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JOINT RESPONSE THE INTERIM REPORT BY THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

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via email: royalcommissionecec@sa.gov.au

Australian Community Children's Services South Australia (ACCS SA) and Community Children's Centres SA (CCCSA) are pleased to present the following response to the Interim Report by the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care

ACCS SA and CCCSA view early childhood as a child's right in addition to a strategy for increasing workforce participation. Families have multiple choices for accessing education in early childhood, and this is evident in the report with the emphasis on access, quality, and affordability.

The recommendations in the report reflect an understanding of the challenges and opportunities in early childhood education and provide valuable insights for improving the system in our state.

We commend the Commission on recognising the critical importance of early childhood education and its long-lasting impact on a child's development. This is a crucial stage in a child's life that is often overlooked but holds immense potential for shaping their future has been highlighted.

Our organisations support the recommendation to increase access to 3-year-old preschool for all children in South Australia. It is encouraging to see that the Commission recognizes the benefits of early intervention and the positive impact it can have on educational outcomes.

By expanding access, we can create a solid foundation for children's learning and development, bridging the gap between disadvantaged and privileged children and setting them up for success.

The focus on quality improvement is a key to the success of early childhood education and care, and it is crucial to invest in well-trained educators who can provide a nurturing and stimulating environment for our young learners.

The Commission's recommendation to enhance the qualifications and ongoing professional development of educators aligns with international best practices. By supporting educators in their professional growth, we can ensure that they possess the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the diverse needs of children in their care.

Recommendation 6 and 8 will support the development of a professional and knowledgeable workforce and are welcomed by our organisations. For early childhood teachers to have

'access to evidence-based tools to improve pedagogical approaches' and 'have funded professional learning and planning time'¹, and to professional learning opportunities with the focus of early childhood the not-for-profit sector would welcome the investment.

Addressing the affordability of 3-year-old preschool is a vital step towards equitable access, the Commission's recognition of the financial burden faced by families, particularly those from low-income backgrounds is acknowledged. The proposed measures to reduce fees and explore subsidy options will help alleviate the financial strain and make preschool accessible to all families, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

An original proposal by our organisations was the extension of the Preschool Reform Agreement to include a broader range of service types including long day care, with equal funding provided to all service types. This supports families to have greater choice of where children access preschool, it will also support continuity for children, reducing the number of transitions between education settings.

It is acknowledged that children accessing long day care are eligible to federal government funding through Child Care Subsidy, however the out-of-pocket cost to the family is not comparable to the out-of-pocket fees for standalone preschool.

Both ACCS SA and CCCSA would call for a review of the proposed funding model to support families who choose to access their child's preschool hours in a long day care setting in order to support their workforce participation. This aligns with our commitment to fostering inclusivity and equal opportunities for every child in South Australia.

We know that equitable government funding models are crucial for ensuring positive outcomes for all children, however it is fundamental in removing barriers for disadvantaged children, some key reasons why equitable funding across service type is important:

1. **Equal access to quality education:** Equitable funding models aim to distribute resources fairly among educational settings, regardless of their location or child population. This helps to ensure that disadvantaged children have equal access to quality education, regardless of their socioeconomic status or geographic location. It helps bridge the opportunity gap and provides a level playing field for all children.
2. **Resource allocation:** Disadvantaged children often require additional support and resources to overcome barriers to learning. Equitable funding models allocate resources based on the needs of students, considering factors such as socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, disabilities, and other individual needs. This ensures that education settings serving disadvantaged populations have the necessary resources to provide targeted interventions, smaller class sizes, specialized staff, and appropriate materials and equipment.
3. **Quality educators:** Equitable funding allows settings serving disadvantaged children to attract and retain quality teachers and educators. Adequate funding enables services to offer competitive salaries, provide professional development opportunities, and create supportive working environments.

Well-trained and motivated educators are better equipped to address the unique needs of disadvantaged students, implement effective instructional strategies, and provide individualized support.

