



Big pay increase for early childcare workers

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NEWS

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Highlight: Childcare workers will get a huge bump to their pay packets by Christmas, with the federal government agreeing to fund a 15 per cent pay increase for workers, but it's conditional.

Body

Stephanie Smail: Childcare workers have welcomed a significant pay increase, saying it will help address the staff shortages that have been plaguing the sector. The federal government has announced a 15% wage increase to be rolled out over 12 months from this December. Advocates say the bump in pay is also a major step forward for gender equity, as Kathleen Ferguson reports.

Anthony Albanese: What do you think about my drawing, Ned? Do you think it's good?

Kathleen Ferguson: The Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, has a crack at some of the crafts which help nurture the country's young.

Anthony Albanese: Hey, what do you reckon?

Opinion: That looks weird. Can I have a look? Can I have a look, Tom?

Kathleen Ferguson: He visited the Sydney Early Childcare Centre after announcing a 15% pay increase for the sector's workers.

Anthony Albanese: They deserve more than our thanks. They deserve decent wages and conditions.

Kathleen Ferguson: Under the deal, workers will get 10% by this Christmas and a further 5% by December next year. It equates to around an extra \$100 a week and will cost \$3.6 billion. Karen Moran is a long-time educator.

Karen Moran: This decision today will change people's lives. It means that early childhood educators who've been relying on Food Bank to feed their own families won't have to do that anymore. And those that work two and three jobs just to make ends meet will be able to spend more time with their families.

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Kathleen Ferguson: But the deal is conditional. In order to receive the pay bump, childcare centres will have to limit their fee increases to 4.4% during the next 12 months. The Minister for Early Childcare, Education and Youth, Dr Anne Aly, says the sector's role in society is critical.

Dr Anne Aly: We know that brain development is... 90% of brain development occurs in those first five years. This is not babysitting, this is not wiping bums and noses. This is education. We see you, we hear you, we acknowledge you. We know the vital and professional work that you do.

Kathleen Ferguson: The early childcare sector says it's been a long and hard-fought battle. Georgie Dent is the CEO of advocacy group The Parenthood.

Georgie Dent: This is a long overdue recognition of the incredible contribution that early childhood educators make to our children, to our communities, to families. It is such a fantastic achievement.

Kathleen Ferguson: Georgie Dent says this pay increase is desperately needed to combat a worker shortage in the sector, which is mostly made up of women.

Georgie Dent: The sector is overjoyed. This has been a long-realised dream. We have known that early childhood educators have been chronically underpaid and undervalued. We have seen in recent years the accelerating exit of early educators from the sector, which has put incredible pressure on services.

Kathleen Ferguson: This is an interim measure which will be in place for two years while the federal government reviews the sector. The federal education minister, Jason Clare, says it will be up to childcare centres and providers to sign on to the scheme. And he says if centres don't sign up, they should be prepared to lose staff to competitors.

Jason Clare: This is a cost-of-living win-win. It's good for workers and it's good for parents. And at its heart, this is good for education, for the next generation, setting our kids up for success.

Kathleen Ferguson: Shadow Treasurer Angus Taylor supports higher wages but says bringing down inflation is the best way to increase pay.

Angus Taylor: Well, we want to see higher real wages, which means lower prices for everything, for all Australians, PK. And we'll look at the detail of this proposal that Labor's putting forward. If it can raise real wages for Australians, of course we're going to support it. That's our position.

Kathleen Ferguson: The United Workers Union says the increase sends a strong message to women. Jo Schofield is the union's national president.

Jo Schofield: Just this week, we did a survey that showed 60% of educators wanted to leave within three years. 97% of centres have seen educators walk out in the last year, and the single factor in that is the low pay.

Kathleen Ferguson: She says while the union will continue advocating for better pay and conditions, this is a good start.

Stephanie Smail: Kathleen Ferguson reporting.

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