

TIRED OF WAITING: OVERCOMING CHILDCARE SHORTAGES

Access to quality early childhood education and care is essential for our children, families and the economy.

Accessible, quality and affordable childcare enables greater workforce participation, particularly for women, reduces cost of living pressures on families, and is shown to have a positive impact on many other socio-economic indicators such as school attendance and child development.

And yet, families across the Territory often wait years to secure early childhood education and care. It is commonplace for parents in the Territory to put their names on waitlists in the first trimester of pregnancy and still have to call multiple centres to secure a spot. In the NT there is only one childcare place per three children¹, well below the national average.

Early childhood education and care is also a crucial part of overcoming severe workforce shortages across multiple sectors of the Territory economy. Especially in the essential frontline female-dominated industries of health, education and social work. We can't afford to let the childcare crisis continue!

All children deserve access to quality early learning and care. We need urgent measures to provide immediate relief to families struggling with care needs now, as well as long-term investment to grow the economy and give Territory kids the best start in life, recognising early, play-based learning as central to children's development.

The Greens will:

1: Build our early childhood education and care workforce to fully staff existing centres

Many existing childcare centres in the Territory are not running at full capacity because of recruitment and retention issues. A dedicated campaign to increase this workforce is urgently needed, such as the [Early Childhood Alliance's plan](#). We would focus on the areas of most need, including attracting First Nations workers, so children can appropriately access First Nations cultural knowledge in their early education.

a) Push for intensive educator accreditation opportunities and other incentives to build our local workforce

¹ Deserts and Oasis: How accessible is childcare in Australia - The Mitchell Institute, 2022

We will build our local workforce through intensive accreditation opportunities which recognise prior learning will increase opportunities for Territorians to access both jobs and care at existing childcare centres.

b) Make the NT an attractive destination for international skilled early childhood educators - sponsorship programs and payment of visa and other costs

Individual childcare centres bear the administrative and financial costs associated with recruiting early childhood educators from abroad. We would provide financial assistance to those Centres to attract experienced educators from abroad.

c) Provide incentives to keep educators in the job & incentives for new workers

Early childhood educators should be paid what they deserve for doing the most important work imaginable - educating and caring for our kids. The current [award wage](#) does not align with the demands of early childhood education. We would review the most effective way to attract & retain new educators to the NT, including relocation allowances and retention bonuses. We would also investigate removing administrative bottle-necks to childcare workers entering the workforce, like prioritising ochre card application reviews for people going into the early childhood sector.

2: Centralise the waitlists for childcare in each local government area

Most families seeking childcare are on multiple waitlists for different childcare providers across their local community. Families have to make regular contact with each provider to make sure they keep their spot on the waitlist. This system inflates waitlist times and places an extra burden on families to keep up.

The Greens will centralise these waitlists for each local government area to increase efficiency, ease administration pressure on both families and childcare providers, and ensure transparency and fairness around allocation.

3: Increasing the number of early childhood education and care facilities & flexibility in childcare choices

For too long the availability of childcare in the Territory has been ignored. We will develop and implement a Childcare Supply Plan that looks at all options to ensure all families have access and choice in relation to quality childcare.

An NT Childcare Supply Plan would:

- Identify the amount, type and location of childcare required;
- Work with communities, local governments and the private sector to find place based solutions
- Consider measures to urgently increase childcare supply, including:
 - NT government owned and/or operated childcare Centres in our towns
 - Grants for employers to integrate childcare into the workplace
 - Other incentives for expansion of existing centres or establishment of new ones.
- Advocate for the abolition of the Childcare Subsidy activity test, activity test, to ensure children are not missing out on early educational activities and we are not entrenching disadvantage for families with unstable work.
- Investigate options to reduce the cost of childcare for families, and transition to free, universal childcare, with a commitment to quality and supply of services

- Create flexibility of early childhood education and training offerings, including co-locating with workplaces and “book-on-the-day” options

The Greens will recognise the importance of early learning - **for the sake of our kids, our families and our economy.**

References:

- <https://www.vu.edu.au/mitchell-institute/early-learning/childcare-deserts-oases-how-accessible-is-childcare-in-australia>
- https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Economic_Aspects_of_ECEC_in_Australia-WEB.pdf
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