



Kimberley Development Commission Sector Profile

Childcare in the Kimberley

A Comparison of the State and Dynamics of Early Childhood
Education and Care in the Kimberley 2022 to 2024



Acknowledgement

Mira Consulting has prepared this report for the Kimberley Development Commission.

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About this series

The Kimberley Development Commission is an independent statutory authority responsible for promoting economic development and government service delivery across the Kimberley region. 'Kimberley Development Commission Sector Profiles' are a series of reports examining the challenges and opportunities of particular industries and service delivery sectors in our region in depth. They are intended to provide a sound base of data and analysis to inform decision-making by the Kimberley community, governments and investors.

The entire series of Sector Profiles, as well as the Kimberley Development Commission's Quarterly Snapshots series, can be accessed on our website www.kdc.wa.gov.au.

The Kimberley Development Commission acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country, the Aboriginal people of the many lands that we work on and their language groups throughout the Kimberley. We recognise their continuing connection to the land and waters. We respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of our region, and we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.



Childcare in the Kimberley snapshot



 **22** Early childhood education and care centres in the Kimberley (ECEC* and OSHC*)


TOTAL APPROVED PLACES

912


CURRENT OPERATING CAPACITY PLACES

708


CURRENT OPERATING CAPACITY

78%



32

Additional staff required



28%

of parents are providing unpaid child care for their own or other children



10 centres

operating at reduced capacity due to staff shortages



697 Children (0 - 4 yrs) living in remote communities with no access to ECEC & OSHC



12-24 months waiting period reported by 65% of the centres

Childcare (0 - 4 years)



0.23

APPROVED PLACES FOR EVERY CHILD



0.18

CURRENT CAPACITY PLACES FOR EVERY CHILD

OSHC (5 - 12 years)



0.05

APPROVED PLACES FOR EVERY CHILD



0.04

CURRENT CAPACITY PLACES FOR EVERY CHILD

Students enrolled in Early Childhood Education studies at North Regional TAFE and One Tree

 **114 students** in Certificate III
 **34 students** in Diploma

4 students in Course in the Early Years & in Early Childhood Education and Care Skill set

The challenges

Training

Housing

Wages & Incentives

Regulation

Social Issues

Financial Models

ECEC* Early Childhood Education and Care
OSHC* Outside School Hours Care



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Executive summary

The care of our youngest people is amongst one of the most fundamental responsibilities of any community. In 2022, the Kimberley Development Commission published a report to illustrate the ECEC and OSHC sector's situation and highlight local solutions being implemented to reduce the impact of limited ECEC and OSHC on communities. In 2024, we provide an update to the 2022 report and assesses how the sector has changed across the last two years.

This comparison of the availability of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) from 2022 to 2024 found that whilst there have been improvements, access to care remains a critical social and economic issue.

During this period, the number of centres decreased by two. However, the number of operating places increased by 83, resulting in a 9% increase in operating capacity. At the same time that operating capacity increased, the waitlist for care increased by 211 children.

The growth in operating capacity is predominantly due to a workforce increase of 16 staff, enabling more licensed places to be utilised. Workforce growth was supported by an increase of 71 student enrolments during this two-year period.

The Kimberley has benefited by targeted support at an industry, state and national level. This included new pre-pathway courses to support students into formal training and new grants. Services have accessed new grants for workforce initiatives including the resourcing, training and mentoring of staff and report these have been key to staff and student retention. Most initiatives are funded through one-off grants and will finish mid-2025.

An expansion of the Commonwealth Early Childhood Education Workforce Package in 2023 will support sector capacity and staff retention over a four-year period. In addition, between 2022 and 2024 the Commonwealth and State Governments increased their investment into fee-free training which continued to support early childhood education and care students. The workforce remains on Australia's priority migration skilled occupation list. Services have sourced skilled workers through the Kimberley Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA). Whilst there was minor regulatory reform during this period to support greater flexibility, centres did not cite regulatory changes as contributing to workforce growth.

Similar to 2022, a critical workforce issue is access to affordable housing. Centres continue to provide staff housing sourced from the WA Government or local shires. They believe access to affordable homes will attract and retain staff and support workforce growth, increasing operating capacity.

Whilst access to early childhood education and care is a national issue, data shows access in the Kimberley is lower than the national average. The gap has not closed during this period for access to early childhood education and care on remote Aboriginal communities with only one remote community with an ECEC centre. A national Early Years Strategy 2024-2034, launched mid-2024, was developed to increase the availability of affordable childcare options across Australia.

The opportunity cost of access to childcare in the Kimberley is significant. A conservative estimate indicates that reaching parity with the national utilisation rate would unlock a minimum of \$40M per year in direct economic activity from the employment of additional staff, along with indirect economic activity in the Kimberley through increased spending and by enabling more people to engage in the labour force.



Key findings

Licensed capacity has remained the same, but operating capacity has slightly increased. Operating capacity remains below the national average

- There are 0.23 approved places for every child aged 0-4 and 0.05 approved places for every child aged 5-12 years. This is similar to 2022.
- There are 0.18 operating places for every child aged 0-4 years; an increase from 2022 which had 0.15 operating places.
- There are only 0.04 operating places for every child aged 5-12. This is similar to 2022.
- The number of children on the waitlist increased by 231 from 2022 to 2024. 82% of centres report a waitlist. 65% of the centres reported a 12-24 month waiting period, a decrease of 15% from 2022.
- There remains no approved ECEC or OSHC options in most remote Aboriginal communities.
- 18% of Kimberley children aged 0-4 attend care, compared to a national average of 49.5%. Only 3.34% of children 5-12 attend care compared to 34.4% nationally.
- An additional 28 places are planned to open in 2025.

Workforce initiatives have increased staff and student enrolments

- Staff numbers increased by 16 from 2022 to 2024, but an additional 32 staff are required to enable centres to operate at licensed capacity.
- Student enrolments increased by 71, from 85 students in 2022 to 156 students in 2024.
- Two pre-pathway courses have been developed with units accredited towards the Certificate III in early childhood education and care.
- New in-house resourcing, training and mentoring programs funded by grants have supported workers and students contributing to workforce growth and operating capacity.

