An Australian Government Initiative

Regional Development Australia

LIMESTONE COAST

Early Childhood Education and Care

July 2026

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Acknowledgement of Country

Regional Development Australia Limestone Coast acknowledges and respects the Traditional Custodians of the ancestral lands of the Limestone Coast. We acknowledge Elders past, present and emerging and we respect the deep feelings of attachment and relationship of Aboriginal peoples to Country.

Limestone Coast Early Childhood Education and Care

Executive Summary

Access to early childhood education and care is critical to the wellbeing and economic sustainability of regional communities. Childcare enables parents and caregivers to participate in the workforce, supports local businesses to recruit and retain staff, and contributes to children's early learning and development.

This study examines childcare demand and supply across the Limestone Coast region, drawing on demographic data, service information, consultation with providers and existing local studies. The analysis identifies patterns of demand, service pressures and access challenges across the region's seven council areas.

While Mount Gambier contains the largest concentration of childcare services and functions as a regional service hub, many surrounding communities rely on travelling to access care or informal care arrangements. In more rural and dispersed areas, limited service availability, workforce constraints and long travel distances can create significant barriers for families.

Evidence gathered through this study suggests that childcare availability across the Limestone Coast is shaped by a combination of factors, including population distribution, workforce constraints, service viability in smaller communities, and a regional role played by Mount Gambier. In several council areas, consultation and local data indicate persistent waiting lists and unmet demand, particularly for younger age groups where staffing ratios reduce available places.

Indicative modelling suggests the Limestone Coast region may currently require between approximately 1,150 and 1,380 childcare places to meet potential demand and there are currently 800 – 900 places available across the region. While these figures are estimates, they highlight the broader structural pressures within the regional childcare system.

Key Regional Insights

- The Limestone Coast region is estimated to be between approximately 260 and 490 childcare places short of potential demand.
- Childcare shortages are affecting regional workforce participation, with parents unable to increase or maintain working hours.
- Mount Gambier functions as the region's primary childcare service hub, supporting demand from surrounding council areas.
- Some communities may require new childcare infrastructure, while others may benefit from flexible or innovative service delivery models.
- A coordinated regional approach will be important to ensure sustainable childcare provision across the Limestone Coast.

This report provides an evidence base to support regional planning and advocacy. Its findings have also informed the development of the regional childcare toolkit, which explores practical strategies to improve childcare access across the Limestone Coast.

Acknowledgement and disclaimer

Regional Development Australia Limestone Coast acknowledges the Office for Early Childhood Development for contributing funding for this project. All content and views are our own and do not represent advice from the Office for Early Childhood Development or the Government of South Australia.

References

Mitchell Institute at Victoria University
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Limestone Coast Council Websites
Australian Government Department of Education
Tatiara Childcare Needs Assessment
Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)
Education and Early Childhood Services (Registration and Standards) Act 2011
South Australian Government's Office for Early Childhood Development
Early Childhood Australia
Improving Early Childhood Education and Care Access
Limestone Coast Regional Plan

Contact us

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"Quality childcare is one of the most important investments a region can make. It supports children's development, enables workforce participation and helps businesses attract and retain staff. As the Limestone Coast grows, access to childcare must be recognised as essential infrastructure that supports economic growth, liveability and regional prosperity."

Angela Cutting – Manager of Projects and Partnerships Regional Development Australia Limestone Coast.

More than 90% of a child's brain development occurs before the age of 5. That's why the early years are the perfect time to build a child's confidence, curiosity and important life skills. Early education helps us do that.

Office for Early Childhood Development

Part One: Regional Overview

1.1 Context and Objectives

Access to early childhood education and care has emerged as an increasingly important issue across the Limestone Coast region. Like many regional areas in Australia, the Limestone Coast is experiencing strong labour market demand alongside ongoing challenges in attracting and retaining workers across key industries including agriculture, healthcare, education, manufacturing and tourism. In this context, access to reliable childcare plays a critical role in enabling parents and carers to participate in the workforce and supporting the sustainability of regional communities.

Early childhood education and care services play an important role not only in supporting workforce participation but also in contributing to children's development. Participation in high-quality early learning programs has been shown to support children's social, emotional, physical and cognitive development and contribute both to family wellbeing and long-term educational outcomes.

Regional stakeholders have identified childcare availability as a growing constraint on workforce participation and business capacity across several Limestone Coast communities. While childcare services exist across the region, evidence gathered through consultation and previous local studies indicates that access to childcare varies significantly between council areas. In some communities' families rely on services located in neighbouring towns, while in others available services operate at or near capacity or face constraints related to staffing, infrastructure or service models.

The purpose of this study is to provide a regional overview of childcare demand and supply across the Limestone Coast and to identify areas where access to early childhood education and care may be constrained. The report draws together demographic data, service information, previous local studies and stakeholder consultation to assess current childcare provision across the region. The analysis also considers the potential economic and social implications associated with limited childcare access, including impacts on workforce participation, regional productivity and community wellbeing.

The findings are intended to inform future planning and discussions between local government, service providers, industry and state and federal agencies regarding opportunities to strengthen childcare provision across the Limestone Coast region.

