

ABOLISHING BONDS TO INCREASE ACCESS TO EARLY EDUCATION

Bonds are in place at a range of childcare centres as a fee that need to be paid before a child can enrol into early learning. The Hive find this to be a significant barrier for many low-income families and believe that this should be abolished to allow for equitable access to early learning for vulnerable children.



THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY EDUCATION

Access to 600 hours of early education prior to commencing school is recognised as one of the most effective ways to support a child's development and readiness for school.

Access to early education is particularly important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, CALD, and First Nations children as a core protective factor (ARACY 2015).

Access to early education has additional benefits to caregivers, providing childcare to allow carers to complete study, engage in employment, access various social services, and support their mental health.

THE PROBLEM

Access to early education is not easy for many families, particularly those from disadvantaged communities where children would benefit the most in attending high quality education and care. The cost of enrolling in childcare can be unattainable for low-income families, with many ECEC services having bonds and/or enrolment fees to be paid before a child can commence care.

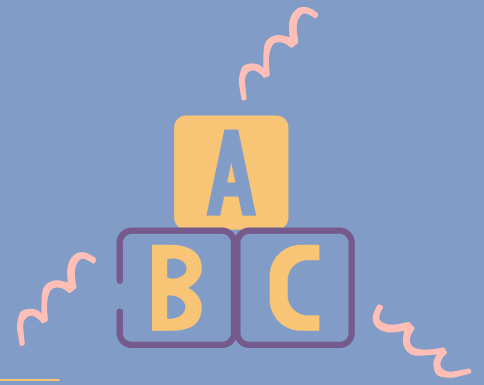
Bonds are usually calculated by 2 weeks of unsubsidised fees for each child being enrolled, where an enrolment fee is a non-refundable fixed cost to secure a child's place in ECEC. If a family is enrolling multiple children in a private service, it is not uncommon for a bond cost to reach or exceed \$1000. While low-income families may be able to afford the subsidised childcare fees, bond payments or enrolment fees are often impossible and a barrier to entering ECEC.

With subsidies recognising income level and adjusting fees to remove the financial barrier, it is reasonable that this should also apply for bonds and enrolment fees.

Not all ECEC services choose to have a bond or a large enrolment fee, therefore it is discretionary for each service to implement without regulation.



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THE HIVE'S DATA & ADVOCACY

The Hive Mt Druiitt have an Early Learning Linker (ELL) who since 2018 has practically, emotionally and financially supported families in Mt Druiitt to overcome barriers to access early education.

Of all the reasons families have requested assistance from the Early Learning Linker, brokerage for payment of bonds or enrolment fees is the most common.

From 2018 to June 2024:

- The Early Learning Linker has supported 139 children to enrol in ECEC
- Of those children, 121 have required support to pay for a bond or enrolment fee
- The total of this brokerage has been \$31,310.

At a local level, The Hive have advocated with local ECEC service providers to remove their bond payment however where successful, some have replaced this with an enrolment fee which is often cheaper, but still a barrier for many families. As such we need a more sustainable and regulated solution.

THE SOLUTION & IMPACT

- As the enforcement of and cost of bonds are determined by individual early learning centres, we believe that there should be protections within Early Education policies at both a state and federal level to **exempt low-income families from having to pay a bond.**

The abolishing of bonds for low-income families will increase the number of vulnerable children who are able to access early education, at no cost to the government. These children will commence school greater prepared to learn and with a higher likelihood of early identification of developmental delays or disabilities resulting in earlier intervention.

CONTACT US

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