

# Thousands of childcare workers take action in pay fight <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** 9News

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 26 Mar 2018

## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

Some childcare workers want to be paid as much as doctors for helping shoulder the burden of educating Australia's next generation.

Unions will settle for pay parity with teachers.

Mel Lowndes is among thousands of workers taking part in rolling stop-work action across the nation today, calling for better pay.

[Photographs of the march, available to view online: "A sea of colour lined Melbourne's CBD streets today" & "The union gathering in Melbourne attracted hundreds of participants"].

"I believe in the whole system that is done in Sweden and Denmark, we should be paid as much as doctors," she told reporters at a union gathering in Melbourne.

"We are supporting and growing the next generation."

She said educators constantly upskilled and dealt with all facets of a child's life, with sector pay failing to reflect the responsibility.

Some 6500 workers at 317 centres participated in the rolling closures, impacting about 30,000 parents.

Many workers attended union rallies in capital cities.

United Voice acknowledged the strike would have a "ripple effect" across the community but said it had enormous support from parents and operators.

"They are walking off the job to demand that this federal government takes seriously their calls for equal pay ... funding of the sector and works to fix the crisis in the early education sector," Helen Gibbons told reporters.

"This is the largest early education walk off we have ever seen.

The union wants the federal government to subsidise a 30 to 35 percent pay rise for workers, who start on an award rate of just over \$21 an hour.

Ms Gibbons said early educators wanted pay parity with teachers and others with equivalent qualifications.

"This is not something families can fix. We don't want to make early education unaffordable and inaccessible for Australia's children," she said.

The action follows the Fair Work Commission's decision in February to reject a wage increase for childcare workers.

[Photograph available to view online, "United Voice said the strike had 'enormous support' from parents and operators"].

Goodstart Early Learning, the country's largest provider, says staff from around 100 of its 650 centres took part in the action but no centres closed.

Nearly 100 centres in Queensland alone are participating, with a further 61 in South Australia and 30 in Tasmania.

Parent Jane Sherlock-Holcombe told reporters in Melbourne educators should be treated with "respect and value".

"Any increase to families would be untenable and not sustainable. This needs to be a matter of the federal government investing in our future," she said.

Federal Education and Training Minister Simon Birmingham has said he expects early learning and childcare centres to pay workers "as much as they can afford".

"The role of government is not to run those centres but to help families access affordable care," he said in a statement.

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