¹ Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, Interim Report April 2023, page 93

4. Enhanced programming and interventions: Equitable funding enables education settings to implement evidence-based programs and interventions specifically designed to support disadvantaged children. This can include early literacy programs, tutoring services, mentoring programs, after-school activities, and mental health services. With appropriate funding, interventions can be tailored to address the specific challenges and learning gaps faced by disadvantaged students, promoting their academic, social, and emotional well-being.
5. Reduced achievement gaps: Disadvantaged children often face significant achievement gaps compared to their more privileged peers. Equitable funding models aim to reduce these gaps by providing additional resources and support to services and students in need. By addressing the root causes of educational disparities, such as lack of resources, limited access to quality instruction, and inadequate support services, equitable funding helps level the playing field and promotes more equitable educational outcomes.
6. Long-term benefits for society: Equitable funding models prioritize investing in the education of disadvantaged children, recognizing that educational opportunities have long-term impacts on individuals and society. By providing equitable resources and support, these models help break the cycle of poverty, reduce social inequalities, and contribute to a more just and prosperous society.

In summary, equitable government funding models are crucial for improving outcomes for disadvantaged children. By ensuring equal access to quality education, allocating resources based on needs, attracting and retaining qualified staff, implementing targeted interventions, and reducing achievement gaps, equitable funding helps create a more equitable educational system and promotes positive long-term outcomes for all students.

Recommendation 9: 'children at risk of developmental delay should access additional hours'², we welcome this recommendation to support children's development, as the research is clear on the benefits of early intervention on long term outcomes.

1. Timely intervention and support: Research show that early intervention can lead to better outcomes and improved long-term development in children.
2. Optimal brain development: The early years of a child's life are crucial for brain development. By identifying and addressing developmental delays early, interventions can be implemented during this critical period when the brain is most responsive to growth and change. Early intervention can help rewire neural connections and promote healthy brain development, maximizing a child's potential.
3. Improved outcomes in the long run: Addressing developmental delays early can have a significant impact on a child's overall development and future outcomes. Early intervention can enhance a child's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, increasing their chances of success in school and later in life. By providing appropriate support at an early stage, children can develop the necessary skills and abilities to overcome challenges and reach their full potential.
4. Informed decision-making and planning: Early identification of developmental delays allows parents, caregivers, and educators to make informed decisions and develop tailored strategies to support the child's needs. It enables families to access appropriate resources, services, and therapies, and work collaboratively with

² Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, Interim Report April 2023, page 121

professionals to create an individualized plan for the child's development. Early identification ensures that children receive the right support at the right time.

5. Emotional and social well-being: Early identification and intervention can positively impact a child's emotional and social well-being. Addressing developmental delays early helps children develop the necessary skills to interact with peers, regulate emotions, and build positive relationships. It can prevent feelings of frustration, low self-esteem, and social isolation that may arise from struggling with developmental challenges.
6. Parental empowerment and support: Early identification of developmental delays provides parents with the knowledge and understanding of their child's unique needs. It empowers parents to take an active role in their child's development, seek appropriate resources, and access support networks. Early intervention services often include parent education and guidance, equipping parents with the tools and strategies to support their child effectively.

In summary, early identification of developmental delays in young children is crucial for providing timely interventions, promoting optimal development, improving long-term outcomes, reducing difficulties, informing decision-making, supporting emotional and social well-being, and empowering parents. It enables children to receive the support they need to thrive and reach their full potential.

It would be our proposal that there is additional funding made available to employ additional educators, and that this funding is appropriate to cover their entire wages, as the current Federal Government funding model is inadequate.

Finally, we express our support for the Commission's call to strengthen partnerships between preschools, families, and communities. Collaboration and engagement with parents and caregivers are vital to creating a holistic learning environment for children. By fostering open lines of communication and involving families in their children's early education, we can support the transition from home to early education and care, promoting continuity and supporting children's social and emotional development.

In conclusion, the recommendations presented by the Royal Commission into 3-Year-Old Preschool in South Australia provide opportunities for transforming early childhood education and care.

ACCS SA and CCCSA are committed to working closely with stakeholders to implement these recommendations effectively, ensuring that every child in our state has access to high-quality, affordable, and inclusive early childhood education. We view this as an opportunity to make significant changes to the system to reflect a child's right to education.

Thank you once again for your valuable contribution to the advancement of early childhood education in South Australia.

Your faithfully



Carrie Johnson
Convenor ACCS SA and Chairperson CCCSA