



Set up for Success

Phase Three Consultation – May 2026

Set up for Success: An early childhood strategy for the ACT (Set up for Success) is the ACT Government's 10-year strategy for early childhood education and care (ECEC), designed to strengthen outcomes for children and families across the ACT. Since its commencement in January 2020, the strategy has driven significant early childhood reform and contributed to improved outcomes for children and families across the ACT.

I am immensely proud of everything we have achieved through *Set up for Success* so far and would like to acknowledge that this work could not have been achieved without ongoing contributions and engagement from the sector and community.

I am pleased to invite the sector and broader community to participate in consultation on Phase Three of *Set up for Success*, which will be delivered between 2026 and 2030.

As the final phase of the strategy, Phase Three builds on the strong foundations established throughout Phases One and Two. It will focus on consolidating key initiatives, continuing to support system-wide improvement and responding to ongoing and emerging challenges facing the early childhood sector and families. A particular emphasis will be placed on strengthening child safety and supporting a sustainable, culturally safe and responsive early childhood system that meets the needs of children, families, providers and educators now and into the future.

The Phase Three Consultation Paper has been developed to support stakeholders to share their views and insights on proposed initiatives, as well as on child safety and quality, provider models and service sustainability. The consultation builds on feedback already gathered from the sector and community and aims to minimise consultation fatigue and the duplication of consultation efforts.

Feedback from this process will inform the development of the Phase Three Implementation Plan and help ensure that ACT Government actions and initiatives are practical, grounded in lived experience and responsive to current realities.

Details on how to contribute your views are set out in the Consultation Paper.

Your voice matters, please take this opportunity to share your views and be part of shaping the next phase of this important work.

Yvette Berry, MLA
Minister for Education and Early Childhood
May 2026



Set up for Success: Phase Three

Consultation Paper – May 2026

Overview

Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT (Set up for Success) is the ACT Government's 10-year plan for early childhood education and care (ECEC) and aims to strengthen outcomes for children and families.

Phase Three is the final Phase of *Set up for Success* and spans from 2026 to 2030. It builds on the foundations established in earlier phases and focuses on consolidating key initiatives and system improvements while addressing ongoing and emerging challenges across the early childhood sector. There will be a continued emphasis on supporting culturally safe and responsive early learning environments and strengthening partnerships with the community-controlled sector. Phase Three will include a focus on supporting child safety and ensuring a sustainable early childhood system that is able to meet the needs of children, families and educators now and into the future.

This consultation paper seeks stakeholder feedback on the implementation of Phase Three initiatives including the expansion of Three-year-old preschool to 600 hours per year from 2028. Furthermore, the consultation seeks feedback on a range of issues relating to early childhood regulation and safety, service quality and land use planning. This consultation builds on information gathered through the ACT's [ECEC & Outside of School Hours Care \(OSHC\) Workforce Survey](#), [Minister's Round Table Forums](#) on Child Safety undertaken in 2025 and the outcomes of [National consultation on child safety](#) (Tranche 1 and 2 Consultation). It recognises the views, experiences and time already contributed and is intended to minimise consultation fatigue and support further engagement in a way that is flexible and meaningful.

Input gathered through this consultation will inform development of the Phase Three Implementation Plan and will help ensure that future initiatives are practical and responsive to the current context and lived experience of those delivering and accessing ECEC in the ACT.

How to engage

The consultation process has been designed to allow stakeholders to engage with the topics in ways that suit them. This paper provides an overview of the key topics we are seeking insights and feedback on and includes key questions to guide responses. There is no need to respond to all of the topics and questions, you can select to respond to the topics that interest you most.

Once you have read the paper, you can:

- Access the online survey via [this link](#) to provide your views and input; or
- Email more comprehensive written responses to earlychildhoodpolicy@act.gov.au; or
- Email earlychildhoodpolicy@act.gov.au to organise a time to provide your input verbally over the phone to a member of the team.

Consultation will close on Friday 26 June 2026.



Phase Three of Set up for Success

When *Set up for Success* was released in 2020, a range of Phase Three initiatives were included in the strategy. These initiatives are outlined on [page 16 of the strategy document](#) and include:

- Continue the roll-out of universal preschool for three-year olds
- Explore/enhance multi-agency support services for very young children
- Develop flexible options for accessing extended hours to early childhood education
- Investigate providing learning and planning support for less formal environments
- Explore establishing 'Educational Leader' career pathways
- Explore embedding Prep for Pre (Preschool Pathways) and other related programs
- Investigate system-wide policy and resource allocation through child-oriented outcomes
- Implement the structured capacity planning framework for ECEC.

Progress has already been made towards the following initiatives outlined in Phase Three:

- Explore options for professionalising and increasing the pay and conditions for the ECEC workforce – through national efforts resulting in wage increases and worker retention payments
- Explore increasing paid parental leave in the ACT public service – improvements to paid parental leave provisions have been made under consecutive enterprise agreements, including extended paid leave (from 12 to 18 weeks), gender-neutral access, superannuation contributions, flexible working and shared care arrangements.

The strategy document highlights that as the strategy is implemented, initiatives in the third phase will be refined, taking into consideration the changing context and emerging needs of the sector and stakeholders in the ACT. With this in mind, Phase Three will include a renewed focus on safety in early childhood settings and on supporting the early childhood profession.

Key consultation questions

- What should be considered in relation to implementation of existing initiatives?
- What additional initiatives could be considered as part of Phase Three?
- How can Phase Three better support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce, and support improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families?
- What challenges are families facing in accessing supports and information about children's development and neurodevelopmental difference?
- How could child safety be better reflected in Set up for Success through the Phase Three Implementation Plan?