Whilst operating capacity has increased, workforce shortages remain at the heart of childcare access

- Whilst staff numbers increased by 16 FTE an additional 32 FTE staff are required to deliver at licensed capacity - a decrease of 27 FTE staff from 2022.
- Collectively the centres are operating at 78%, an increased capacity of 9% from 2022. This increased capacity is due to increased staff numbers.
- The workforce shortages remain driven by:
 - A critical lack of affordable housing for staff.
 - Wages and conditions, in particular in the context of the cost of living in the Kimberley and the wages of comparable work in the education sector.
- Bringing the centres to full capacity would create an additional 204 places.
- FIFO models are used to address staff shortages, at an additional cost to care.

State and Federal Governments have increased their focus on the sector

- A Federal Government Early Years Strategy 2024-2034 was launched in May 2024.
- The Preschool Reform Agreement expanded in 2023 in WA to include the ECEC sector, providing new grants for services.
- The WA Government released new grants to attract and retain regional childcare workers and to provide backbone support for small regional not for profit providers. Funding ceases mid-2025.
- A Federal Government expanded Early Childhood Education Workforce Package was announced in July 2024, and a worker retention payment announced in August 2024 to support future growth.
- Childcare workers remain on the government's skilled migration workforce list.
- Early childhood education and care courses remain fee free.



Introduction

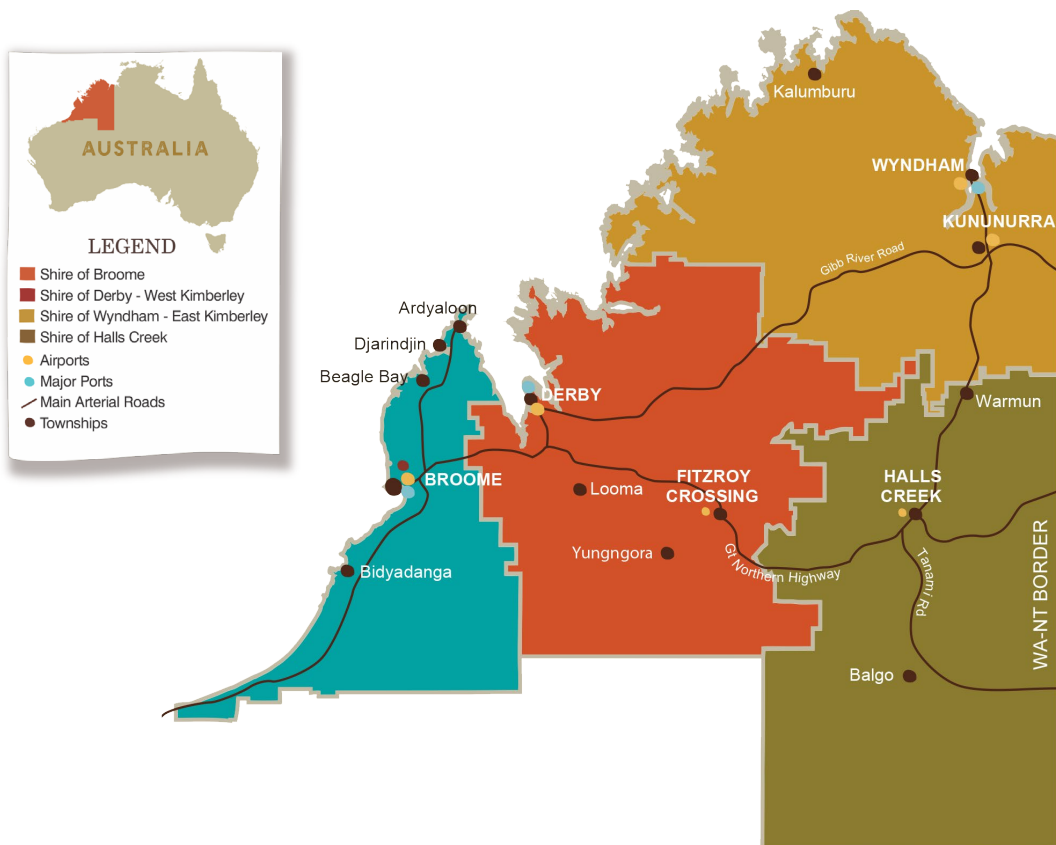
The purpose of this Report is to compare the findings of the Kimberley Development Commission (KDC) Childcare in the Kimberley Report 2022 with data from 2024. Its purpose is to illustrate how the sector's situation has changed during this period. Consistent with the 2022 report, this report does not make recommendations. It aims to provide an important part of the evidence base to enable policy makers and key stakeholders to understand the current situation, and to develop strategies to enable the ECEC in the Kimberley sector to thrive.

Methodology

This 2024 review involved follow up surveys with all approved childcare providers in the Kimberley. The same survey instrument was used as 2022 and the data captured compared to determine if childcare options had decreased, improved, or stayed the same. The data was collected during September and October 2024. The survey instrument can be found in the 2022 report available at kdc.wa.gov.au.

Scope

This analysis compares the findings of the 2022 report with data collected in 2024. It is to be read as an adjunct to the 2022 report. For context on childcare sector attributes and a glossary of terms please refer to the 2022 report.





Findings

Service availability and supply

There are 22 approved early childhood education and care services in the Kimberley, two less than 2022. The location, type, and number of centres by year is shown in Table 1. This change was driven by the closure of two family day care services in Kununurra and one in Broome, and the opening of an out of school hours centre in Kununurra.

 **22** Early childhood and education care centres in the Kimberley (ECEC* and OSHC*)

Figure 1 outlines the approved and operating capacity of the centres by location. The total number of approved ECEC and OSHC places in 2024 is 912, an increase of 3 places from 2022. This change is due to a loss of 11 approved places in Kununurra and an increase of 14 approved places in Broome. The closure of 3 family day care services, offset by the opening of a new out of school hours care service in Kununurra contributed to this change.

In 2024, of the 912 approved places, only 708 places are available due to staff shortages. As a result, the operating capacity of the centres is 78%. Operating capacity has increased from 2022 when it was 69%. Table 5 indicates an increase in 16 staff between 2022 and 2024. This increase is a driver for the increase of 83 available places during this period.