Limestone Coast

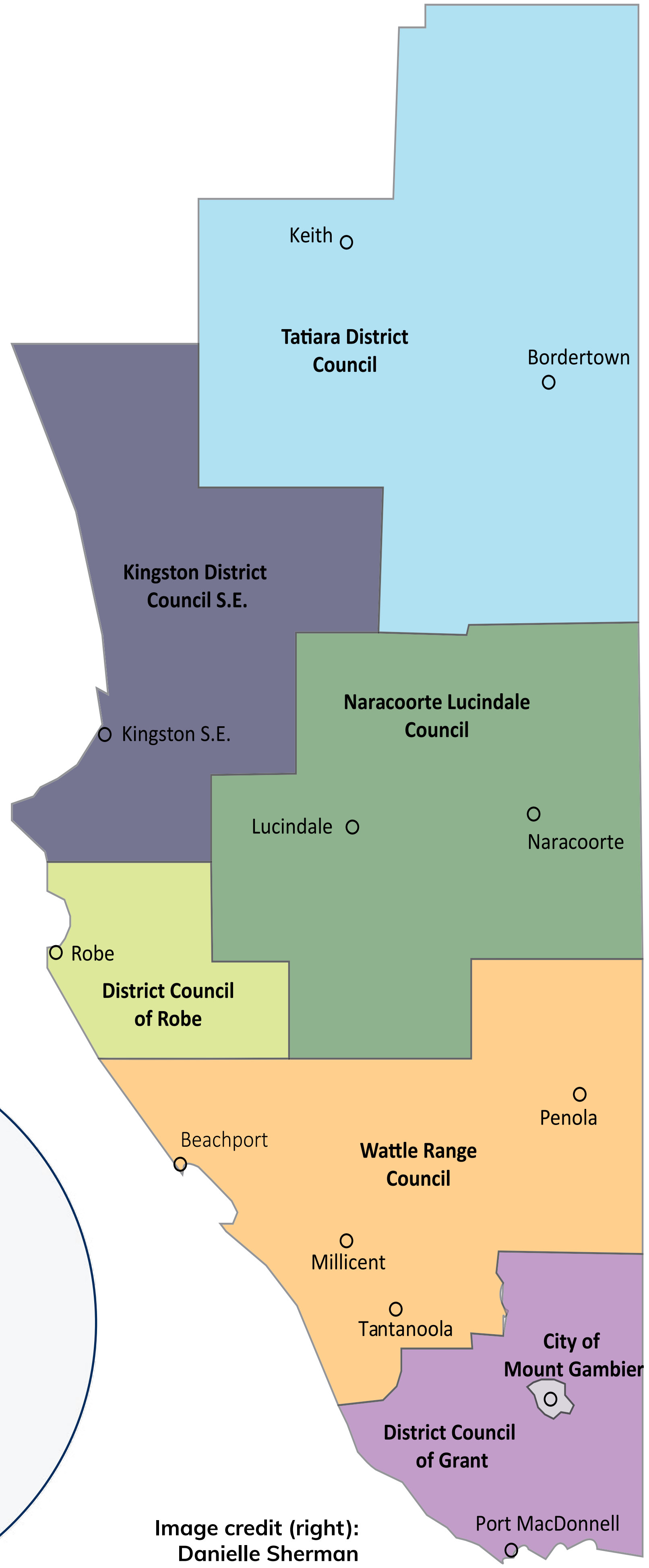


Image credit (right): Danielle Sherman

1.2 Limestone Coast Demographic Profile

The Limestone Coast is one of South Australia's most significant regional economies, encompassing the local government areas of the City of Mount Gambier, District Council of Grant, Naracoorte Lucindale Council, Tatiara District Council, Kingston District Council, District Council of Robe and Wattle Range Council. It has a regional population of approximately 70,000 people and is currently experiencing growth that may translate into a further 15,000 – 20,000 residents by 2051. Mount Gambier is the largest city in the region with approximately 30,000 residents.

The region supports a diverse economic base, including agriculture, forestry, manufacturing, tourism, healthcare and education, many of which are export-oriented and contribute significantly to South Australia's broader economy. Agricultural and food processing sectors within the region in particular play a major role in national and international supply chains.

Like many regional areas across Australia, the Limestone Coast is currently experiencing tight labour market conditions. Recent data indicates the regional unemployment rate is approximately 3.1%, which is lower than both the South Australian (4.3%) and the national (4.1%) unemployment rates. In this context many employers report difficulty filling roles across multiple sectors including agriculture, food processing, health services, retail, and hospitality. These labour market conditions have increased the importance of workforce participation across all segments of the population, including parents and carers of young children.

Socio-economic conditions across the region also provide important context when considering access to services such as childcare. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), parts of the Limestone Coast experience higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage than the national average. The median household income is $140 per week less than the South Australian average. While there is variation between communities, improving access to employment opportunities and supporting family income stability remain important priorities across the region.

In this context, access to essential services such as childcare plays an important role in supporting regional workforce participation, sustaining local communities and ensuring that families are able to live and work within the Limestone Coast region.

Population	Median Weekly Household Income
69,336	$1,311
SEIFA Index	**Childcare Service Gap**
984	258 - 489
Unemployment	**Labour Force Participation**
3.1%	59%

1.3 Early Childhood Demographics

Across the Limestone Coast region there are **approximately 3,459 children aged between 0 and 4 years**, representing the key cohort requiring access to early childhood education and care services.

The distribution of this population varies across the region, with the largest concentration in Mount Gambier, which acts as the primary regional service centre. Smaller but significant cohorts are also located in Naracoorte Lucindale, Wattle Range and Tatiara. In smaller councils such as Robe and Kingston, the number of children in the 0 - 4 age group is lower in absolute terms, but childcare services remain essential to supporting local workforce participation and maintaining the sustainability of local communities.

In regional contexts, even relatively small cohorts of young children can create strong demand for childcare services, particularly where there are limited alternative care options or long travel distances to neighbouring service centres. This is particularly relevant in the current economic climate, where many parents are returning to work sooner after the birth of a child or increasing work hours, based in response to labour market demand and rising cost of living pressures.

Early childhood education and care services also play an important role in supporting children's development and equipping children with social-emotional, physical and cognitive skills. Participation in high-quality early learning environments has been shown to support children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development during the critical early years.

For regional communities such as those across the Limestone Coast, access to early childhood education and care therefore contributes both to family wellbeing and to the long-term social and economic sustainability of the region.

Across the Limestone Coast region there are approximately 3,459 children aged between 0 and 4 years.

"To assist the child we must provide him/her with an environment which will enable him/her to develop freely"

~ Maria Montessori, Educational Pioneer

1.4 Childcare Demand

Estimating childcare demand is complex. It is influenced by multiple factors including workforce participation, family preferences, and availability of alternative care arrangements. Measuring childcare demand can also be challenging. Waiting lists do not always capture the full extent of demand as some families may stop registering after repeated unsuccessful attempts to secure a place, while others may join multiple waiting lists to increase their chances of accessing care.

We have however, utilised two benchmarks, that are widely recognised by social planners, government and within academic circles. These provide a useful guide when assessing childcare supply and demand to formulate this report.

Research from Victoria University's Mitchell Institute has suggested that a planning benchmark of approximately one childcare place for every three children aged 0 - 4 can provide an indicative baseline for service provision.

In regions with higher workforce participation and limited informal care networks, the effective demand may be higher, with many in the social planning field utilising a 1 place for every 2.5 children aged between 0 – 4. For the purposes of this study, demand has therefore been considered using both benchmark scenarios:

- 1 place per 3 children[1]
- 1 place per 2.5 children[2]

This modelling suggests that the Limestone Coast region may require between **1,153 and 1,384 childcare** places depending on workforce participation patterns and service utilisation rates. Demand is naturally concentrated in the region's largest population centre, Mount Gambier, as well as other larger townships within each Council.

1 Mitchell Institute Benchmark
2 Common Social Planning Benchmark

The Limestone Coast region may require between 1,153 and 1,384 childcare places.

It is important to note that the above benchmarks provide standardised estimates and do not factor in local conditions including the geographical spread of communities, local industry needs such as seasonal fluctuations within agricultural industries and low unemployment rates, population growth or economic trends including the current cost of living crisis.

For example, our analysis of the information gathered for this project indicates demand across several smaller communities including Padthaway, Beachport, Mount Burr, Tarpeena and Kalangadoo. Families within these smaller more remote villages and agricultural regions either have no access to care or are forced to drive long distances to access it in the nearest town.

From an economic perspective, some parts of the Limestone Coast report very low unemployment rates, with businesses of varying sizes sometimes struggling to fill vacancies. Anecdotally, some of these businesses have reported a lack of access to childcare is one of the factors contributing to this issue. From an anecdotal perspective information collected from stakeholders as part of this, and previous projects supports these assumptions. For example, data collected as part of the Tatiara District Council Childcare Needs Assessment Report (2025), 65% of the local businesses surveyed indicated that childcare shortages affect their capacity to grow and almost the same number indicated that hiring and retention issues were directly related to childcare issues.

Current inflation levels and increasing interest rates are also causing financial stress within households, which increases the likelihood of parents returning to work sooner after the birth of a child or increasing work hours. The Tatiara report indicated that families in the region would like access to approximately 70% more childcare hours in addition to what they already use.

