educators specifically expressed concerns relating to children’s rights and privacy.

It was stressed that the presence of cameras should never be seen as a substitute for adequate staffing levels. Quality care and supervision rely on skilled, present educators and not technology

alone, and that implementation of CCTV should be carefully balanced with ethical considerations and workforce support.

“We need to safeguard our educators, the ones who do the right thing but also bring attention to policies such as whistleblower protections.”

Professional development is essential to safe practice

Educators expressed a strong desire for increased access to professional development opportunities, particularly in the areas of inclusion, child safety and behavioural support. Participants emphasised that these topics are central to high-quality ECEC, however, many educators often feel underprepared to navigate the complex and evolving needs of children.

Participants suggested that professional development opportunities and support in these topics would not only build the confidence of staff but also enhance their ability to create safe, inclusive, and responsive learning environments. Some participants suggested that there should be mandatory minimum professional development hours for educators, similar to that required as part of Teacher Quality Institute registration.

Educators raised concerns relating to the rapid promotion of individuals into leadership roles, often without sufficient support, training or experience. They noted that while leadership opportunities are essential for career progression, the pace of advancement can sometimes outstrip the development of the foundational skills required to lead effectively. Educators noted that new leaders may lack confidence in areas such as team management, pedagogical guidance and regulatory compliance, which can impact service quality and staff wellbeing.

“What is missing is training for educators on managing and supporting children with additional needs.”

Qualifications require improved oversight

Educators and sector representatives voiced concerns about the quality and consistency of qualifications and pathways into the early childhood profession, particularly in relation to accelerated training options. It was noted that while efforts to address workforce shortages are important, fast-tracked qualifications (such as one-year Early Childhood Teacher (ECT) programs and graduate diplomas) may compromise the depth of knowledge, practical experience, and preparedness of new educators entering the sector.

It was highlighted that educators require specialised skills in child development, safety, inclusion and responsive practice, areas that cannot be adequately covered in condensed programs.

Participants suggested that the need for better oversight and regulation of training providers and alignment of certification with job requirements, to ensure high professional standards are maintained and that educators are well-equipped to support children’s learning, safety and wellbeing.

“Qualifications and practice don’t align anymore. Anyone can receive a qualification. Doesn’t seem strict enough.”

Pay and conditions must reflect the complexity of the work

Educators and sector leaders highlighted that pay rates and working conditions can often be a significant barrier to retaining skilled and committed professionals to the sector. Participants shared that working closely with your children often results in frequent exposure to illness, yet current sick leave entitlements do not adequately reflect the heightened risk that comes with working with children.

It was also expressed that despite the complexity and importance of the work, remuneration often fails to reflect the level of responsibility, expertise, and emotional labour required and contributes to staff turnover. Participants expressed that improving wages and employment conditions is essential to valuing the profession, attracting new entrants, and retaining experienced educators.

Educators emphasised the importance of prioritising educator health and wellbeing across the sector. There were strong calls for better pay, conditions and protections for whistleblowers.

“Despite the complexity and importance of the work, remuneration often fails to reflect the level of responsibility, expertise, and emotional labour required.”

Employers shape culture – great leadership inspires great practice

Educators expressed that leaders require organisational support to foster safe cultures, and that Approved Providers must be held accountable for staff and child safety. Participants expressed the view that leaders who model professionalism and high expectations, inspire great practice across a team and service. Effective leadership fosters collaboration, continuous improvement, and a sense of purpose, creating conditions where educators feel valued and children thrive.

“We need to be the influencer, be the change we want to see.”

Child safety is everyone’s responsibility

Across all forums, participants consistently reinforced that child safety is a shared responsibility, one that must be embedded in the community and in every aspect of early childhood education and care. Educators, leaders, parents, and policymakers each play a vital role in creating environments where children feel safe, supported, and protected. Participants highlighted the importance of collaboration, transparency, and collective action in safeguarding children and driving meaningful reform.

