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Workforce crisis continues: NSW government misses the mark on preschool funding

The union representing teachers in early childhood education and care in NSW and the ACT calls on the NSW government to boost funding to help community preschools attract and retain staff.

The state government on Tuesday announced \$100 million in funding for community preschools to extend operating hours, open more days and cater for children from birth through to school age.

“We acknowledge the efforts of the NSW government to improve access to early education and focus on child safety,” said Independent Education Union of Australia NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews. “However, this funding will not assist the vast majority of community preschools.”

Teachers in community preschools earn up to 30% less than their colleagues with the same qualifications and roles in schools.

“This has led to a staffing crisis that is worsening as experienced teachers and educators leave the sector and community preschools struggle to attract new staff,” Matthews said.

There are more than 700 community preschools across NSW that provide a vital service to educate and care for children aged three to five years, their families and communities.

Matthews said funding for community preschools is almost solely derived from the NSW government.

“They have rejected our request for increased funding for wages for teachers and educators after months of bargaining,” she said.

“Without an increase to NSW government funding to lift pay and conditions, many community preschools may be forced to cap enrolments, increase fees for families and, in some cases, close entirely.”

The union also anticipates the early childhood education and care sector, including community preschools, will have to raise salaries to address the historical underpayment of women.

“Addressing the gender pay gap is vital, but community preschools need funding support from the NSW government to fix this,” Matthews said.

Community preschools are run by volunteer committees of parents whose only priorities are children’s education and safety – not profit.

“Community preschools have low rates of safety breaches,” Matthews said. “However, retaining a stable and well-qualified workforce is essential for a child-safe environment.”

Matthews said poor pay and conditions mean community preschools are struggling to attract new staff to their services and are losing staff to other sectors.

“Community preschools need qualified, trained teachers and educators to provide high-quality early childhood education that parents expect, and children deserve,” she said. “Their work has been undervalued for far too long and this must be fixed.”

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The IEUA NSW/ACT Branch represents 32,000 teachers, principals and support staff in Catholic and independent schools, early childhood centres and post-secondary colleges.

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