Figure 1 shows that placement availability increases are not evenly spread across the Kimberley. Kununurra lost 21 available places due to a reduction in the number of staff and changes in the type of care due to changes in services.

Table 1. Number, Management Type of early childhood education and care centres by location for 2022 and 2024

Year	2022	2024	2022	2024	2022	2024	2022	2024
Location	Private Business	Private Business	Family Daycare	Family Daycare	Not-for-profit	Not-for-profit	Total Centres	Total Centres
Kununurra	-	-	3	1	2	3	5	4
Halls Creek	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1
Warmun	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1
Wyndham	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	1
Broome	6	6	4	3	3	3	13	12
Derby	-	-	1	1	1	1	2	2
Fitzroy Crossing	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1
Total	7	7	8	5	9	10	24	22



Broome gained 14 places and Halls Creek gained 39 available places due to an increase in staff numbers. Staff changes are outlined in Table 5. The changes illustrate that the type of care impacts on placement availability. OSHC has a higher ratio of children to carer than long day care, so as centres shift the type of care that they offer, staff to child ratios change.

Despite an overall increase in operating capacity during this period, less than 50% of the centres are operating at their approved licensed capacity. The centres advised that they continue to use waivers to enable them to maintain services. However, a number of centres reported that they have had to close rooms or combine rooms to manage staff shortages or when staff are unable to work. As a result, the number of available places fluctuates during the year, impacting on people’s ability to access care.

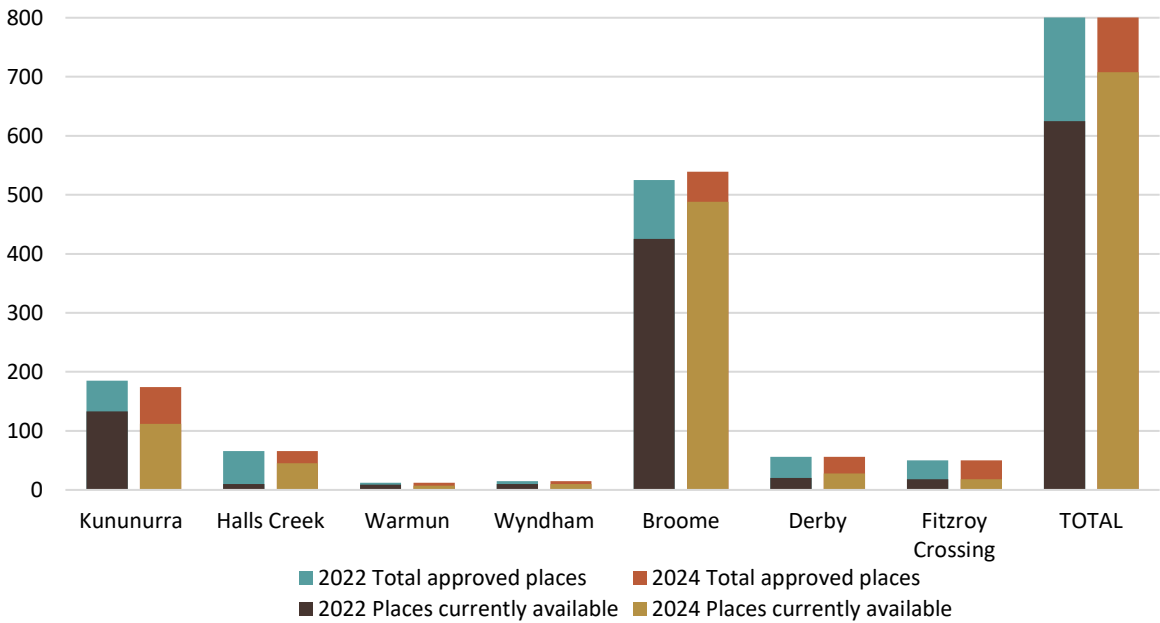
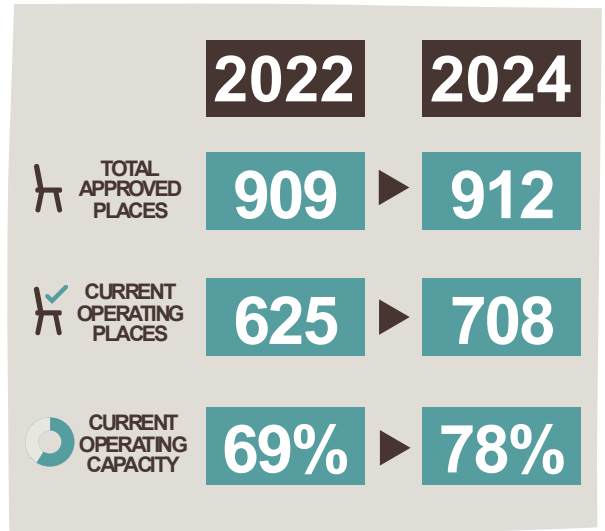


Figure 1. Total approved and operating capacity by location for 2022 and 2024

The gap between approved and actual capacity in 2022 was 284 places. The gap between approved and actual capacity in 2024 was 204. It is estimated that the Kimberley forgoes approximately \$2.4M p.a.¹ in Commonwealth Child Care subsidies calculated on these unused places.



¹ ECEC daily rate of \$155 per child, a 50% CCS, 48 weeks (240 days) annual access and a total of 151 unused place additional places = \$2,808,600. OSCH daily rate of \$55 per child, a 50% CCS subsidy, 40 weeks (200 days) annual access and a total of 53 unused places = 291,500.



Increased licensed capacity in 2025

The Wunan Foundation, in partnership with One Tree community services, is opening a new centre licensed for 24 children in Kununurra in early 2025. Wunan received funding from the Community Child Care fund Restricted (CCCFR) - Closing the Gap, non-competitive grant. It is anticipated that the new service will be open from 7.30am to 4.00pm and have 7.5 FTE staff. One Tree advised that they have been advertising for 10 weeks, and recruitment is proving challenging. A Family Day Care Service in Broome, closed for extended parental leave, will re-opening in 2025, providing four places for care.

Service provision on remote Aboriginal communities

The gap has not closed between 2022 and 2024 regarding childcare availability on remote Aboriginal communities. Warmun remains the only community with an early childhood education and care service.