Expansion of Three-year-old preschool

The Three-year-old preschool program currently provides up to 300 hours per calendar year of free quality early learning for eligible three-year-old children living in the ACT.

The program is delivered:

- by partnered ECEC services who are *Meeting* or *Exceeding* overall against the National Quality Standards (referred to as Partner Providers)
- for up to 300 hours, delivered either as 6 hours per week over 50 weeks, or 7.5 hours per week over 40 weeks
- by a degree-qualified early childhood teacher (through a phased approach, acknowledging workforce shortages).

More information on the current program, including child and service eligibility criteria is available on the [ACT Government website](#) and in the [Program Guidelines](#).

Jurisdictions that have implemented three year-old preschool programs have adopted different funding models, reflecting local delivery systems, workforce conditions and policy priorities. The ACT's current funding model uses the Commonwealth's Child Care Subsidy (CCS) as the base funding, with the ACT Government covering the full Gap Fee for program hours, after CCS has been applied (referred to as 'Fee Relief'). This means that the program hours are completely free for all families, regardless of their CCS. Families continue to pay for any wrap-around hours accessed outside of the program.

Funding is provided to services quarterly as a per child amount. Any remaining funding leftover after Fee Relief has been applied for families can then be used as 'Program Funding' towards quality uplift initiatives such as incursions or excursions, program resources, employment of early childhood teachers or incentives for staff.

Phase Three provides an opportunity to consider the policy parameters of the program and the best approach to an expanded program that best suits the needs of providers and families.

Key consultation questions

- Are any changes or enhancements to the program model required?
- Are any changes to eligibility requirements or partnering arrangements required?
- What support would be required for Partner Providers to implement an expanded program?
- Should the ACT continue with its existing funding model to scale to 600 hours, or should a different approach be adopted? For example, should CCS remain the basis of the program funding model or should the funding amount be capped for families?



Child Safety and Quality

Children’s Education and Care Assurance (CECA) is the ACT regulatory authority ECEC and OSHC services. It is responsible for administering and enforcing the National Quality Framework (NQF) in the ACT and working with providers to support quality and continuous improvement.

Child safety is foundational to a high-quality ECEC system. The ACT Government recognises the professionalism and commitment of educators across the sector, while also acknowledging concerns raised in the media and in the Legislative Assembly about instances of poor practice that have compromised children’s safety and wellbeing.

Reforms to the Education and Care Services National Law (National Law), agreed by Education Ministers require all jurisdictions to substantially uplift regulatory oversight. These reforms intend to strengthen compliance, improve early identification of risk and ensure regulators have appropriate tools to respond promptly to non-compliance and include:

- Reforms to the Education and Care Services National Law to better support child safety
- Development of policies and procedures for safe use of digital devices in ECEC settings
- Establishment of a National Early Childhood Workforce Register
- Introduction of mandatory child safety training for all individuals working in ECEC
- ACT implementation of a “no-card, no-start” approach, ensuring a Working with Vulnerable People (WWVP) check is undertaken prior to commencing work at a service
- Increased penalties and expanded infringement offences and regulatory penalties
- Enhanced transparency for families through the publishing of information on enforcement actions and compliance concerns.

A capable, well-supported profession is essential to child safety and quality outcomes. Strengthening child safety requires a whole-of-system approach that supports continuous improvement, accountability and collaboration between government, providers and families.

Phase Three provides an opportunity to place a stronger, more explicit emphasis on child safety and quality, supported by National Reform initiatives.

Key consultation questions

- What information are families seeking to support them to understand child safety and quality, and to select quality ECEC services for their children?
- What impact could the implementation of CECA enforcing fines against ECEC providers for egregious and repeated child safety breaches have?
- How could regulatory approaches and processes better support continuous improvement in service quality while maintaining strong child safety and compliance outcomes?



Provider Models and Service Sustainability

The long-term sustainability of a safe, high-quality ECEC system depends on service viability, appropriate infrastructure and a diverse range of providers that reflect community needs. The Legislative Assembly has highlighted concerns about increasing corporatisation, land-use pressures and the impacts of planning settings on community run and not-for-profit services.

The ACT Government has long championed community-based provision of ECEC. *Set up for Success* includes specific reference to “ensuring that services in the ACT prioritise child outcomes over profits” and remains committed to supporting not-for-profit organisations. These services are often embedded within their communities and are well placed to reinvest revenue into workforce development, inclusive practices and continuous quality improvement.

Consistent with this, the ACT Government has committed to appointing not-for-profit providers to operate all new ECEC services co-located with ACT public schools, as well to deliver the targeted 3 year-old initiative program for children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.

Phase Three provides an opportunity to consider how land-use planning and other policy levers can support child-centred outcomes and reinvestment in service quality.

Key consultation questions

- How can planning and land-use settings better support community-based and sustainable ECEC services?
- Should land release for ECEC services be provided, similar to the provision of schools and other community facilities in major developments?
- What additional measures are needed to support community-based and not-for-profit service providers?
- How could the ACT Government support the growth and sustainability of Aboriginal community-controlled early childhood services? What barriers exist in establishing and operating early learning services and how could these be addressed?
- How can service sustainability and sector diversity be balanced with quality, workforce and child safety objectives?
- Should surplus revenue be capped for for-profit services to ensure reinvestment in quality, the profession and the community?

Contact

For further information about the consultation process please contact the Early Childhood Policy team via earlychildhoodpolicy@act.gov.au.