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The [Centre for Community Child Health](#) welcomes the Productivity Commission’s roadmap to universal Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). This report paves the way for equitable outcomes for all Australian children – underpinned by high-quality and accessible services, an enabled workforce and a research and evaluation agenda.

The Productivity Commission’s comprehensive review and recommendations into Australia’s ECEC system sets a clear path for ensuring that our ECEC system not only meets the needs of children and families but is geared to reducing the inequities in children’s outcomes, setting up all children on the lifelong path to good health, education and wellbeing.

“As a Centre focused on reducing inequities in children’s outcomes, we are strongly encouraged by the Productivity Commission’s acknowledgment that high quality ECEC can improve outcomes for children, particularly those experiencing disadvantage. Yet, we know that ECEC services need the support to deliver high-quality, affordable services; our ECEC workforce needs to be enabled to continue to provide high-quality care; and a ECEC policy research agenda is needed so we know if reforms are working, and course correct if need be.” - Prof Sharon Goldfeld AM, Director, Centre for Community Child Health.

High quality, affordable, accessible ECEC

Our [Restacking the Odds](#) initiative, referenced in the Commission’s findings, has shown that an ECEC system that provides **enough** places for children, is of **high-quality**, and is enabled to boost **participation** will ensure ECEC services are contributing to more equitable outcomes for children. We’re encouraged by the Commission’s recognition of this important triple bottom line.

We’re also encouraged by the Commission’s recognition of the important role that ECEC services provide in making important connections to other services that children and families need. Integrated services, often termed Child and Family Hubs, that bring health, ECEC, education, social and justice care together to support families experiencing vulnerability, are an opportunity to respond to the variety of needs that children and families experience and was highlighted by the [National Child and Family Hubs Network’s](#) submission to the Productivity Commission’s review. CCCH supports the Commission’s recommendation to consider funding to establish integrated services to ECEC services receiving supply-side funding but caution the missed opportunity to consider existing ECEC services receiving similar support, particularly in areas of disadvantage. ECEC services are an important front door for many families in accessing holistic support.

“We are also pleased to see the Commission recommend the removal of the Activity Test” Says Prof Sharon Goldfeld. “The Activity Test provides a barrier for many children and families to access the important early education opportunities they need to thrive, alongside barriers many parents -particularly women, face to re-enter the workforce or education opportunities.”



An enabled workforce

As a provider of education and training programs to the ECEC workforce, we are aware of the challenges the workforce experiences in being able to participate in professional development opportunities. We support the Commission's recommendation for all Governments, and we would add private providers, to continue to build the capability of the ECEC workforce. Beyond the importance of ongoing training in the latest pedagogical approaches, we would strongly encourage training in the area of relational practice, such as the [Family Partnership Model](#), that is key to enabling the workforce to genuinely engage in meaningful relationships with the families in their community.

An [investment in the consistent collection of useable data, together with an uplift in data capability across the workforce](#), ensuring workforce capabilities to use it, are essential for stewarding a system to improve children's outcomes and empowering front line workers to make change quickly.

An ECEC Research Agenda

As the Commission highlights, a focus on a research agenda that enables policy planning and evaluation, whilst identifying emerging challenges, will be critical to support the ECEC system in supporting childhood development.

"With investment in an ECEC research agenda we're able to monitor and evaluate whether ECEC reforms are reaching the children and families that most stand to benefit and course correct if required. The Commission's recommendation for a research agenda is commendable and provides an opportunity to use other initiatives such as the Australian Early Development Census, Early Years Outcomes Measure and cohort studies such as [Gen V](#) and the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children – particularly around monitoring the impact these reforms will have on children's outcomes and their families." - Prof Sharon Goldfeld AM, Director, Centre for Community Child Health.

The Centre for Community Child Health is proud that our published research, along with our [Restacking the Odds](#) and [National Child and Family Hubs Network](#) responses were cited 22 times in the Commission's report. We look forward to continuing to support access to evidence-based policy and investment to ensure that all Australian children and their families receive the lifelong benefits that universal ECEC can provide.

The Federal Government, in collaboration with state and territory governments, now has a pathway to ensure the ECEC system plays a pivotal role in improving children's outcomes, cementing ECEC as universal pillar, alongside health, to improve children's outcomes. This will require unwavering commitment and investment from all governments, service providers, qualification and training providers, researchers and communities around Australia.

You can find Restacking the Odds' response to the Productivity Commission into ECEC [here](#), and the National Child and Family Hubs statement [here](#).

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