Participants discussed the vital role that parents, carers and educators play in modelling and teaching protective behaviours and leading conversations about body safety with children. It was emphasised that these conversations should and can begin early in a child's life, using age-appropriate language to help them to understand concepts like personal boundaries, safe and unsafe touch, and the right to say no. The importance of modelling respectful relationships was also highlighted, using everyday moments to reinforce body autonomy, and ensuring children know who they can talk to if they have concerns.

"The number one thing that [adults] can do is actually model body safety practices. It's one thing to tell or to teach our children, but how we behave, what we model, is going to be the most enduring lesson that our children take away."

Summary

The voices captured through these forums reflect a sector and community deeply committed to the safety and wellbeing of every child. Participants expressed a shared vision for a system that better supports children, values the workforce, and strengthens community engagement.

To build a safer, stronger, and more inclusive early childhood system, it is essential that the voices of those who engage with and care for children continue to inform and shape reform efforts. Their lived experiences and insights are vital to creating a system that is not only responsive and equitable but also sustainable for future generations.

By placing children's rights at the centre of policy and practice, investing in the professional growth and wellbeing of educators, and fostering genuine collaboration across all levels of the sector, the ACT is well-positioned to lead the way in driving national progress.

As we move forward, it is essential that these conversations translate into meaningful action. The ACT Government remains committed to listening to, learning from, and leading reform work alongside the sector. This commitment includes:

- embedding child safety as a non-negotiable priority across all early childhood services;
- elevating educator wellbeing and professional development as central pillars of quality and safety;
- strengthening and encouraging transparency, accountability, and proactive reporting to ensure concerns are addressed early and effectively; and
- continuing to advocate nationally for reforms that reflect the realities of the workforce and the needs of children and families.

The momentum generated through these forums must be sustained. Continued collaboration, courageous leadership, and collective advocacy will be key to building a system that is safe, inclusive, and future-focused.

The ACT Government remains committed to implementing reforms that are both rigorous and fair and continuing open, sector wide-engagement and listening to and learning from those with lived experience in early childhood education and care sector.

"People want to be part of the change. When we do this, we can influence real reform."

Next Steps

Education Ministers have agreed to national actions to strengthen safety and quality in ECEC services. The ACT Government is committed to ensuring safety and quality in early childhood education settings, with significant work already underway in the ACT as part of these reform actions, including:

- A new national early childhood workforce register is available from February 2026, requiring all Approved Providers to provide (and regularly update) information on employees, ensuring better visibility of who is working in the sector and where. The register will support CECA to monitor, identify and respond to risks associated with persons working in ECEC.
- From February 2026 all ECEC staff will be required to complete new national child safety training developed by the Australian Centre for Child Protection, ensuring all individuals working in the sector understand child safety obligations and requirements.
- The mobile phone ban will continue to be enforced across all ECEC services, restricting the use of personal mobile phones, smartwatches and photographic devices by educators during period of direct supervision.
- CECA is undertaking unannounced audits to monitor compliance and improve safety standards. This approach is designed to provide a more accurate representation of everyday practice within services and to strengthen regulatory oversight.
- CECA is implementing a “no card, no start” requirement for all new ECEC staff where educators and other staff must hold a valid WWVP registration before commencing work in a service. Work is also underway to strengthen WWVP registration and information sharing processes in the ACT.
- Work is underway to ensure ACT families can easily access clear and reliable information about ACT ECEC services, and the role and work of CECA. This will support improvements already made to the Starting Blocks website, which now includes details relating to compliance and enforcement actions issued to services.
- Work is underway to ensure ACT public preschools are supported to effectively implement child safety reform actions, and educators understand their obligations and are well equipped to embed strengthened child safety practices.
- The Teacher Quality Institute is exploring moving towards mandatory ECT registration, reinforcing the principle that early childhood educators are integral members of the teaching profession and adding an additional layer of safeguarding by ensuring only qualified, fit and proper individuals are permitted to teach in ECEC settings.