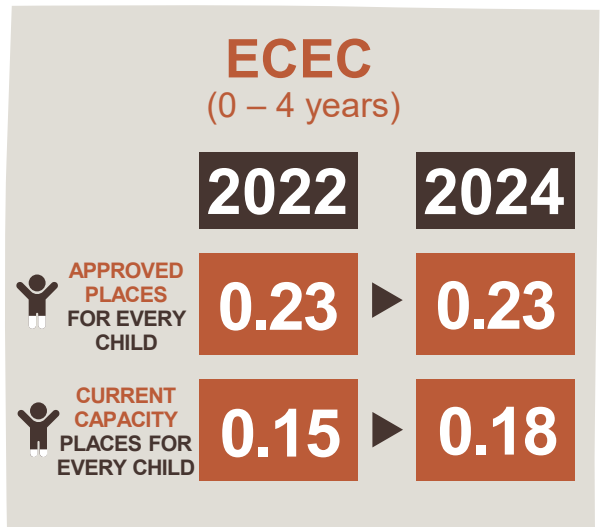
Service demand

The 2022 report was based on data from the 2021 Australian Census of Population and Housing, and estimated resident population. As this is the latest population data available it is used for this report.

ECEC

The 2024 operating capacity for ECEC places is 528 compared with the total approved places of 679. This is shown in Table 2. This equates to an underutilisation of 151 approved ECEC places across the Kimberley. Operating capacity has increased between 2022 and 2024 by 82 places. Capacity increase is due to an increase in staffing numbers.

June 2024 data from the Department of Education indicates that across Australia 49.6% of children aged 0-5, and 34.4% of children 0-12 used approved care². Of the 2915 children in the Kimberley aged 0-4 years, 526 (18%), attend ECEC. Assuming demand is similar in the Kimberley, 1446 children would require care, yet there are only 528 places available.



² <https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/early-childhood-data-and-reports/quarterly-reports-usage-services-fees-and-subsidies/child-care-subsidy-data-report-june-quarter-2024>



Table 2. Measures of ECEC supply and demand 2022 and 2024

Year	Total approved long day care places	Current operating capacity long day care places	Waitlist	Total families in the labour force with children 0-4 years 2021	Total children 0-4 years 2021 ERP	Number of approved ECEC places per child 0-4 years	Number of current operating capacity ECEC places per child 0-4 years
2022	666	446	770	966	2915	0.23	0.15
2024	679	528	991	966	2915	0.23	0.18

OSHC

Table 3 outlines that whilst there has been an increase of 10 OSHC places since 2022, there has only been an increase in one operating place during this period.

June 2024 data from the Department of Education indicates that across Australia 34.4% of children aged 0 to 12 used approved care³. In the Kimberley of the 5048 children aged 5-12 years, 169 attend OSHC. Or 3.34%. Assuming demand is similar in the Kimberley 1736.5 children would require OSHC. There are 180 places available.

 + 1 **OSHC Operating place**
2022 - 2024

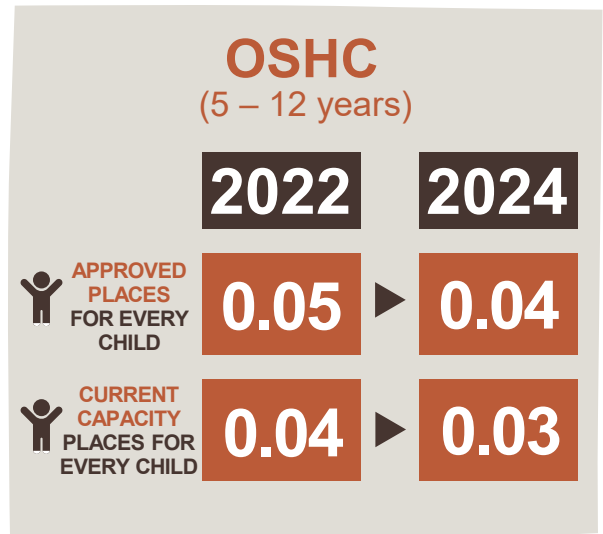


Table 3. Number of approved OSHC places and operating places for 2022 and 2024

Year	Total approved OSHC places	Current operating capacity OSHC places	Total families in the labour force with children 5-12 years 2021	Total children 5-12 years 2021 ERP	Number of approved ECEC places per child 5-12 years	Number of current operating capacity OSHC places per child 5-12 years
2022	243	179	2108	5048	0.05	0.04
2024	233	180	2108	5048	0.05	0.04

³ <https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/early-childhood-data-and-reports/quarterly-reports-usage-services-fees-and-subsidies/child-care-subsidy-data-report-june-quarter-2024>



Waitlist

82% of ECEC and OSHC services reported waitlists ranging from 4 to 212 children. 65% of the centres reporting a waiting period of 12 – 24 months. Table 4 indicates that waitlist numbers for childcare have increased by 231 children. It must be noted that this does not equate to the total number of children waiting for care as parents will place their children on multiple waitlists with the hope of securing a place. This increase is driven by an increase in waitlist numbers in Broome and Fitzroy Crossing.



Table 4. Waitlist numbers for 2022 and 2024

Location	2022 Waitlist	2024 Waitlist	Difference
Kununurra	194	167	-27
Halls Creek	15	0	-15
Warmun	0	0	0
Wyndham	0	4	4
Broome	487	759	272
Derby	50	30	-20
Fitzroy Crossing	14	31	17
Total	760	991	231

Priority of access

The majority of centres continue to prioritise childcare access for their staff, with most providing it for free. Access continues to be prioritised for children in the care of the Department of Communities, children at risk, and single working parents.





Sector constraints and workforce sustainability

Staffing, housing, wages and regulation, and social issues, remain the key factors constraining the supply of ECEC and OSHC services in the Kimberley. As a result of not being able to fully staff the centres, they remain below operating capacity and have to adjust their services in response. This impacts on people’s access to childcare.

 **+16** Sector staff
2022 - 2024

Staffing

Staff numbers increased by 16 from 2022 to 2024. Despite this increase, in 2024 centres are short 32 staff, 27 less than the staff shortage in 2022.

