

Media Release

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Is early childhood education and care affordable and accessible?

IPART has released the Interim Report on its review of the early childhood education and care sector in NSW including draft findings about factors that drive affordability, accessibility, consumer choice and supply.

IPART Chair Carmel Donnelly encouraged community feedback on the draft recommendations to address barriers to affordability and access in the sector, currently used by more than 300,000 families in NSW.

"Improving access to early childhood education and care is critical for NSW families," Ms Donnelly said.

"High quality early childhood education and care is closely linked to better long-term educational outcomes for children and increased workforce participation for parents, especially for women."

Our review found there is scope to improve affordability, accessibility and choice for families in NSW, in particular for children with disability, additional needs or experiencing disadvantage or vulnerability.

IPART has made draft recommendations to simplify the funding system, improve availability of qualified workers and better support families and children with diverse needs.

"The funding system for early childhood education and care services is complex, fragmented and potentially inefficient, and this can lead to unintended negative outcomes," said Ms Donnelly.

Governments should work together to develop an integrated funding approach to early childhood education and care which prioritises affordability and accessibility for families with greater disadvantage including those with lower incomes and families in regional or remote locations.

The report includes draft recommendations to improve flexibility and inclusion through targeted supports for children and families experiencing disadvantage or vulnerability.

The review found workforce availability and expertise are critical to the supply and accessibility of quality early childhood education and care services, with workforce shortages a significant problem for the sector.

"We have made a draft recommendation that the NSW Government develop an early childhood education and care workforce strategy to increase availability of suitably qualified workers and support educators to deliver high quality services," said Ms Donnelly.

"We also suggest the NSW Government develop a digital service and data strategy to help families access early childhood education and care services. Better digital tools and data could help families find, choose and use services, and help service providers make better decisions about locating, expanding and supporting services."

Ms Donnelly welcomed feedback from the community, including families, as well as providers and workers in the sector, on the draft findings and recommendations.

"We are particularly keen to hear from families, people who work in early childhood education and care and service providers," Ms Donnelly said.

"This consultation will help us refine our draft findings and recommendations to the NSW Government to enable better outcomes for families and children."

"We welcome submissions and invite people to complete a short survey online. We will also hold an online public hearing on 30 October 2023."

IPART will make final recommendations in December this year. For more information, to take our survey, make a submission or register for the online public hearing, visit our website at www.ipart.nsw.gov.au.

You can respond to the Interim Report until 17 November 2023.

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Editor's note

The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) has made draft findings and recommendations as part of its review of the NSW early childhood education and care sector to improve affordability, accessibility and consumer choice.

IPART's review examines the NSW experience - there are also 2 national inquiries under way into early childhood education and care by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and the Productivity Commission.