- Work is underway to ensure alignment of policy and regulatory approaches in the ACT with national reform actions, and address what has been heard through these forums. This includes investigating educator-child ratios to support improved supervision practices.
- Work is continuing to ensure supports for the ECEC sector, educators and families are prioritised through delivery of the ACT Government's 10 year strategy, *Set up for Success: An early childhood strategy for the ACT*.
- The ACT Government will continue to engage with the sector and community on child safety issues to ensure their views are incorporated into government policies, actions and advocacy efforts.

Key contacts

Parents and carers are encouraged to speak with their child's service about how they are implementing child safe practices, as well as associated reporting policies and procedures.

ACT Government

Information on Child Safety in ACT public schools and reporting mechanisms is available on the ACT Government website.

- **Make a complaint about an ACT public school:** [Enquiries, compliments and complaints](#)
- **Report risk of significant harm:** [Online form](#)

ACT Policing

If you have serious concerns about a child's safety, particularly if you suspect abuse, neglect, or exploitation contact ACT Policing immediately.

- **Phone:** 131 444
- **Website:** [ACT Policing](#)

ACT Human Rights Commission

- **Phone:** 6205 2222
- **Website:** www.hrc.act.gov.au

Children's Education and Care Assurance

CECA is the regulatory authority for early childhood education and care services in the ACT and play a central role in ensuring that services are safe, high-quality, and compliant with national standards. For matters involving child safety, workplace misconduct, or regulatory breaches, contact the CECA as soon as possible. CECA is committed to responding to concerns and supporting educators who report child safety concerns.

- **Make a complaint:** [Enquiries, compliments and complaints - ACT Government](#)
- **Email:** CECA@act.gov.au
- **Phone:** 02 6207 1114 (general enquiries) or 02 6207 9309 (complaints)
- **More information on the obligations of ECEC providers:** [Obligations of early childhood education and care providers - ACT Government](#)

National Office for Child Safety

The National Office for Child Safety (NOCS) is an Australian Government agency established to lead and coordinate national efforts to protect children and young people from child sexual abuse.

- **Make a report:** [Make a report | National Office for Child Safety](#)

United Worker's Union

United Workers Union (UWU) is one of Australia's largest and most diverse unions, representing over 150,000 workers across industries including early childhood education and care. Formed in 2019 UWU fights for fair pay, secure jobs, and safe workplaces.

- **Email:** act@unitedworkers.org.au
- **Phone:** 1800 805 027
- **Website:** [United Workers Union](#)

Support services

Kids Helpline

Mental health support for children and young people.

- **Phone:** 1800 55 1800
- **Website:** [Kids Helpline](#)

Beyond Blue

Free mental health information and qualified support via chat or phone.

- **Phone:** 1300 22 4636
- **Website:** [Beyond Blue](#)

Lifeline

Free crisis support for individuals experiencing a personal crisis via chat or phone.

- **Phone:** 13 11 14
- **Website:** [Lifeline](#)

Child and Family Centres

Free parenting advice and help with family issues and child behaviour.

- **Phone:** 1300 556 729
- **Website:** [Child and Family Centres](#)

Child safety resources

ACT Government

Information for parents and carers to help children develop skills to talk about personal safety.

- **Booklet:** [Protecting-Your-Kids-Personal-Safety-Education-for-parents.pdf](#)
- **Further information on child safety in ACT public schools:** [Education Directorate website](#)

Body Safety Australia

Professional learning programs and resources for children, educators, parents and other adults.

- **Website:** [Body Safety Australia | Promoting childhoods free from violence](#)

National Child Safety Regulations – Sector Guidance

Support and guidance to services in relation to child safety and regulatory requirements.

- **Resources and guidance:** [Child safety | ACECQA](#)

National Office for Child Safety

Resources to help adults engage children in conversations about body safety.

- **Website:** [National Office for Child Safety](#)