Whilst this staff increase has led to increased operating capacity, staff shortages mean centres are still operating below licensed capacity. Centres do not use agency staff to address shortages. The reason for this is cost and lack of housing.

In 2022 one provider used an internal FIFO model to access temporary staff and this continued in 2024. In 2024 another service utilised a FIFO model to reduce staff vacancies with staff employed on a 4 weeks on 3 weeks off roster. They reported this works well and increased their fees to cover this cost. Also, they have a part time (21 hours per week) Educational Teacher based in Perth who does a site visit every three weeks and provides ongoing support for staff for their study and compliance work such as updating centre policies and procedures. One Centre has accessed the Kimberley District Area Migration Scheme (DAMA) to obtain a qualified worker. Other centres advised that they are exploring this option.

Table 5. Number of employed staff and number of staff vacancies for 2022 and 2024

Location	2022 staff employed	2024 staff employed	2022-2024 Difference	2022 Staff Vacancies	2024 Staff Vacancies	2022-2024 Difference
Kununurra	35	29.8	- 5.2	26	8	-18
Halls Creek	8	12	+ 4	5	1	-4
Warmun	4	3	-1	3	1	-2
Wyndham	6	4	-2	0	2	2
Broome	106	128	+22	19	11	-8
Derby	8	7.5	- 0.5	4	4	0
Fitzroy Crossing	13	12	-1	2	5	3
Total	180	195.3	+16.3	59	32	-27



As shown in Table 6, the number and profile of staff vacancies changed between 2022 and 2024. The centres advised that this change has been driven by access to new government grants enabling them to establish training support and mentoring programs for ECEC students, which has increased access to qualified staff.

Table 6. Profile of staff vacancies for 2022 and 2024

Staff vacancies	2022	2024
Early Childhood Teacher	1	9
Diploma	28	6
Certificate III	26	12
Director/Co-ordinator	2	4
Other Roles	2	1
Total	59	32

 **-27 Staff vacancies**
2022 - 2024

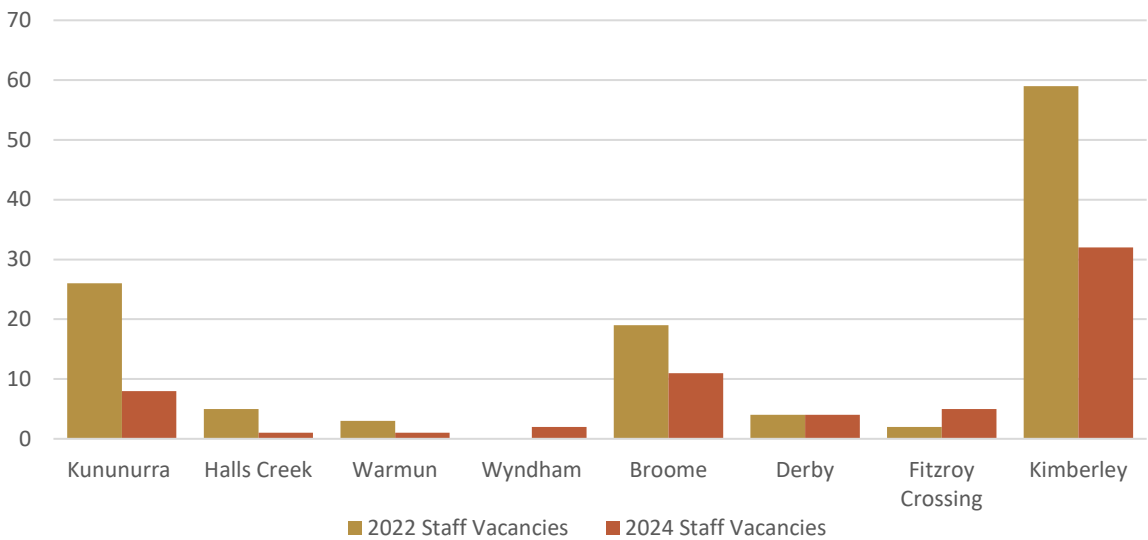


Figure 2. Number of staff vacancies by location for 2022 and 2024





The challenges



Training and workforce development

A key change between 2022 and 2024 is the increase of students enrolled in Early Childhood and Education and Care studies at the North Regional TAFE and One Tree. As indicated in Figure 3, there has been a growth of 71 students, from 85 students in 2022 to 156 in 2024.

 **+71** Students enrolled
2022 - 2024

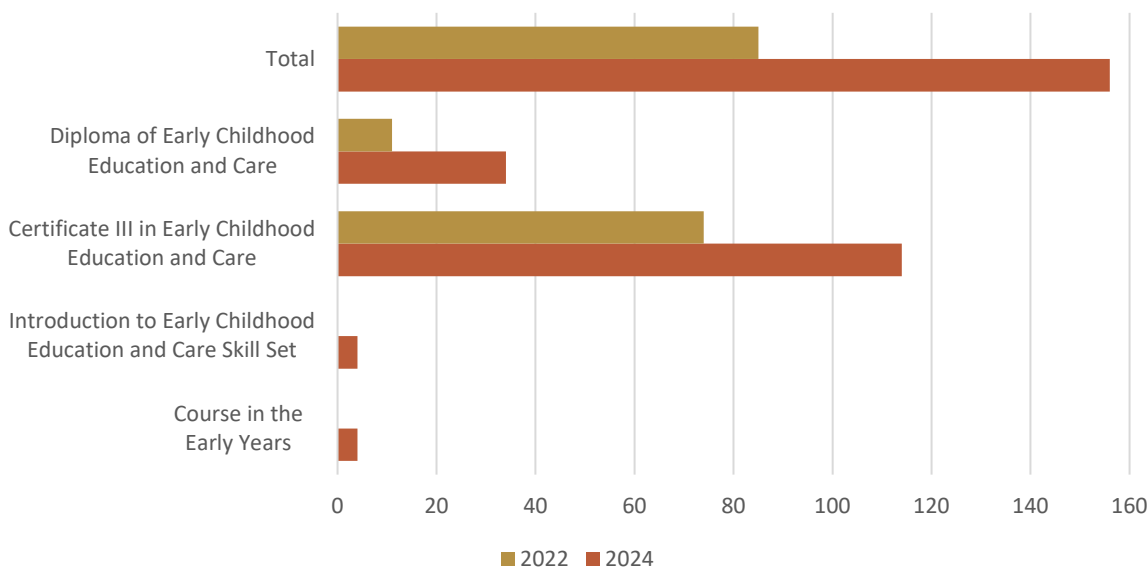


Figure 3. Number of students in early childhood education and care training 2022 and 2024.