1.5 Childcare Supply and Unmet Demand Across the Region

The following provides an overview of what has been captured from the consultation undertaken from this project and research undertaken as part of other projects. The availability of childcare services across the Limestone Coast varies considerably between local government areas. Several factors influence supply numbers including availability of staff, and the size and nature of the facilities and their responsibilities in delivering kindergarten programs – which can have changing numbers semester to semester. There are a couple of Rural Care Programs operated in the region, which are state funded and managed facilities, they can sometimes accommodate more numbers based on the footprint of the Centre but do not have the necessary staff resource to cater to larger numbers.

Table 1 provides approximate childcare places currently available across the Limestone Coast and an indicative gap, which reflects unmet demand.

Mount Gambier, as the region's largest centre, contains the greatest number of childcare services. However, even within Mount Gambier there is evidence of uneven demand, with some centres reporting vacancies while others report significant waitlists, particularly for younger age groups. In surrounding council areas, access to childcare is often more limited. Some communities rely heavily on services located in neighbouring towns or the Mount Gambier service hub.

Evidence gathered during this study indicates that several councils, including Robe, Tatiara and Naracoorte Lucindale and Wattle Range are experiencing clear and sustained demand for additional childcare places. In towns such as Keith and Kingston, childcare services may exist but operate at or near capacity, or families may need to travel to neighbouring towns to access care. Within many council areas there is also evidence that smaller communities outside the main service centres, such as Padthaway and Glencoe, are experiencing strong demand relative to their population size, often with limited or no local childcare provision.

These patterns highlight the challenges of delivering childcare services across a geographically dispersed regional population. In some locations, particularly smaller or more remote communities, traditional centre-based childcare models may not always be feasible. In these circumstances, innovative and flexible childcare solutions may be required. Such approaches often rely on collaboration between communities, service providers and different levels of government and are discussed later in this report.

FAMILY EXPERIENCE

"We were on three waiting lists for over a year and eventually stopped calling because we were told nothing would open up until our child turned three."

WORKFORCE EXPERIENCE

"I'm trying to attract more doctors to the region, but it is hard enough to relocate and raise a family without personal or family supports. Trying to do it without formal childcare adds undue strain that puts off lots of prospective professionals moving to the region."

1.6 Supply and Demand Analysis by Council Area

While regional analysis provides an overview of childcare demand and supply across the Limestone Coast, the evidence gathered for this study demonstrates that childcare availability and demand vary significantly between council areas. Population size, workforce participation patterns, service availability and travel distances all influence how childcare demand is experienced locally.

The following sections summarise the childcare supply and demand context across each council area, drawing on available service information, consultation and previous local studies.

Table 1 Approximate childcare places currently available across the Limestone Coast

Council Area	Children Aged 0-4	Required Places (1:3)	Estimated Existing Places*	Service Gap (1:3)	Service Gap (1:2.5)	Key Notes
District Council of Grant	386	129	~0	129	154	• No long day care services identified within the council area • Families rely heavily on Mount Gambier services • Access issue driven by travel rather than absence of regional supply
Naracoorte Lucindale Council	500	167	~75	92	125	• Naracoorte Child Day Care (~35) and Naracoorte Early Learning (~50) • Waitlists between ~22–74 places • Proposed 50-place Sunrise Christian ELC and possible integrated hub under discussion
Kingston District Council	102	34	~20	14	21	• Licensed for 45 but 25 places are utilised for kinder leaving 20 for long day care • ~29 children on waiting list • Planned development of new 83-place facility indicates recognised demand and future growth expectations
City of Mount Gambier	1,506	502	~600	-98	-2	• Largest childcare market in the region and currently has surplus places compared to needs • Significant waitlists at some centres and others have availability • Some centres reporting vacancies • Greatest shortage for 0–2 age cohort • Functions as service hub for surrounding councils with some travelling long distances to use facilities
District Council of Robe	66	22	~25	-3	1	• Robe Child Care on Wheels model currently operating ~25 places per day • Whilst the data does not reflect a deficit the number of children on the waiting list demonstrates a significant deficit. There are currently 37 on the waiting list • Local analysis identifies need for a 40–60 place centre with nearby Beachport residents included – which is located in Wattle Range Council • Existing service at risk due to existing facilities and spaces being required for future 3-year-old kindergarten
Tatiara District Council	372	124	~74	50	75	• Existing long day care capacity ~74 places (excluding kindergarten) • Keith centre: 62 places with waitlist ~40 • Bordertown/Carol Murray services reporting strong demand • Local study estimates ~50–60 place shortfall
Wattle Range Council	527	176	~101	75	110	• McKay Childcare Penola licensed ~65 places • One centre operating in Millicent • Occasional care in Glencoe (not long day care) • Families in Millicent and surrounding areas often rely on Mount Gambier
Regional Total	**3,459**	**1,153**	**~895**	**258**	**489**	**Regional picture combines direct shortages, age-cohort mismatches, and reliance on Mount Gambier as the regional childcare hub**

*Estimated existing childcare places are based on publicly available service information, consultation with providers, and previous local studies. Due to limitations in consistent reporting of service capacity and waitlists, figures should be interpreted as indicative estimates rather than precise counts.

District Council of Grant

Regional Overview

Population	Median Weekly Household Income
9,140	$1,734
SEIFA Index	**Childcare Service Gap**
1026	129
Unemployment	**Labour Force Participation**
3%	59%

No long day care services identified within the council area. Relies heavily on City of Mount Gambier services.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

“We travel into Mount Gambier to access care for our children”

“We need to travel 45 minutes one-way to access childcare.”

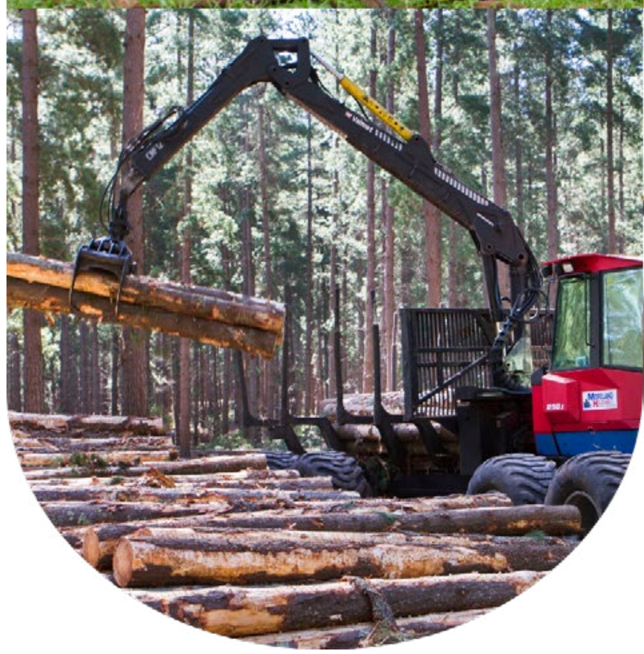
Photo credit: Ockert le Roux

1.6.1 District Council of Grant

The District Council of Grant surrounds the City of Mount Gambier but does not currently contain any long day care childcare services within its own council area. As a result, many families rely on services located in Mount Gambier to access childcare. It includes a number of small townships including Port MacDonnell, Tarpeena, Allendale East and Mount Schank.

While the proximity of Mount Gambier provides some access to childcare services, travel requirements can create practical challenges for families, particularly where work locations, commuting patterns and childcare operating hours do not align. For example, families living in the outer areas of the District Council of Grant who work in agriculture may need to travel considerable distances to access childcare. In some cases, this may involve up to an hour of additional travel each day (round trip) to drop off and collect children from childcare facilities.

