

Amid claims of abuse, neglect and poor standards, what is going wrong with childcare in Australia? ^[1]

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Excerpts

On Monday, an ABC's Four Corners investigation reported shocking cases of abuse and neglect in Australian childcare centres. This included examples of children being sexually abused, restrained for hours in high chairs, and fed nutritionally substandard meals such as pasta with ketchup.

While acknowledging there are high-quality services operating in the community, the program also showed how centre-based childcare is big business, dominated by for-profit providers, who may not be meeting regulatory standards.

What is going wrong with childcare in Australia?

Differing levels of quality

Data from Australia's childcare regulator consistently shows for-profit childcare services are, on average, rated as lower quality than not-for-profit services.

Of those rated by regulators, 11% of for-profit long daycare centres are not meeting national minimum quality standards (they are just "working towards"). This compares with 7% of not-for-profit centres not meeting minimum standards.

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As Four Corners highlighted, poor-quality services, with bad pay and working conditions are driving good educators away from the sector.

What next?

The Albanese government recently passed legislation to "guarantee" eligible families three days of subsidised childcare per week from January 2026.

But families need more than access. They also require a guarantee this childcare will be high-quality and keep children safe.

Even without the extra spending on the three-day guarantee, government spending on childcare subsidies is due to reach nearly A\$15 billion by 2026–27. Thus there is also a corresponding duty to taxpayers to ensure these funds are going to high-quality providers.

In the wake of the Four Corners report, the Greens are calling for a royal commission into childcare. But we do not need this level of inquiry to tell us the current system needs fundamental change.

Stronger regulatory powers, while important, will not be enough on their own. High-quality services need well-educated and well-supported staff. They also need governance and leadership that value educators' expertise and enable consistently high standards.

Related link: [Paving the path: Addressing market imbalances to achieve quality and affordable childcare in more places](#) ^[3]

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