Along with increased student numbers there has been an increase in student completion rates. The reasons cited for this include two new pathways to the Certificate III. The course in the Early Years provides learning in a non-regulated early childhood setting with children aged between 0-5 years such as a playgroup. The Introduction to Early Childhood and Care Job Ready Skill set enables students to start a traineeship in a centre with units counting towards the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care. Feedback from training providers is that these pre-pathway programs enable students who are often excellent workers, to ease into study and helps address barriers to learning such as poor levels of literacy and numeracy.

Another reason provided for the increase in students was new government grants to support staff training and mentoring.

One Tree established the Regional Early Years Learn and Lead (REYLL) program, providing resources and support to not for profit ECEC centres through Regional Support Managers who tailor individual plans for staff needs. This twelve-month program ends in April 2025. Another One Tree initiative is workplace pathway mentors based in Kununurra and Derby, to support their staff to recruit and train trainees with a focus on the local workforce. One Tree advised that this has vastly improved course completion rates. A Regional Economic Development grant of \$130K is supporting the role in Derby and a Commonwealth Grant Stream in Kununurra. Without additional funding both programs will cease. Another centre received a Regional Economic Development Grant of \$130K for a trainer/mentor to support their trainees.



**Students enrolled
In Early Childhood
Education studies at
NR TAFE & One Tree**



**114 students
in Certificate III**



**34 students
in Diploma**

The Ewin Centre and Jalygurr Guwan Aboriginal Corporation both received one-off grants of \$96K and \$80K from the expanded Preschool Reform Agreement. These funds enabled them to support staff through workshops and mentoring sessions. Further information on these grants is in the 'Industry Responses to ECEC and OSHC challenges' section. The increase in students studying has increased the pool of available staff for centres, as a requirement of appointing unqualified staff is that they have to actively study towards a qualification⁴.

The latest 2023 data from the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research shows that VET completion rates for Indigenous students undertaking VET qualifications in WA commencing in 2019 was 33.8%. For WA students in the education sector completion rates were 57.8%⁵. Research from Jobs and Skills Australia shows that students in remote areas have on average a 10% lower completion rate, pointing toward a need to support delivery in regional and remote areas⁶.

A barrier identified by centres to students becoming qualified, is that students who pause their qualifications for an extended period of time may have their units discredited as qualifications change. The units studied are not accredited and have to be retaken. It was felt that this issue should be addressed to support students to complete their studies.

Housing

Affordable housing was cited as the key challenge by all the centre-based services in attracting staff. Ten centres, over 50%, continue to provide housing or a rental subsidies for staff.

The majority of houses are sourced through the WA Government Regional Housing Officer Housing (GROH) Program, with one centre leasing a house from their local shire. Some centres report that staff have to share a house which is not ideal and impacts on recruitment. The Kimberley Development Commission Residential Housing and Land Snapshot 2023 shows housing stress, in particular the high proportion of government housing and almost no affordable rental homes in the private market⁷. In 2024, one Kimberley Shire accessed \$21.5K from a new WA Government Attraction and Retention Program for Regional Childcare Workers, for a childcare worker housing support program. These funds are used for a housing subsidy for a Kununurra service.



>50%

**Centre-based
services provide
staff housing or
subsidies**

Wages and incentives

Low wages were cited as a challenge in attracting and retaining staff. To address this, eleven centres offer above the award wages. Centres advised that in towns where some centres pay over the award and others don't this can become an issue. Centres noted that staff from the WA Department of Education receive higher wages, subsidised housing, utility subsidies and other incentives that the centres cannot match. A number of centres said that their wages should have parity with staff employed by the Department of Education.

⁴ <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/qualifications/qualification-requirements>

⁵ <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/vet-qualification-completion-rates-2023>

⁶ <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/download/690/vocational-education-and-training-regional-rural-and-remote-australia/983/vet-regional-rural-and-remote-australia/pdf>

⁷ <https://www.kdc.wa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Kimberley-Land-and-Housing-Snapshot-Final-Version-Reduce-Size.pdf>



Regulation

In July 2023, regulatory changes came into effect that provide flexibility for services when replacing educators during short term absences and resignations, such as enabling a person with a primary school teaching qualification and amending requirements for OSHC providers to keep ‘program level’ not individual child level documentation about educational programs. In addition they provide greater flexibility when calculating family day care coordinator to educator ratios for FDC services operating for over 12 months⁸. Another key change was to the OSHC legislation. The Nationally accredited Cert III Outside School Hours Care qualification could not be used as a First Qualified. In response HumanAbility is launching a project to review the Cert III OSHC.

The ratio of educators-to-children means that centres have to juggle their services to remain compliant, through closing or merging rooms or changing the number of babies, toddlers and older children in care. Whilst there have been no changes to the educator-to-child ratios between 2022 and 2024 the WA ratios for children over preschool age are lower than the other jurisdictions. In WA, the ratio is 1 educator for 10 children. In the NT, QLD, SA, TAS, VIC, NSW it is 1 educator for 15 children⁹.

Social issues

Similar to 2022, centres cited high levels of crime as a reason for finding it difficult to recruit and retain staff.

Financial models

Whilst all centres raised their fees between 2022 and 2024, most centres continue to rely heavily on the Child Care Subsidy (CCS). Some services are able to access the Community Child Care Fund (CCCF) and/or Community Child Care Fund Restricted (CCCFR) an Australian Government funding for sustainability in remote regions. Services highlighted that the work by providers to offset childcare costs for families is very administrative heavy. Services do not often receive recognition for the work that goes into accessing grants to help families’ cost of care.

New grants have assisted centres to develop initiatives to support their staff. These are one-off grants for discrete projects and do not provide sustainable long-term funding. Centres advised that whilst welcome, grants place additional work on staff and management committees in terms of applying for, implementing, and acquitting grants.

Infrastructure

Only one centre highlighted infrastructure issues as impacting on their service. This was need for more storage areas.