This additional travel time can be inconvenient and costly and may be particularly challenging for farming families managing seasonal workloads and early or variable working hours. This reliance on neighbouring council areas highlights the importance of regional service hubs in providing childcare access, while also illustrating the limitations of service provision in smaller or more dispersed communities.



Naracoorte Lucindale Council

Regional Overview

Population	Median Weekly Household Income
8,901	$1,466
SEIFA Index	**Childcare Service Gap**
978	92
Unemployment	**Labour Force Participation**
2.6%	63%

Naracoorte Child Day Care (~35) and Naracoorte Early Learning (~50). Waitlists between ~22–74 places.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

"I put my second child on the waiting list when I was in the first trimester (mid 2024) and still haven't been able to access the care I need. Whilst my 2 year old has a place I have the added stress of trying to find someone trustworthy to look after my youngest, which I need in order to be able to work. There is added financial pressure and it opens up a whole range of child safety concerns. Out of sheer desperation parents are forced to rely on unqualified, unregulated people to care for them."

Photo credit: (Left to right) Naracoorte Lucindale Council and South Australian Tourism Commission

1.6.2 Naracoorte Lucindale Council

Naracoorte Lucindale has two long day care services currently operating within the council area. Evidence gathered through this study indicates that both services have experienced significant demand pressures, with waitlists reported via this consultation and through previous research.

Local planning work has identified the potential need for additional childcare capacity in Naracoorte, including proposals for new childcare services and integrated early childhood facilities. Demand for childcare services within the council area also reflects the needs of surrounding rural communities that rely on Naracoorte as a service centre including Lucindale, Hynam, Frances and Bool Lagoon.

Sunrise Christian School is investigating the potential for the development of an early learning community centre kindergarten / childcare facility on their grounds, which would accommodate up to 50 children and allow them to offer a seamless education experience from 0 to Year 10. With its aging infrastructure and location limiting options for expansion, Naracoorte Child Daycare Centre is exploring options with government and commercial stakeholders in relation to the prospect of moving to a larger more modern facility. It is expected to gain support and proceed but this is not yet confirmed.

The available evidence suggests that childcare demand within Naracoorte Lucindale exceeds current supply, particularly as the population growth and workforce participation increases and that further childcare places are required.

EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE

"As a business owner in Naracoorte, Kingston, Millicent and Bordertown, we have physiotherapists who want to work, but cant because they cannot access childcare. It is incredibly frustrating for us as a business. I have no doubt we are not the only ones facing this, but with a female dominant workforce it certainly impacts us greatly".

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

"I know at least five families locally, all highly skilled who have had to look for care and work elsewhere. Children are missing out on early education. In short we are in crisis, unable to access quality care and unable to work in industries desperately needing their workforce to keep our town afloat"

Kingston District Council (S.E.)

Regional Overview

Licensed for 45 but 25 places are utilised for kinder leaving 20 for long day care. ~29 children on waiting list.

BUSINESS FEEDBACK

"As a small business we pride ourselves on offering flexible working arrangements, particularly given the large majority of our workforce is female. In Kingston, Naracoorte, Millicent and Bordertown we are constantly hamstrung by childcare availability and are unable to get staff back to work. This has been a frequent issue over the last 20 years of running a business. It hampers business growth and prevents qualified health professionals from returning to the workforce in any capacity."

Population	Median Weekly Household Income
2,406	$1,115
SEIFA Index	**Childcare Service Gap**
977	14
Unemployment	**Labour Force Participation**
3.1%	55%

Photo credit: (Left to right) Kirsty-Ann Thompson, Kim Gibbs, M. Irwin, and South Australian Tourism Commission

1.6.3 Kingston District Council (S.E.)

The Kingston District Council area currently has a childcare service operating within the community. However, available evidence indicates that the service has experienced capacity constraints. This in part is related to its structure as a Rural Care Service, which limits the number of staff allocated by the State Government to the facility. It also offers a kindergarten program, which inhibits flexibility within the facility.

Consultation and previously gathered information suggest that demand for childcare services remains strong within the Kingston SE community, particularly for younger age groups. An expanded childcare facility in Kingston on the Areas School grounds, which will accommodate approximately 83 children is about to commence construction and is expected to be completed in 2027. This development directly correlates to local demand and reflects the community's expectations relating to continued population growth and workforce participation.

Improving childcare capacity within Kingston SE may help support local workforce participation and strengthen the ability of local businesses and services to attract and retain staff.

EARLY LEARNING ACCESS

"Welcoming of 83 place centre. Growing our own workforce with lots of support for placement of students. We have a much more demand than ever before with babies"

City of Mount Gambier

Regional Overview

Greatest shortage for 0–2 age cohort. Functions as service hub for surrounding councils with some travelling long distances to use facilities.

Population	Median Weekly Household Income
27,888	$1,200

SEIFA Index	Childcare Service Gap
924	(98)

Unemployment	Labour Force Participation
4.7%	59%

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

"I can't request different days each week because my shifts are sporadic over a 7-day roster as an essential worker. Therefore, I pay fulltime childcare and still have to send my child on my days off, when someone else could use these."

Photo credits: Raising Wanderers

1.6.4 City of Mount Gambier

As the largest population centre in the Limestone Coast, Mount Gambier contains the region's greatest concentration of childcare services. Based on the Mitchell Model the City currently has a surplus of childcare places but as regional service and commercial hub for the surrounding district it plays an important part in dealing with the overall regional service gap. Families from the District Council of Grant, which surrounds Mount Gambier and Wattle Range Council frequently access childcare services in Mount Gambier.

Evidence gathered through this study indicates a mixed childcare market within the city. Several services report significant waitlists, particularly for younger children aged under two years, while other centres report vacancies in older age cohorts. This suggests that while overall capacity may appear sufficient at times, there are mismatches between the availability of places and the types of care required by families. There have been new facilities open in Mount Gambier as recently as 2024 and other existing facilities indicate they have no plans for expansion in the near future.

This pattern is not unique to Mount Gambier or the broader region. National childcare regulations require higher staff-to-child ratios for children aged 0–2 years, which reduces the number of places available for this age group within childcare centres. As a result, demand for places for children aged under two years often exceeds available capacity, leading to longer waitlists and waiting times for families seeking care.

Mount Gambier therefore plays an important role in supporting childcare demand across the wider region. Consultation for this project suggests that many families residing outside the Mount Gambier council area currently access childcare within the city. In some cases, families travel considerable distances to do so. If childcare availability was improved within surrounding communities some of the demand pressure on Mount Gambier may reduce.

While Mount Gambier plays a critical role as a regional childcare hub, the evidence suggests that relying solely on one service centre is unlikely to provide a sustainable long-term solution for meeting childcare demand across the broader Limestone Coast region.

District Council of Robe

Regional Overview

Population	Median Weekly Household Income
1,611	$1,347

SEIFA Index	Childcare Service Gap
1023	(3)

Unemployment	Labour Force Participation
1.8%	58%

Local analysis identifies need for a 40–60 place centre with nearby Beachport residents included – which is located in Wattle Range Council.

