

ACA Victoria Executive Board Nomination 2025

Nominee: Sheela Edwards

Service Provider: Aurora Early Education

Bio:

Sheela Edwards is the Founder and CEO of Aurora Early Education in Melbourne and was the President of TiE Melbourne. With a background of over 35 years in corporate finance and leadership (Time Warner, IBM, HCL Technologies, Johnson Controls), she transitioned into the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector in 2012. Her approach integrates business acumen, governance, and holistic child development through Aurora’s philosophy of “Connect, Care, Create.”

Describe your experience in the early childhood education and care sector.

I am the Founder and CEO of Aurora Early Education, a values-driven provider in metropolitan Melbourne. Over the past decade, I have led Aurora’s growth from a single service into a multi-site organisation known for warm, holistic environments, multilingual learning, and strong family partnerships. My work spans governance, strategy, quality and compliance, workforce capability, and community engagement. Before entering ECEC, I spent over 25 years in senior corporate finance and operations roles with organisations such as Time Warner, IBM, and HCL Technologies. That commercial discipline and my learnings in these varied sectors now underpin Aurora’s culture of sustainability and continuous improvement. I remain connected with daily operations and deeply engaged with educators, families, and community partners to ensure pedagogy, practice, and business operations align with our shared purpose: to nurture each child’s potential through connection, care, and creativity.

Tell us what makes ACA Victoria’s mission meaningful to you.

ACA Victoria’s mission to support quality, viability, and advocacy for providers resonates deeply with my own professional philosophy. I am an inquirer at the core of my being; gaining knowledge to understand the root of the matter has helped me see things with broader and deeper perspectives. Sustainable services embedded into the communities they serve are the foundation of high-quality outcomes for children and families. I believe ACA Victoria’s leadership on funding, workforce policy, and regulatory reform empowers providers to reinvest in what matters most: educators, inclusion, and innovation. My personal mission aligns with ACA Victoria’s: to ensure every Victorian child can access consistent, high-quality early learning, supported by confident, respected professionals and viable, values-driven services.

Describe any Board Leadership experience you have had to date.

I currently serve in board and executive leadership roles beyond ECEC, including as President of TiE Melbourne, an entrepreneurship and mentoring network. In this capacity,

I oversee strategic direction, growth in memberships, governance, and partnerships that support innovation and professional growth. I served on the Knox Children's Services Advisory Committee for 2 terms (4 years), supporting Knox council in their vision to develop and deliver high-quality long-day care services and kindergarten provision. I am part of the Advisory Board of Aspire Education Ltd to support their launch into delivering Graduate programs for the ECEC sector. Within Aurora, I chair the executive leadership group and report to an advisory board, managing financial stewardship, compliance, quality assurance, and organisational culture. I regularly contribute to sector roundtables and workforce forums, providing a provider's perspective on regulation, leadership, and workforce development. These experiences have honed my governance, collaboration, and strategic advocacy skills.

Outline any skills, connections, resources, or expertise you can provide to improve the services ACA Victoria offers to its members.

I bring a combination of strategic, operational, and people-centred leadership grounded in more than a decade of ECEC experience. From my corporate finance background, I contribute financial literacy, risk management, and sustainability expertise, supporting ACA Victoria's efforts to enhance service viability and business resilience. Within ECEC, I offer deep knowledge of quality practice, leadership development, and cultural inclusion—particularly in workforce capability, educator wellbeing, and professional growth.

As President of TiE Melbourne and a mentor in women's leadership networks, I can connect ACAVictoria to cross-sector partnerships that enhance innovation, wellbeing, and professional Development across many industries and geographies around the world. This exposure brings much-needed new thinking, which can be instrumental in breaking down barriers for growth. I also bring strong communication and advocacy skills, enabling me to help amplify the collective voice of members on policy reform and workforce recognition.

Ultimately, my focus is on bridging educational excellence with organisational sustainability, strengthening the long-term impact of ACA Victoria's support for its members.

Confirm that you can commit to the time required for meetings and other duties as outlined in the Executive Board Position Description.

Yes, I am more than happy to fully commit to the time requirements and responsibilities outlined in the Executive Board Position Description. As the CEO of Aurora Early Education, I am well-versed in balancing strategic leadership and governance obligations. I approach every role with attention, mindfulness, professionalism, preparation, and accountability. I understand that meaningful board service involves active participation, collaboration, and representation. I am ready to dedicate the necessary time to attend meetings, contribute to committees, participate in consultations, and advance ACA Victoria's objectives throughout the year.

What are your thoughts on the key challenges and opportunities facing the Early Childhood Education and Care sector?

The ECEC sector is currently facing many key questions. Funding, People, Policy and

possibly the larger Purpose too, as it navigates several interconnected challenges that also present powerful opportunities. Foremost among these is the workforce shortage—a systemic issue affecting quality and sustainability. Increasing compliance demands and economic pressures continue to challenge service viability. In parallel, the sector’s public perception and professional recognition still do not match its significance to lifelong learning and national productivity. Taking care of our people and providing opportunities for long-term knowledge advancement is the key to unlocking potential. This is key to solving some of the critical issues facing the ability to consistently deliver the high quality that we are appointed for.

However, we are also at a moment of transformational opportunity. National policy reform, growing investment in early learning and greater public awareness of its social and economic value create a fertile environment for advocacy and innovation.

By addressing workforce wellbeing, embedding leadership pathways, and streamlining regulation, we can elevate quality and professionalism while ensuring equitable access and sustainability across all service types.

Indicate how you might use your time on the ACA Victoria's Board to address these challenges and opportunities.

If elected, I would dedicate my time on the Board to helping ACA Victoria strengthen its advocacy and member support through three core priorities:

1. Champion workforce wellbeing and capability.

Drawing on Aurora’s leadership programs and retention strategies, I would advocate for initiatives that empower educators through mentorship, wellbeing frameworks, and professional development.

2. Strengthen service sustainability and governance.

Leveraging my background in finance and corporate strategy, I would support ACA Victoria in developing tools and resources that help providers manage financial performance, compliance, and long-term planning.

3. Elevate the sector’s public influence.

Using my networks across education, business, and media, I would help amplify ACA Victoria’s policy voice and build partnerships that advance the recognition of ECEC as essential educational infrastructure. I would serve as a collaborative, values-driven advocate, ensuring that ACA Victoria remains responsive, inclusive, and forward-looking.

What are your ideas to enhance ACA Victoria’s engagement with its members?

Member engagement must be authentic, two-way, and focused on meaningful connection. My vision is to help ACA Victoria evolve into an even more collaborative, accessible, and inspiring member network.

1. Deepen communication and feedback channels.

Introduce digital forums and regional “leadership huddles” to capture real-time member

insights and strengthen the link between advocacy and on-the-ground realities.

2. Expand professional and well-being support.

Curate practical learning opportunities focused on leadership, workforce wellbeing, and operational resilience, leveraging partnerships from allied sectors.

3. Strengthen inclusion of regional and small providers.

Use hybrid and virtual engagement tools to ensure every member, regardless of size or location, has access to resources and representation.

4. Celebrate innovation and excellence.

Highlight member stories and achievements to foster community pride, shared learning, and a strong professional identity.

Through these initiatives, I would help ACA Victoria remain not just a representative body but a vibrant professional community—a trusted space for learning, advocacy, and collective growth.