



Minister stands by training package for early childhood educators

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Body

Update FEDERAL Minister for Early Childhood Education Dr **Anne Aly** has stood by the government's training package for educators in this year's budget.

Childcare operators have called the package "chicken feed" and "a slap in the face" - arguing it doesn't address the real issue - a wage increase to keep people in the job.

The union has asked for a 25 per cent pay rise to attract more educators and retain the current workforce.

Dr Aly said she acknowledged early childhood educators and teachers do "incredible work".

"That's why we changed the law last year, to make it easier for them to get a pay rise," she said.

"The multi-employer provisions commence in June."

She said she was proud to be part of a government that recognises the importance of the workforce.

"Our professional development package is a direct response to the issues and the concerns the sector has raised with me over the year," she said.

"We know the early childhood education workforce is experiencing long-term challenges - professional development is key to retaining highly skilled educators and teachers in the sector, but also key to improving capacity and capability of early childhood education services."

Earlier CHILDCARE educators say the Federal Budget has made no real effort to address workforce shortages, calling a lack of wage growth a "slap in the face".

Federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers announced a raft of measures designed to make childcare more affordable for parents and provide better support for educators' professional development on Tuesday night, but did not address the 25 per cent pay increase unions have strongly campaigned for.

Karuah Preschool director Karen Baloch said she can't take more enrolments because she doesn't have the staff and has had to ask employees to work extra hours to support families.

Minister stands by training package for early childhood educators

"There are so many people leaving the sector because not only are we thoroughly under-appreciated and under-valued but that's made blatantly obvious every week when we get paid," she said.

"It's an absolute slap in the face, they make no effort to address educator shortages unless they address wages.

"Everything they do is completely tokenistic and as a workforce we know that."

The budget committed an extra \$9 billion to the sector, bringing the total spend on childcare to \$55.3 billion in the next four years.

It also included \$724 million across five years to support training for educators and the care sector with more than 80,000 early childhood educators expected to benefit.

Along with educators, the budget focused on making childcare more accessible and affordable for families, with about 1.2 million to benefit from July.

St Nicholas executive director David Healy said he welcomed the increased training measures but said more needed to be done to retain the workforce.

"To be frank it's a national-level issue and this is chicken feed being thrown at it, it looks attractive but realistically it's going to take years for those shortages to resolve themselves," he said.

Mr Healy said their centres operate up to 50 weeks a year and the concern is that the sector is losing skilled, qualified workers to teaching which offers longer breaks, shorter hours and better pay.

He said he can't run his centres at full capacity because of staffing shortages, and said that although it was great to see subsidies for parents to assist them with childcare the issue is having enough staff to offer them a place.

"It's hard to say what's not attracting people to the sector, certainly having further support to drive and encourage opportunities for people in the educator workforce who want to upskill will ultimately increase the number of degree-qualified early childhood teachers and that is welcome," he said.

"On a national level the funding appears attractive on the face of it, but if you break it down to the shortages being experienced I'm not confident it does go far enough."

United Workers Union early education director Helen Gibbons said educators are passionate about providing quality learning to children and professional development that supports their practice is a "must".

"Better access to training and development will improve centres' ability to attract and retain educators, but it's not enough alone," she said.

"To properly response to the massive workforce crisis in early learning, the federal government must follow through and play its role in improving wages.

"The only way to keep educators from leaving the sector at current crisis levels is by paying them a wage that respects their vital contribution to our society."

The union is calling on the federal government to fund a 25 per cent pay rise for every educator in the sector.

The Newcastle Herald has contacted federal Minister for Early Childhood Education **Anne Aly** for comment.

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