EARLY LEARNING ACCESS

"Our service hosted two TAFE SA students completing their Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care. We made the decision to employ both students while they continued their studies. Both students were required to complete placement competencies relating specifically to the care of children under 12 months of age. [Due to ongoing workforce shortage and extensive waitlists] in our region many services do not have infants enrolled. [These] students were facing the prospect of travelling to Mount Gambier to complete the infant component of their placement."

Photo credits: Raising Wanderers

1.6.5 District Council of Robe

Whilst the data suggests there is currently no gap in the District Council of Robe, the evidence collected from the community indicates a different story, with significant unmet demand. Existing childcare provision within Robe operates under a mobile or flexible service model, which limits the number of places available to 25 children. This service currently has a waiting list of approximately 50 children and survey results and consultation highlight that limited childcare access is affecting the ability of parents to participate fully in the workforce.

The childcare demand for the Robe Council area extends beyond its boundaries with local families as well as those from nearby Beachport and Kangaroo Inn, which are situated in Wattle Range Council utilising its services.

Robe Childcare on Wheels utilises pre-school rooms at school sites to deliver its program, some of which are at risk due to the introduction of 3-year-old kinder in 2027 and schools needing to use the spaces themselves for this expansion. Due to its tenuous access to infrastructure, this service faces ongoing operational issues and staff are having to spend significant time juggling waitlists to accommodate the community's needs. This presents a significant risk for the service and several stakeholders in the district are motivated to develop a new more permanent facility. The local Council are supportive of developing a more permanent facility with it being an advocacy 2026 focus. Negotiations are underway with the Department for Education to access land on school grounds to establish a co-located facility.

The evidence available for Robe presents one of the clearest examples within the Limestone Coast of a community experiencing a structural shortage of childcare services. Responding to community needs and expectations, Childcare on Wheels is eager to develop a permanent fixed childcare service with an added Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) service in the Council area. Robe Childcare are exploring funding with State and Federal governments. Robe Childcare was also gifted land at Robe Primary School and Kindergarten in late May 2026 indicating significant promise for a new childcare centre at Robe.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

"Without childcare it's very hard for families to stay in town or for new families to move here."

Tatiara District Council

Regional Overview

Population	Median Weekly Household Income
7,071	$1,471

SEIFA Index	Childcare Service Gap
982	50

Unemployment	Labour Force Participation
1.9%	66%

Existing long day care capacity ~74 places (excluding kindergarten). Local study estimates ~50–60 place shortfall.

FARMING FAMILIES FEEDBACK

"We are in Padthaway and we rely solely on paid nannies and babysitters, a costly and inconsistent alternative, available only on an ad-hoc and unreliable basis"

Photo credit: (Left to right) Anonymous and Sarah Cunningham

1.6.6 Tatiara District Council

The Tatiara District Council has two main towns with several smaller communities within its boundaries including Padthaway, Mundulla, Willalooka and Wolseley. There are two main childcare services operating within the region, located in Bordertown and Keith. These support families within their own townships as well as those travelling from the regional villages. Previous local research and consultation undertaken for this study indicates that demand for childcare services currently exceeds available supply with an estimated shortfall of at least 50 places. Parents in the region report not being able to return to work at the conclusion of maternity leave due limited childcare options and small businesses indicate an ongoing challenge to fill vacancies, in part due to the lack of access to childcare. Additionally this childcare shortfall is impacting women's overall income in the community economy and their career progression.

Waitlists and local workforce demand suggest that additional childcare capacity is required to meet the needs of families within the council area. This includes the potential for some flexible options that support families working in agriculture whose needs fluctuate with seasonal demand and bespoke services delivered in smaller towns in conjunction with Schools.

A new childcare centre has been announced for Bordertown May 2026, which will address some of the shortages in the region. Valued at $11.8 million an 111 place integrated Early Education Centre will be constructed on school grounds. Funded by both Federal and State governments it is expected to be completed by the end of 2028.

The War Memorial Childcare Centre, located in Keith is also eager to expand in the coming years and is continuing to pursue opportunities to increase its capacity. It has been constrained by a number of issues in the past including eligibility for funding programs. It is also important to note that due to the geographic nature of Tatiara travelling to either Keith or Bordertown is still challenging for some rural and remote families and alternative options will continue to be sought.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

"I was able to receive 'care' from family one day a fortnight to care for my kids. But this commitment wasn't enough to continue my job, so I resigned from my position."

Wattle Range Council

Regional Overview

Population	Median Weekly Household Income
9,140	$1,734
SEIFA Index	**Childcare Service Gap**
1026	75
Unemployment	**Labour Force Participation**
3%	59%

Families in Millicent and surrounding areas often rely on Mount Gambier.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

"We live outside Glencoe and work on a farm. Childcare means driving to Mount Gambier every day before work and again to pick them up. Some days travel alone adds up to two hours to the day."

Photo credit: (Left to right)
Kirsty-Ann Thompson and annonymous

1.6.7 Wattle Range Council

Wattle Range Council is one of the larger Councils located in the Limestone Coast region with Millicent acting as the primary service hub. Due to its size some of its residents utilise childcare facilities outside the Council area – particularly those located in Beachport.

Childcare provision within Wattle Range Council is more fragmented than in some neighbouring council areas. Services exist in several communities; however, the availability of long day care services varies and access to childcare may depend on the location of individual communities.

Existing services are located in Millicent, Glencoe (Pre-school and occasional care) and Penola, which has a Rural Care Service.

Wattle Range Council operates the largest childcare facility – Gladys Smith Early Learning Centre. It is investigating opportunities to expand the service but is currently restricted by its current location, with limited options to expand the facility from a physical / location perspective. St Anthony's Catholic Primary School in Millicent is exploring opportunities to develop a childcare centre on its land but is looking for investment partners to realise this ambition.

In some parts of the council area, families rely on services located in Mount Gambier or other neighbouring towns. Communities such as Millicent, Penola and surrounding areas have reported demand pressures, while smaller communities may have limited access to formal childcare services.

These patterns illustrate the challenges of delivering childcare services across geographically dispersed regional populations.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

"With no availability for childcare in my town and postnatal depression, I felt very isolated with a toddler and baby."

Part Two: Regional Overview

2.1 Childcare as Workforce Infrastructure

In regional economies with tight labour markets, access to childcare plays a critical role in enabling workforce participation. When parents are unable to access childcare services, they may reduce their working hours, leave the workforce entirely or be unable to take on additional hours despite workplace demand. This can affect both household income and the availability of workers across the regional labour market.

Across the Limestone Coast, consultation undertaken for this study and previous local research suggests that childcare access is an important factor influencing workforce participation. Employers across several sectors, including agriculture, healthcare, retail and hospitality, report difficulty filling positions or maintaining staffing levels. In some cases, these workforce challenges are linked directly to the availability of childcare services.

Evidence gathered through the Tatiara District Council Childcare Needs Assessment indicates that 65% of surveyed businesses identified childcare shortages as affecting their capacity to grow. Several businesses also reported difficulties maintaining standard operating hours due to staff being unable to secure childcare. 20% of respondents to a survey undertaken by the Robe Childcare on Wheels service indicated that they cannot work due to a lack of childcare.

These examples illustrate how access to childcare can influence workforce participation not only at the household level but also across the regional economy. Anecdotally, residents in Tatiara reported that they had delayed their return to work or they were unable to take on additional work hours (despite the demand/needs of the business) due to a lack of access to childcare. In this context, early childhood education and care services can be understood not only as a family support service, but also as essential workforce infrastructure that enables parents and carers to participate in employment.

EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE

"We've had positions open for months. In some cases, staff simply can't take the job because there is no childcare available"

Photo credit: Meagan Coles

2.2 Implications for the Regional Economy

Population benchmarks and available service data, suggest the Limestone Coast region is currently experiencing an indicative shortfall of approximately 350 – 400 childcare places. Based on modelling undertaken for this study, the region may **require between 1,153 and 1,384 childcare places** depending on workforce participation patterns and service utilisation rates. While Mount Gambier provides the largest concentration of childcare services, several surrounding council areas demonstrate clear evidence of unmet demand. Current estimates suggest that approximately **800–900 places** exist across the region, indicating a potential shortfall of around **260 places under the Mitchell Institute benchmark**, and up to **400–500 places using a higher social planning benchmark**.

Table 2 Regional Childcare Demand Modelling Table: Reiterating the figures outlined above, the table below provides a summary of the supply and demand shortfall for the Limestone Coast Region.

Indicator	Mitchell Institute Benchmark	Higher Participation Benchmark	Notes
Children aged 0-4 in region	3,459	3,459	ABS Demographic Data
Planning ratio	1 place per 3 children	1 place per 2.5 children	Benchmarks referenced in Section 2.1
Benchmark childcare places required	1,153	1,384	Calculated demand
Estimatimated existing regional childcare places	~898	~898	Based on provider data and consultation
Indicative regional childcare place shortfall	~258 places	~489 places	Regional Supply Gap / Service Deficit

EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE

"We regularly have staff who want to increase their hours but can't because they can't secure childcare".

Part Two: Regional Overview

Limited childcare availability can constrain workforce participation in regional labour markets that are already experiencing labour shortages. When parents are unable to access childcare, they may reduce working hours or withdraw from employment entirely, reducing the available labour supply for local businesses and essential services.

The economic implications of these workforce constraints can be illustrated through regional productivity modelling. Based on available economic data, the contribution of an additional worker in the Limestone Coast economy has been estimated at approximately $127,968 in annual value added per worker.

Table 3 Potential Economic Value for Additional Childcare Places based on Workforce Participation

Scenario	Workers Enabled	.5FTE x 50%	.5FTE x 100%
Mitchell Benchmark gap (~258 places)	130-260 workers	$8.3m per year	$16.6m per year
Social Planning Benchmark gap (~489 places)	245-490 workers	$15.7m per year	$31.4m per year

Where childcare availability enables workforce participation, each additional childcare place may support between 0.5 and 1 full-time equivalent workers, depending on family circumstances and employment patterns. Under this scenario, **each additional childcare place has the potential to support between $63,984 and $127,968 in annual economic value within the regional economy.** The table above provides a conservative indication of the economic value of additional childcare places:

- **Column 1** is the number of additional childcare places required based on our agreed benchmarks (refer Section 1.4)
- **Column 2** indicates the potential number of workers enabled if they access these additional childcare places.
- **Column 3** estimates the economic value if half the childcare places resulted in workers entering or increasing their participation in the workforce at 0.5FTE.
- Column 4 estimates if all of the childcare places resulted in workers entering or increasing their participation in the workforce at 0.5FTE.

At a regional scale, improving access to childcare could therefore support hundreds of additional workers across the Limestone Coast economy and generate significant economic activity over time.

These estimates are indicative and scenario based. They combine population benchmarks, service information and workforce productivity modelling to illustrate the potential economic implications associated with improved childcare access. Due to limitations in consistent reporting of service capacity and waitlists, figures should be interpreted as informed estimates rather than precise counts.

2.2.1 Future Economic Impact

A lack of childcare will impede the region's capacity to grow, which is an aspiration of both the local and the state government. Some estimates suggest an increase in population for the region of approximately 26% or 18,000 residents by 2051. The following table provides an estimate of the future childcare needs with incremental population growth and its economic value.

Table 4: Future Economic Impact

Percentage Population Growth	Actual Increase	Estimated No. of Children Aged 0-4	No. of Childcare Places Needed 1:2.5 Ration	Deficit Compared to Now	*Annual Economic Value
10%	76,269	3,813	1,525	630	$43.7m
15%	79,736	3,987	1,595	700	$48.5m
26%	87,363	4,368	1,747	852	$59.0m

*Value of the additional childcare places if each place results in a 0.5 FTE contribution to the workforce. The Estimate reflects the annual value of each full-time worker to the local economy as of 2026 ($127,968). It does not account for any CPI increases.

Part Two: Regional Overview

PART TWO: REGIONAL OVERVIEW

2.3 Social and Community Implications

While the economic implications of childcare shortages are significant, the impacts on families and communities are equally important.

Consultation undertaken for this study and previous local research indicates that many families across the Limestone Coast face difficult decisions about employment, education and family wellbeing due to limited childcare availability. In some communities, families report travelling considerable distances to access childcare services in neighbouring towns, adding additional time and financial costs to already busy family schedules.

Where childcare places are unavailable, parents may delay returning to work after parental leave or reduce their working hours. These pressures are often felt most strongly by mothers, who continue to undertake a larger share of unpaid care responsibilities. Limited access to childcare can therefore affect the wellbeing of the household alongside other issues, which can create added stress for the family including reduced income, limiting career progression and uncertain long-term financial security for families. The Tatiara District Council Childcare Needs Assessment Report indicated that an inability to access the necessary childcare impacted on the mental health of parents and guardians.

Access to childcare also plays an important role in supporting children's development during the early years. The early years of a child's life represent a critical period of brain development, and participation in high-quality early childhood education and care has been shown to support children's social, emotional, physical and cognitive development, helping to build the foundations for lifelong learning and wellbeing.

While the economic implications of childcare shortages are significant, the impacts on families and communities are equally important.

EARLY LEARNING ACCESS

"For some families, preschool or occasional care may be the only structured early learning their child experiences before school."

Participation in early learning environments helps prepare children for school by supporting the development of language, communication, physical and social-emotional skills. Where access to early childhood education and care is limited, children may miss opportunities to participate in planned early learning experiences during these critical developmental years.

At a community level, childcare services also contribute to the sustainability of regional towns. Access to childcare can influence whether families choose to remain in a community or relocate to larger centres where services are more readily available. Reliable childcare is therefore an important factor in supporting population retention, attracting skilled workers and maintaining the viability of local businesses and essential services.

Part Three: Key Findings and Recommendations

Part Three: Key Findings and Recommendations

The following findings and recommendations summarise the key insights arising from the regional analysis of childcare demand, service availability and workforce impacts across the Limestone Coast.

