

FREE AND UNIVERSAL EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Early childhood education is an essential public service

Early childhood education is too expensive for families and too hard to access. It's holding children and families back.

Childcare is an essential public service, and for children, the early years are the most important in their development.

The Greens will make childcare free for everyone; we will expand access to early childhood education, establish specialised cultural early education for First Nations children, and phase out for-profit early learning providers.

All children deserve access to quality early learning and care. It will remove barriers that limit choices for women, boost women's capacity to engage in paid work and relieve financial pressure on families.

THE GREENS WILL:

- ▲ Invest \$19bn over the forward estimates to ensure childcare is free and accessible for everyone
- ▲ Extend universal access to early childhood education for all 3 and 4 year olds to 24 hours a week
- ▲ Ensure early childhood educators have well paid, secure jobs
- ▲ Strengthen early learning for First Nations children through support for Aboriginal community-controlled services
- ▲ Phase out for-profit early learning and treat early learning as an essential service.

PAYING FOR OUR PLAN

By making billionaires and big corporations pay their fair share of tax and winding back handouts to big polluters, we can build a better life for all of us.

1 in 3 big corporations pays no tax and many big corporations and billionaires send their profits offshore tax free.

The Greens will tax billionaires with a new 'billionaires tax', require big corporations making excessive profits to pay a 'corporate super-profits tax' and axe billions of dollars in handouts to the coal, oil and gas giants that are driving the climate crisis.

These measures have all been costed by the independent Parliamentary Budget Office.

When big corporations and billionaires pay their fair share, everyone can have the services they need for a better life.

MAKE CHILDCARE UNIVERSAL AND FREE

Early learning costs in Australia are out of control. High fees are a barrier to a child's early learning and make our society less equal. They limit choices for women, who have to give up study, career and work opportunities.

The Greens will invest \$19 billion to make childcare and early learning free for every family and child. It doesn't matter where you live or how much you work or study - all families should have a right to free care and education for their children. It doesn't matter what type of care you access, whether it's long day care, in-home care, family day care or out of school hours care, we will make it free. This measure has been fully costed by the independent Parliamentary Budget Office.

Childcare was briefly free during the pandemic. There's no reason we can't have it permanently by making the billionaires and big corporations

who made massive profits during the pandemic pay their fair share of tax.

UNIVERSAL EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR 3 & 4 YEAR OLDS

The benefits of early childhood education programs such as preschool for children are beyond doubt¹.

The Greens will extend universal access to early childhood education to 24 hours a week for all four-year-olds and expand this access to three-year-olds. Our commitment to extending early childhood education will genuinely ensure every child, everywhere in the country, has access to 24 hours a week of a quality, play-based learning program staffed by qualified professionals and resourced to give them the best possible start in life.

¹ OECD (2021), *Starting Strong VI: Supporting Meaningful Interactions in Early Childhood Education and Care*, Starting Strong, OECD Publishing, Paris, <<https://doi.org/10.1787/f47a06ae-en>>

Under our plan, there will be no barriers for your child to access pre-school: it doesn't matter what you earn, where you live, or how much you work or study - your child will get the care and education they need.

SUPPORT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS AND CENTRES

The treatment of early childhood educators is a national shame. Early childhood education was the first sector to be taken off JobKeeper², and educators continue to be paid well below what would be expected of those with their responsibility and skills.

The Greens will deliver and implement a proper workforce strategy with the early learning sector and unions to achieve higher, professional pay and better working conditions for workers.

Our plan will boost employment in the early childhood sector - ensuring demand is met, and quality is retained. We will continue to give our full support to the Big Steps campaign and explore how expanded public provision of childcare services could improve conditions for workers, children and families³.

The Greens plan will further provide \$200 million of grant funding to reduce waiting lists for community and non-profit centres by increasing the number of spaces they offer. Grants would assist with capital works or increased workforce, depending on the specific needs of individual centres. This funding would be targeted towards high-need areas, where the gap in availability is greatest.

²<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-09/childcare-changes-to-disproportionately-affect-women/12333398>

³ <https://bigsteps.org.au/>

STRENGTHEN FIRST NATIONS EARLY LEARNING

The Greens will deliver increased support for First Nations Community-Controlled Early Childhood Education and Care, ensuring First Nations children and families have increased and improved access to free, specialised cultural early learning and care.

EARLY LEARNING SHOULD NOT BE RUN FOR PROFIT

Education should not be a business. That's why for-profit schools are basically non-existent in Australia. But this is not the case for early childhood education and care.

Investors and corporations continue to profit off families who want early learning and care for their children. Some engage in dodgy business practices while doing so. In 2020, the biggest for-profit provider, G8 Education, admitted to owing up to \$60 million in unpaid wages to around 27,000 staff.⁴

At the same time, a below average number of for-profit services meet or exceed the National Quality Standard – a measure government and not-for-profit services perform well above average on.⁵

The Greens will develop a plan to phase out for-profit early learning to ensure every child has access to early learning and care from a high-quality government-provided or not-for-profit service.

⁴<https://www.smh.com.au/business/companies/childcare-provider-g8-education-in-underpayment-shock-20201208-p56li4.html>

⁵ ACECQA, National Quality Framework snapshots, <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/snapshot>