



**THRIVE  
BY FIVE**

# **THRIVE BY FIVE RURAL AND REGIONAL ACTION GROUP FIVE POINT PLAN**

**Under the Thrive By Five banner, the Rural and Remote Coalition has agreed on a five-point plan to improve access, affordability, and equity in the provision of childcare services in rural and remote locations.**

It is widely acknowledged that families living in country areas (rural and remote), face specific challenges in accessing and attending pre-school, because of where they live.



# BACKGROUND

**A Rural Roundtable, held in conjunction with Thrive by Five and Royal Far West late last year, agreed to develop a specific plan for early learning in rural and remote Australia, that considers some of the unique issues this community faces.**

Families living in rural and remote Australia face limited access to pre-school and quality early childhood education. The importance of technology and telehealth in providing distance education is heightened in these isolated geographical areas that are less serviced by the market, and more serviced by local and state government services. Attracting quality, skilled staff to remote areas is another unique issue to rural and remote areas, with educators needing more support.

Research shows that children living in rural and remote Australia have far greater likelihood of developmental vulnerabilities or delays compared to their city counterparts – which are in turn linked with poor educational outcomes, disability, chronic mental health problems and a higher risk of unemployment, personal relationship difficulties, contact with the criminal justice system and homelessness. The recently released 2021 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data shows children living in very remote areas of Australia continue to be more than twice as likely as those living in major cities to be developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains. They are also three times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains.

The most recent figures show children living in rural and remote areas of Australia are further falling behind with the gap widening for children who are developmentally vulnerable on one and two or more domains.

All evidence supports pre-school is advantageous in the early years for brain development and to help identify any developmental issues. The physical, emotional, and social development attained in early childhood sets a trajectory for long term outcomes in health, education, and well-being. Reducing childhood developmental vulnerability and improving developmental health outcomes in rural Australia will help increase educational outcomes and build stronger regions and a stronger nation, well into the future.

However, the results of a recent report from the Mitchell Institute highlights that families in regional, rural, and remote areas are the most at risk of suffering from poor access to early learning.

The Report shows just over 30% per cent of families living in major cities live in areas the researchers classified as a childcare desert, compared with 42.6% and 62.6% of people living in inner regional and outer regional neighbourhoods. The contrast is even more stark with remote and outer remote areas having the highest levels of childcare deserts at 87.5% and 79.9%. About 453 remote towns did not have a childcare centre within a 20-minute drive.

# THE RURAL AND REMOTE 5 POINT PLAN IS BASED AROUND 3 PILLARS

1

A fairer, more accessible funding model

2

Workforce incentives and assistance to attract and retain teachers in remote and rural areas

3

The need to have a unified system across States and Territories with fair and equitable access for all, no matter the postcode

## THE RURAL AND REMOTE 5 POINT PLAN CALLS FOR THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:

1

**A dedicated funding model** for a sustainable and viable early childhood education and childcare system in rural and remote communities regardless of location, setting, income or hours.

2

**Early childhood education and childcare to become part of the National Cabinet reform agenda** to deal with complexities of the system and build a true national universal system.

3

**Agree to a new national agreement to deliver universal three-year-old pre-school across the country** to match the partnership agreement in place for four-year-old preschool.

4

**Make the Childcare Subsidy available to all children regardless of the setting and the income or work status of the parents.** Lift the Childcare Subsidy to 95% for all children and set agreed fee caps.

5

**Start workforce planning for universal access and fund appropriate pay and flexible conditions for educators** to end the problem of skill shortages, high vacancy rates and high staff turnover rates across the sector.

## Other considerations to include are:

1. Support and coordination for remote childcare centres to help access federal and state grants that are available such as those announced in the recent Budget.
2. Fund workforce initiatives including professional development (per remote centre) and incentives for teachers to relocate to rural and remote areas
3. Fund allied health wrap around services in rural and remote locations identified as high need
4. Additional fully funded 2000 places in 40 (instead of the 20 committed) disadvantaged rural and remote locations.
5. Expand community navigators to support rural and remote communities  
– one per LGA

## SIGNED BY:

Bourke & District Children's Services -  
Yanmali

Children and Young People with Disability  
Australia (CYDA)

Community Connections Services  
Australia (CCSA)

Connected Beginnings - Yanmali - Bourke  
Contact Inc

Isolated Children's Parents Association  
(ICPA)

Life Ed NSW

NSW Nationals Women's Council

Regional Early Education and  
Development (REED)

Royal Far West

Royal Queensland Bush Children's Health  
Scheme (BUSHkids)

Rural Aid Ltd

Rural and Remote Mobile Children's  
Services Council

Thrive by Five



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