3.1 Key Findings

- **Childcare demand across the Limestone Coast region exceeds current supply** when assessed against commonly used population benchmarks.
- **Childcare supply and demand operate as a regional system** rather than within individual council boundaries.
- **Based on population modelling, the region requires approximately 1,150–1,380 childcare places**, indicating a structural shortfall across several councils, which equates to a deficit of between 260 and 490 places for the whole region. This reflects a potential loss in workforce participation which can have a negative economic impact on the Limestone Coast Region, which is estimated to be valued at between $8.3m and $31.4m.
- **Limited childcare availability has measurable economic implications for the Limestone Coast region.** When parents are unable to access childcare, workforce participation can be reduced, working hours limited and recruitment challenges for local employers intensified. At a regional level this represents a loss of productive workforce capacity and reduced economic output.
- **Limited childcare availability can affect regional workforce participation**, with some parents reducing working hours or delaying returning to employment due to a lack of available places. Anecdotally, some parents reported leaving the workforce completely due to an inability to access childcare.
- **Mount Gambier functions as the primary childcare service hub for the region**, with families from nearby surrounding councils frequently accessing services within the city. This is particularly true of the District Council of Grant which doesn't have a larger service centre town.
- **Reliance on Mount Gambier services creates additional pressure on existing providers** and can result in long travel distances for families living in surrounding rural communities. Several families indicated that they were travelling between 30 minutes and an hour to drop off children to childcare, which for some represents 2 – 4 hours in the car daily just to access childcare.
- **Even where overall capacity appears adequate, shortages for children aged under two years are common**, reflecting staff-to-child ratio requirements and operational constraints. The length of time spent on waiting lists (6 – 18 months) for parents wanting to access childcare from 0 – 2 years is a strong reflection of this deficit.
- **Reported waiting lists are likely to under-represent the true level of childcare demand**. Families may place their children on multiple waiting lists, withdraw from lists after extended waiting periods, or choose not to register at all where they believe services are unlikely to have vacancies.
- **The distribution of population across the Limestone Coast means that not all communities can sustainably support a standalone long day care centre**, highlighting the need for coordinated regional planning and childcare solutions which are both flexible and creative.
- **The viability of childcare services in smaller communities can be challenging due to population size, staffing availability and operating costs**. As a result, service provision across the region is uneven, and sustainable solutions may require flexible or collaborative delivery models.
- **Accessing a sustained workforce of qualified childcare workers continues to be an ongoing challenge** for childcare centres across the Limestone Coast region.
- **The cost of building childcare infrastructure continues to be a significant barrier** for the development of new childcare facilities. These facilities should be understood as essential workforce infrastructure rather than purely social or educational services.
- **Responsibility for the ownership, management and governance of new facilities can create challenges for small communities** who do not have significant populations or government or ommercial sectors that can easily support the delivery of these services long term.

EARLY LEARNING ACCESS

"Basic things taken for granted in city centres, such as adequate storage and kitchens do not exist at our centre."

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL CONTEXT

"We need greater investment in regional childcare infrastructure. When families cannot access quality care children in the country miss opportunities for early learning."

Part Three: Key Findings and Recommendations

3.2 Recommendations

Adopt a coordinated regional approach to childcare planning involving Regional Development Australia Limestone Coast, local councils, State Government departments including the Office for Early Childhood Development and the Department for Education and childcare providers.

Prioritise service expansion in communities with the clearest evidence of unmet demand, including Naracoorte Lucindale, Robe and parts of the Wattle Range and Tatiara District Council. Ensure economic modelling considers the impact of new facilities on existing services.

Support sustainable childcare models in smaller communities, including integrated early learning hubs, flexible service models and shared service arrangements. This could include the use of existing Department for Education infrastructure.

Investigate the potential for joined up governance and management models for new and existing small centres across the region, improving oversight efficiencies and increasing the capacity for collaboration and resource sharing.

Recognise childcare as essential regional workforce infrastructure, supporting labour force participation and economic productivity.

Improve regional data collection and monitoring of childcare demand, including capacity, waiting lists and service utilisation.

Encourage collaboration between councils, employers and childcare providers to better align childcare availability with workforce needs.

Investigate opportunities for targeted capital investment and funding support to address priority service gaps across the region.

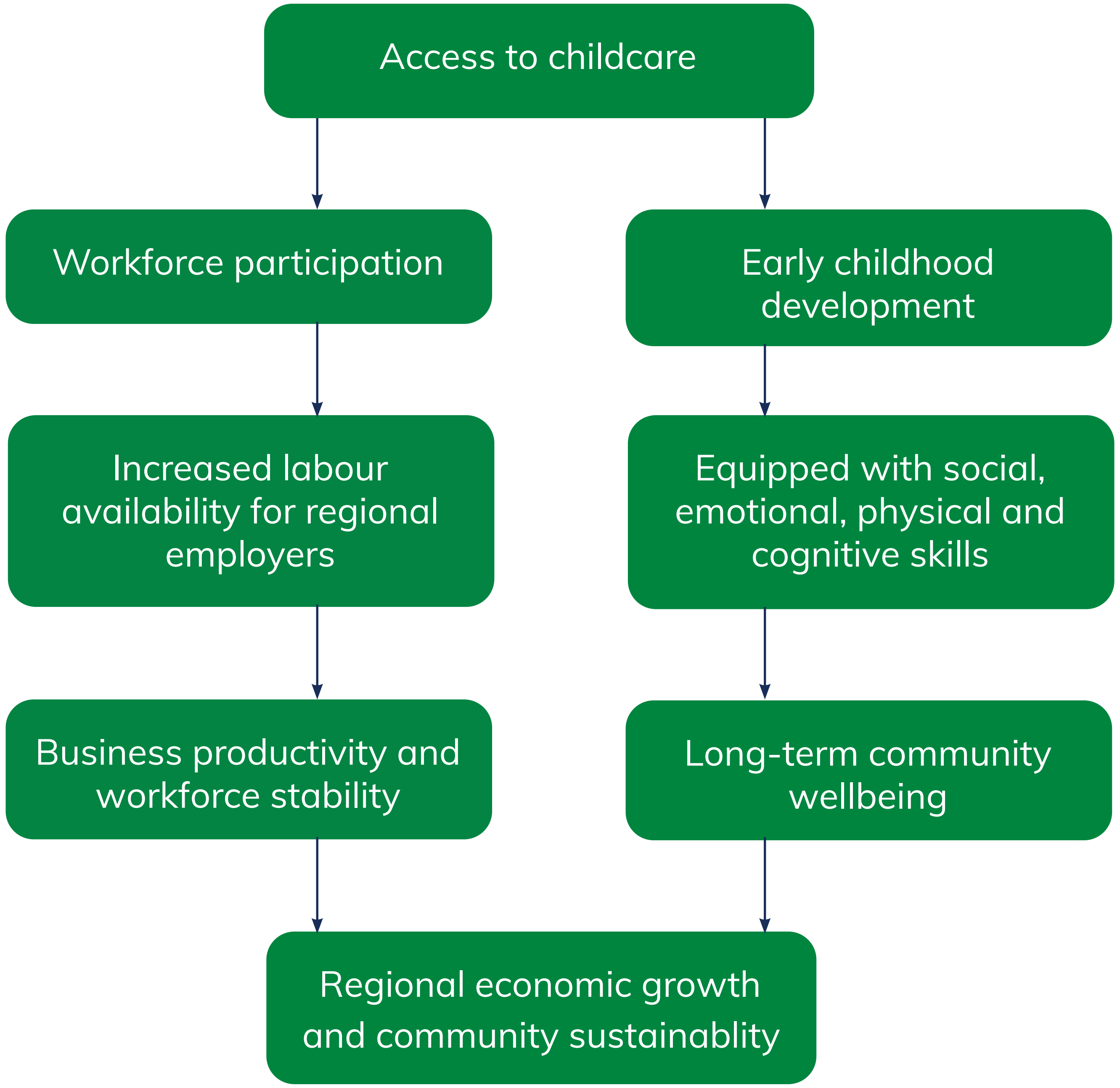
Continue engagement with families and childcare providers to ensure future service planning reflects changing community needs.