⁸ <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/latest-news/changes-nqf-starting-1-july-2023-and-extension-workforce-transitional-arrangements-31-december-2024>

⁹ <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/educator-to-child-ratios>



Opportunities for sector growth and development

Economic activity and investment

Increased Kimberley economic activity continues to be forecast with large projects planned which will increase the already high demand for ECEC and OSHC services.

The Government’s commitment to Closing the Gap Outcome 8 and Target 8, that by 2031, there will be an increase in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-64 who are employed to 62%, will require additional ECEC and OSHC places. In addition, the ECEC and OSHC sector provides a good opportunity for Aboriginal employment.

2024 data continues to illustrate the gap of current operating levels and licensed capacity. It shows the percentage of children attending care in the Kimberley is lower than the Australian rate of 49.6% of children aged 0 to 5 and 34.4% of children aged 0 to 12 using approved care. Raising ECEC and OSHC levels to the national average available places will require an additional 2485.5 available childcare places.

Raising the Kimberley ECEC and OSHC levels to the national average will unlock opportunity. Based on a conservative estimate, if the Kimberley were to achieve parity with national availability rates, this would unlock a minimum of \$40.25M p.a. in direct economic activity through additional employment in the sector¹⁰. This would draw an additional \$34.3M annually to the Kimberley in Commonwealth Childcare subsidies¹¹.

Employment parity would result in a secondary economic benefit stimulated by household consumption of the increased workforce. There is also a multiplied economic benefit because childcare availability enables labour force participation in other sectors for caregivers.

Table 8. Average numbers of children using care, Australia and Kimberley

Type of care	National average 0-4 years using care	Kimberley average 5-12 using care	Additional available places to meet national average
ECEC	49.6%	18%	918
OSHC	34.4%	3.34%	1567.5



¹⁰ This estimate is based on 2485.5 additional places, a multiplier of 0.25 based on every new place available resulting in 0.25 FTE employees able to enter the workforce and May 2024 ABS Average Weekly Earning Data on the average private sector weekly wage for a female being \$1,245.70; 2485.5 places x 0.25 FTE x \$64,776.40 = \$40,250,435.55.

¹¹ ECEC daily rate of \$155 per child, a 50% CCS, 48 weeks (240 days) annual access and a total of 918 additional places = \$17,074,800. OSHC daily rate of \$55 per child, a 50% CCS subsidy, 40 weeks (200 days) annual access and a total of 1567.5 additional places = \$17,242,500.



Industry responses to ECEC and OSHC challenges

The following outlines major responses by government and industry between 2022 and 2024 to support the early childhood education and care sector. Kimberley training providers and centres have accessed new pre-pathway training and grant funding to implement local initiatives to support students and their workforce as outlined throughout this report.

Education and training pathways

Two courses were developed to support workforce training and development. The Introduction to Early Childhood Education, and Care Job Ready Skill Set¹² was introduced in 2022 for students to gain the skills, knowledge and experience to start a traineeship. The course includes work placement in a centre and prepares students for employment-based traineeships or further study. The unit's skill sets provide credits to further study in a related qualification. The Course in the Early Years – 52917WA¹³ was developed by Community Skills WA, bridging a gap by providing learning in a non-regulated early learning service, such as a playgroup or child and family centre, which caters for children from birth to 5 years of age. Funding from Job Pathways supported course development. The course was approved by the Training Accreditation Council in February 2024. One Tree has students in Kununurra and Halls Creek. Studying this course does not count towards the regulator requirements for ECEC staff working towards a qualification.

Research and strategies

Education and Care Services National Law Application Bill 2024

The Education and Care Services National Law Application Bill 2024 passed in August 2024 through the WA Legislative Assembly. The Bill aims to strengthen regulatory oversight of providers aligning Western Australia's legislation with other jurisdictions to create nationally consistent standards¹⁴.

*Federal Government Early Years Strategy 2024-2034*¹⁵

Launched in May 2024, this strategy outlines the Federal Government's approach for high-quality, affordable early childhood education and care through a raft of strategies and ten-year action plans.

A Path to Universal Early Childhood Education and Care - Productivity Commission

Handed to the Australian Government in June 2024 this report found that up to 30 hours or three days a week of quality care should be available to all children aged 0–5 years and in 'thin' markets, or complex need communities, additional funding should support appropriate services, and where necessary, ensure ongoing viability through block funding. It found that the government should raise the maximum rate of the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and relax the CCS Activity Test to remove barriers for families. It also found that Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) require a sustainable funding model and publicly funded professional development for staff and support for services. The government is yet to respond to this report.

¹² <https://www.jobsandskills.wa.gov.au/courses/introduction-early-childhood-education-and-care-skill-set>

¹³ <https://training.gov.au/Training/Details/52917WA/summary>

¹⁴ <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/Cook%20Labor%20Government/Bill-cements-WA's-commitment-to-quality-early-childhood-education-20240814>

¹⁵ <https://www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children-programs-services-early-years-strategy/early-years-strategy-2024-2034%20launched%207%20May%202024>



*The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession, Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Capacity Study, May 2024*¹⁶

This Jobs and Skills Australia study outlines the significant workforce growth needed to meet early childhood education demand. It delivered 28 findings and 41 recommendations.

*Regional Early Childhood Education and Care report WA State Training Board in collaboration with the Community Skills WA industry training council*¹⁷

This report builds on work of the State Training Board (STB) in 2021, exploring issues affecting the WA regional childcare sector and how the training sector can assist. Consultation was undertaken during July – October 2021 with the report released in 2023.

Regional Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Action Plan, May 2023

The report provides nine recommended strategies under seven key themes:

1. Tightening regional labour markets
2. Importance of local workforce initiatives and Aboriginal workforce development needs
3. Targeted promotion of early childhood education career pathways
4. Untapped labour markets
5. Barriers of the training and regulatory environment
6. Housing affordability
7. Overseas workforce

Vocational Education and Training in Regional, Rural and Remote Australia, January 2023

This report by Jobs and Skills Australia examines the provision of and access to vocational education and training (VET) in regional, rural and remote

areas of Australia providing advice on issues relating to skills and training, and workforce needs.

