



# ACA Victoria Election Manifesto



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## Foreword

The Australian Childcare Alliance Victoria (ACA Victoria) is a member-funded organisation supporting and advocating for privately owned long day care centres.

ACA Victoria works on behalf of long day care service owners and operators, as a reputable source of evidence-based advice to policy makers and a trusted source of practical guidance to service operators.

We represent more than 650 member services throughout Victoria.

ACA Victoria has existed in various forms for more than 30 years. Our experience means that we understand the critical role that quality early learning services play in our communities and their important role in preparing children for the best start in life and learning.

Early childhood education and care is one of the most important investments we can make in Victoria's future.

Every day, early learning services across our state support the safety, development, and wellbeing of children, while enabling families to participate in the workforce and strengthening local communities. The impact of this work extends far beyond the early years—shaping lifelong outcomes for children and delivering significant social and economic benefits.

As Victoria continues to implement major early learning reforms, the sector is navigating a period of significant change. While these reforms present important opportunities, they are also placing increasing pressure on providers, educators, and services already managing workforce shortages, rising costs, regulatory complexity, and shifting demand.

This manifesto outlines the key priorities of the Australian Childcare Alliance Victoria and the practical, evidence-based reforms needed to support a sustainable, high-quality early learning system.

At its core, this is about ensuring that every child has access to safe, inclusive, and high-quality early learning, delivered by a stable and supported workforce, within a system that is sustainable for providers and responsive to community needs.

We are calling on all political parties and candidates to work collaboratively with the sector to deliver meaningful reform—reform that supports children, families, and the long-term strength of Victoria's early learning system.

Together, we can ensure that early childhood education and care continue to deliver the outcomes that Victoria's children and communities deserve.

## Child Safety, Quality and Child Development Outcomes

Children achieve the best outcomes when early learning services are safe, stable, well-supported, and staffed by qualified educators. High-quality early childhood education and care plays a critical role in supporting children's development, wellbeing, and long-term educational outcomes.

Victoria has a strong regulatory framework designed to safeguard children; however, increasing complexity, inconsistent interpretation, and a growing compliance burden are creating challenges for providers. In some cases, this can shift focus away from quality improvement and child development outcomes, placing unnecessary administrative pressure on services.

A regulatory approach that is clear, consistent, and collaborative is essential to support services to meet their obligations while maintaining a strong focus on continuous improvement.

To strengthen outcomes, ACA Victoria is calling for:

- Regulatory approaches that are transparent, consistent, and focused on continuous improvement, ensuring that compliance frameworks support quality improvement rather than relying on punitive enforcement
- Stronger collaboration and communication between the regulator and providers, enabling proactive risk management, shared understanding, and early intervention where issues arise
- Greater clarity and consistency in regulatory expectations, including practical guidance and aligned interpretation, to reduce administrative burden and support high-quality service delivery
- A balanced and proportionate regulatory approach, recognising the operational realities of services while maintaining high standards of child safety and care

### **Why this matters:**

When services operate within a clear, consistent, and supportive regulatory environment, educators can focus on delivering high-quality education and care. This leads to improved child safety, stronger developmental outcomes, and greater confidence for families in the early learning system.

## Oversupply, Planning and Market Stewardship

Effective planning and market stewardship are essential to ensure early learning services are established in areas of genuine need and remain sustainable over time.

In some parts of Victoria, unmanaged oversupply has led to reduced occupancy rates, financial instability, and inefficiencies across the sector. At the same time, other communities continue to experience gaps in access to early learning.

A more strategic and coordinated approach to planning is required to balance supply with demand and support long-term sector sustainability.

To strengthen planning and market stewardship, ACA Victoria is calling for:

- Improved planning and approval processes, requiring robust demand and supply analysis prior to approving new services
- Policy mechanisms to address unmanaged oversupply, particularly in areas where existing services are under significant pressure
- Better use of data and forecasting, to inform decisions about service approvals and infrastructure investment
- Stronger coordination between state government, local government, and planning authorities, ensuring alignment with population growth and community need
- Assurance that new standalone kindergarten infrastructure is only developed where there is clear and demonstrated demand

### **Why this matters:**

Better planning supports sustainable service delivery, protects existing services, and ensures families have access to high-quality early learning where it is needed most.

## Workforce Sustainability

A stable, skilled, and supported workforce is fundamental to delivering safe, high-quality early learning. Educators are at the heart of the ECEC system, and workforce stability directly impacts child safety, continuity of care, and developmental outcomes.

The sector continues to face significant workforce challenges, including educator shortages, high turnover, and concerns about the quality, accessibility, and consistency of training pathways. Without targeted intervention, these pressures will continue to impact service delivery and limit sector growth.

A coordinated, long-term workforce strategy is essential to attract, develop, and retain qualified educators across Victoria.

To strengthen workforce sustainability, ACA Victoria is calling for:

- Strengthened education and training pathways, including improvements to Certificate III, Diploma, and degree-level qualifications to ensure graduates are job-ready
- Increased traineeship funding and support for workplace-based training models, enabling services to build and retain their own workforce
- Targeted workforce strategies for both metropolitan growth areas and regional communities experiencing acute shortages
- Improved alignment between training providers and industry needs, ensuring consistency and quality of delivery across the sector
- Recognition that workforce policy is intrinsically linked to child safety, quality outcomes, and continuity of care

### **Why this matters:**

A sustainable workforce ensures stability for children, supports consistent relationships with educators, and underpins the delivery of safe, high-quality early learning across all communities.

## Service Viability and Financial Relief

Financial sustainability is critical to ensuring early learning services can continue to operate and provide stable, high-quality care for children and families.

Providers are facing increasing and compounding cost pressures, including wages, regulatory compliance, insurance, utilities, and broader economic conditions. At the same time, some services are operating below capacity due to local oversupply, placing additional strain on financial viability.

Without targeted policy reform, these pressures risk service closures, reduced access to early learning, and disruption for children and families.

To strengthen service viability, ACA Victoria is calling for:

- A review and reform of licensing fee structures, ensuring fees reflect service size, occupancy levels, and current economic conditions
- Payroll tax relief for early learning providers, supporting financial sustainability and workforce retention
- A more equitable distribution of kindergarten funding between sessional services and long day care settings
- Policy settings that support continuity of care, minimising disruption for children and families
- Greater recognition of the financial pressures facing providers, particularly in the context of ongoing reform implementation

### **Why this matters:**

Financially sustainable services are essential to maintaining access to early learning, supporting workforce participation, and ensuring continuity of care for children and families.



## Inclusion Funding and Equitable Access

All children should have equitable access to early learning, including those with additional needs. Inclusion is fundamental to delivering high-quality education and achieving positive developmental outcomes.

However, many services face challenges in accessing timely and sufficient funding to support children with additional needs. Complex application processes and delays in funding approvals can create barriers to participation and place additional strain on services.

A more responsive and accessible inclusion funding system is essential to ensure all children can fully participate in early learning.

To strengthen inclusion and equitable access, ACA Victoria is calling for:

- Increased and more accessible kindergarten inclusion funding, enabling services to better support children with additional needs
- Streamlined application and administration processes, reducing administrative burden on services
- Improved timeliness of funding decisions, ensuring support is in place when it is needed
- Recognition that inclusion is central to quality, participation, and child development outcomes
- Policy settings that ensure no child is excluded from early learning due to funding or support limitations

### **Why this matters:**

An inclusive early learning system ensures every child has the opportunity to participate, supporting better long-term educational, social, and developmental outcomes.



Let's give our children the best start in life.