

# Childcare educators make their case for much higher pay <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

Low-paid childcare educators from across the country will converge in Canberra next week to fight for a major investment of public funds into their wages.

It comes as the daycare sector was hit with industrial strife for the first time in 30 years on Thursday, when staff walked off the job at several Victorian centres to draw attention to what they say is the "gross underpayment" of early childhood educators, some of whom earn as little as \$20 an hour.

Childcare educators and their union, in a landmark Fair Work Commission case, are arguing that the female-dominated workforce of nearly 80,000 employees are paid less than men with similar qualifications because of an outdated notion that childcare is viewed as "women's work in the home".

A cohort of educators have arranged to meet with parliamentarians in coming days in an escalating effort to make the case for the pay rises that they believe is long overdue.

To avoid passing on added labour costs to operators and imposing higher daycare fees on parents, they want the Turnbull government to foot the bill, which could be up to. Union officials have previously pressed federal governments for a \$1.4 billion-a-year subsidy to the private sector to boost wages.

Kylie Grey has a certificate III in early childhood education and is studying for a diploma while working full-time.

Earning slightly more than \$20 an hour, she clears about \$600 a week after tax.

"It's never been a high-paid sector, and I feel that's got a lot to do with the job being seen as 'just babysitting' and not being properly valued as a very important part of a young child's education and development," she said.

"I was recently looking at my super, and, if I have longevity, it's not going to be enough to live off. I have three children, and there's definitely not enough for me and my family to save or buy a house of our own."

Figures compiled by childcare union United Voice show early childhood educators earn on average between \$20-\$23 an hour – a yearly wage of between \$40,700 and \$46,000 – depending on their level of qualification.

Early childhood teachers, with a four-year bachelor's degree, earn \$29 an hour, or \$58,000 a year, which is well below the \$73,000 average income of primary school teachers.

The union's equal pay claim in the Fair Work Commission is seeking pay rises of between 39 per cent and 72 per cent. Central to the case is the complex questions of how to prove women working in childcare were disadvantaged compared to men working in a comparable industry.

Australian Childcare Alliance state president Paul Mondo said payroll was the biggest expense facing childcare centre operators, but the union's pay case was a matter for the independent industrial umpire.

"We think the commission is the appropriate organisation to be making decisions in relation to wages and wage claims," Mr Mondo said.

United Voice national secretary Jo-anna Schofield has called on the Turnbull government to value the work of the committed professionals in the early childhood sector, who "take their responsibilities to children and families very seriously".

"It is vital that our politicians understand the enormous impact of early education and care on all aspects of Australian life, from educational outcomes for future generations to providing the ability for parents to re-enter the workforce," she said.

"The job of building a truly quality education and care system will not be complete until educators are paid the professional wages they deserve. The responsibility for fixing this problem rests firmly in the hands of government."

-reprinted from the Sydney Morning Herald

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