The skilled priority occupation list and expansion of the Kimberley Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA)

Childcare centre managers and workers remain on Australia's priority migration skilled occupation list¹⁸. In 2024 the Kimberley DAMA was extended from the East to the whole Kimberley, along with a new Settlement Services program. One centre accessed the DAMA for a qualified staff member. Other centres are exploring DAMA opportunities.



¹⁶ https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-09/the_future_of_the_early_childhood_education_profession_-_extended_report.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/document-collections/regional-early-childhood-education-and-care-report>

¹⁸ <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-processing-times/skilled-visa-processing-priorities>



ECEC funding initiatives

Expanded Preschool Reform Agreement (PRA)

The Commonwealth Preschool Reform Agreement, which funds sectors delivering preschool (Kindergarten) programs in 2023 was expanded in Western Australia to include the ECEC sector. Funding is via a grants program offering \$20,000 to \$100,000 in line with the PRA objectives¹⁹. In December 2023, 16 organisations received over \$1M, with \$2.4 million of funds sought. Two Kimberley recipients received \$96,461.34 and \$80,000.00 in the initial funding round.

Free TAFE and VET Places for Early Childhood Education and Care

The Australian Government committed an additional \$88.8 million in the 2024-25 Budget, for a further 20,000 fee-free TAFE and VET places²⁰ including for ECEC courses. The WA Government announced an additional \$8 million in the 2024-25 Budget to support fee-free study in 2025.

Increase to the Award Rate and Childcare subsidy

A 3.75% increase to award wage commenced 1 July 2024 following the 2024–25 annual wage review. An increase to the Childcare Subsidy was announced on 17 June 2024.

Expanded Early Childhood Education Workforce package

The Federal government is investing \$72.4 million in professional development opportunities to strengthen skills and professional experience, improve staff retention, build supply, and increase capacity from 2023–24 to 2026–27²¹. A paid practicum wage subsidy is available to assist educators undertaking a Diploma of Early Childhood Education and relevant teaching qualifications.

The package enables positions to be backfilled. The paid practicum wage subsidy has been doubled to up to eight weeks per semester²².

Worker retention payment for childcare workers.

The Federal Government new worker retention payment, commencing in December 2024, will support a wage increase of 10% on top of the current national award rate in the first year; increasing to 15% above the award rate in year two²³. Providers need to apply and will be paid through a grant. The payment is conditional on providers limiting fee growth by no more than 4.4% from 8 August (over the next 12 months), engaging staff through a workplace instrument that meets grant conditions, and passing on all funding to eligible workers through increased wages. Feedback from Community Skills WA is that this only applies to in-ratio centres and that there is a lot of paperwork involved. This coupled with limiting the fee increase may not make it attractive to centres.

2024/25 WA Government budget

The State Government has made a \$16 million investment towards a \$35 million boost for the 10-year Early Years Partnership with the Minderoo Foundation and Telethon Kids Institute, to improve early childhood outcomes in communities across WA. The EYP does not have a focus on ECEC. The Bidyadanga Aboriginal Community is one of four communities in WA who are part of the EYP.

Attraction and Retention Packages for Regional Child Care Workers Program

In July 2021, the WA Government committed \$1M over four years to support the attraction and retention of early childhood education and care workers in regional WA²⁴. Grants of up to \$25,000

¹⁹<https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/Cook%20Labor%20Government/Million-dollar-boost-to-Early-Childhood-Education-and-Care-sector-20231220>

²⁰<https://www.wa.gov.au/government/announcements/training-enrolments-reach-new-highs-thanks-fee-free-tafe#:~:text=The%20State%20Government%20announced%20an,Free%20TAFE%20initiative%20in%202025.>

²¹<https://ministers.education.gov.au/aly/paid-prac-helping-upskill-early-childhood-education-and-care-workforce>

²²<https://ministers.education.gov.au/clare/cheaper-child-care-providing-cost-living-relief-family-budgets>

²³<https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/announcements/wage-increase-early-childhood-workforce>

²⁴<https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/attraction-and-retention-packages-regional-childcare-workers-program>



support attraction and retention initiatives by regional local governments. Funded initiatives include upskilling workers, relocation, and subsidised housing costs. Four funding rounds have distributed \$781,066 to 23 Councils. Round three recipients, announced July 2024, included the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley which received \$20,798.05 for a housing support program.

Funding to assist small community-managed, not for profit ECEC services in regional areas

The WA Government released Expressions of Interest in September 2023 for a \$4.1 million fund to support the viability of regional early childhood education and care services by working with regional providers to deliver advice, support and resources to services, or a model that creates a backbone organisation that smaller centres can roll into, which assumes responsibility for financial management, governance, compliance and reporting, allowing centres to focus on caring for children²⁵. Grants of up to \$1 million were available, including Business Case Development Grants. In May 2024, One Tree was awarded 12-month funding and created the REYLL (Regional Early Years Learning and Lead) initiative to provide resources and support to not for profit services²⁶.

Local Government Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) Grant Program

This funding is for local governments to improve early childhood outcomes, in partnership with key stakeholders²⁷. In June 2024 \$889,686 was awarded to 12 local governments. The Shire of Broome received funding for their Story-time Broome library program for 0-5 year olds, called Little Bubba Yarns - Bookish Play the Deadly Way.

Community Child Care Fund (CCCF)

Commonwealth grants to help services address barriers with a focus on disadvantaged, regional and remote, and Indigenous communities²⁸. This includes the Community Child Care Fund (CCCF), the Special Circumstances Child Care fund (SCCF)²⁹ open fund which helps services stay open when something unexpected happens, and the Disadvantaged and Vulnerable Communities' grant, which has funding rounds focused on sustainability and capital support³⁰.

²⁵ <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/Cook%20Labor%20Government/Funding-to-strengthen-regional-Early-Childhood-Education-and-Care-Services-20230921>

²⁶ <https://reyll.onetree.org.au>

²⁷ <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/Cook%20Labor%20Government/Grants-awarded-to-improve-early-childhood-outcomes-20240619>

²⁸ <https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/community-child-care-fund>

²⁹ <https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/community-child-care-fund/special-circumstances-grant>

³⁰ <https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/community-child-care-fund/disadvantaged-and-vulnerable-communities-grant>



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