Develop regional approach to building a stronger childcare workforce including flexible learning options and sharing of staff across multiple facilities.

Part Four: Case for Investment

Ensuring that families across the Limestone Coast region have access to appropriate and sustainable childcare services will be an important component of supporting future workforce participation, regional economic resilience and community wellbeing.

The Role of Childcare in Supporting Regional Economic and Community Outcomes



Part Four: Case for Investment

4.1 Childcare as a Regional Workforce Infrastructure

Across the Limestone Coast region, access to childcare plays an increasingly important role in supporting workforce participation and regional economic productivity. When parents are able to access reliable early childhood education and care, they are more able to participate in the workforce, increase working hours and pursue employment opportunities.

For regional employers, childcare availability can influence staff recruitment, retention, and workforce stability. In this context, childcare services can be understood not only as a family support service but also as essential workforce infrastructure that supports the functioning of regional economies.

Investment in early childhood education and care therefore has the potential to generate benefits across multiple areas of regional development, including employment, business growth, and population attraction.

4.2 Supporting Regional Communities

Beyond workforce participation, childcare services also contribute to the broader social and economic sustainability of regional communities.

Accessible childcare supports families to remain in regional areas, enables young families to relocate for employment opportunities, and contributes to community stability. For many regional communities, the availability of childcare services can influence decisions about where people choose to live and work.

In communities where childcare access is limited, families may face difficult choices about employment, commuting and relocation. Improving access to childcare can therefore play an important role in supporting regional liveability and long-term community sustainability.

4.3 The Importance of a Coordinated Regional Approach

The distribution of population across the Limestone Coast region means that childcare solutions cannot always be addressed by individual communities acting in isolation.

Some communities may be able to support new or expanded childcare services, while others may require more flexible or collaborative approaches to service delivery. A coordinated regional approach can help ensure that childcare investment is aligned with population patterns, workforce needs and service viability.

This report highlights the opportunity for Regional Development Australia Limestone Coast, local councils, childcare providers and government agencies to work collaboratively to support sustainable childcare solutions across the region.

The development of a regional childcare toolkit in the next phase of this project will provide practical guidance to assist communities, councils and service providers in exploring potential childcare solutions and investment pathways.

Part Five: Service Development Toolkit

This Toolkit is designed to support communities, councils, providers and stakeholders to move from identifying a childcare challenge through to delivering a practical solution. It is not intended to be read as a traditional report from start to finish. Instead, it provides a structured, step-by-step framework that can be used flexibly depending on your starting point, role and objectives.

Table of Contents

Artist Olive - 3 years old

How to Use This Toolkit

A Practical Pathway

The Toolkit is organised into a series of sections that reflect the typical stages of developing a childcare solution in a regional context:

- Part 5 sets the context, positioning childcare as essential economic infrastructure
- Part 6 helps you understand and quantify local demand
- Part 7 explores governance and delivery models
- Part 8 tests financial viability and identifies any funding gap
- Part 9 considers workforce availability and constraints
- Part 10 supports advocacy and stakeholder engagement
- Part 11 outlines the pathway from idea to delivery

Each section builds on the previous one, but they can also be used independently as needed.

Using the Toolkit in Practice

Most users will move through the Toolkit in three key phases:

1. Understand the Problem

Use Part 6 to build a clear evidence base, including demand, supply and service gaps.

2. Test What's Possible

Use Parts 7, 8 and 9 to:

- Identify appropriate delivery models
- Assess financial viability
- Understand workforce constraints

This phase helps determine what is realistic in your local context.

3. Move to Action

Use Parts 10 and 11 to:

- Build a strong case for investment
- Engage stakeholders
- Progress a project toward delivery

Templates and Tools

A range of practical templates and tools are provided in Part 12 (Appendix) to support this process.

These are designed to be used alongside the Toolkit and include:

- Demand Snapshot Template
- Viability Snapshot Calculator
- Economic Impact Estimator
- Workforce and Advocacy Tools

Most sections of the Toolkit will direct you to the relevant tools as you progress.

A Flexible Approach

Not all communities will follow the same pathway. Some may already have a clear understanding of demand and be ready to focus on delivery. Others may need to start with data gathering and stakeholder engagement.

This Toolkit is designed to support both scenarios. Users can move between sections, revisit earlier steps, and adapt the approach as new information becomes available.

Key Principal

The goal is not to produce perfect data or a single "right" solution. It is to build a clear, evidence-based and practical pathway toward improving access to childcare in your community.

5.1 The Regional Context

Across regional Australia, access to childcare is increasingly becoming a challenge for communities in terms of economic and social development and ongoing viability. Population growth, housing availability, workforce participation and local prosperity are all influenced by childcare accessibility – the capacity for families to access reliable, affordable early childhood education and care.

In metropolitan areas, childcare is generally understood as a service that responds to demand often managed by market forces with commercial providers responding with infrastructure and service provision. In regional areas, the picture is more complex. Smaller populations, workforce constraints and fluctuating demand mean that services do not always emerge naturally in response to need, which creates a mismatch.

Communities may have a growing number of young families, strong workforce demand and employers seeking to expand, but without childcare, participation is constrained.

In many parts of the Limestone Coast, families travel significant distances to access care, rely on informal arrangements, or are unable to access care at all. This is not simply a service gap; it is a structural barrier to regional growth.

Childcare access is also closely linked to housing development, population attraction, workforce reliability and the retention of young families. For example, essential services are difficult to sustain with teachers, health professionals and emergency services personnel unable to move to or remain within regional and remote communities because they cannot access reliable childcare services. The result is that childcare is no longer just a "community service issue." It sits at the intersection of economic development, social infrastructure and regional planning.

5.2 The Cost of Inaction

When childcare is unavailable or insufficient, the impacts are immediate and far-reaching.

- **Workforce Participation is Reduced**

  Parents, most often women reduce hours, delay returning to work, or leave the workforce entirely when childcare is not available. This represents a direct loss of skills, productivity and income within the local economy. For employers, this translates into difficulty filling roles, reduced operating capacity and increased turnover and recruitment costs. In tight regional labour markets, this constraint is particularly acute.

- **Local Economic Output is Constrained**

  When workforce participation is reduced, so too is local economic activity. Fewer people working means lower household income, reduced spending and slower business growth. At a regional scale, this represents measurable economic loss.

- **Business and Industry Growth is Limited**

  Access to childcare is increasingly a factor in business location and expansion decisions. Employers in sectors such as health, aged care, education, agriculture and retail / hospitality are all affected when staff cannot access childcare. In some cases, businesses reduce services or delay expansion due to workforce constraints linked directly to childcare access.

- **Essential Services Come Under Pressure**

  In smaller communities, workforce shortages in essential services can be exacerbated by a lack of childcare. This includes health services, schools and community services. Without childcare, attracting and retaining skilled workers in these sectors becomes significantly more difficult.

- **Families Face Increased Financial and Social Pressure**

  For families, limited access to childcare can mean increased travel time and cost, reduced income, greater reliance on informal care arrangements and increased stress and reduced wellbeing. These impacts are often uneven, affecting lower-income households and single-parent families more significantly.

5.3 The Opportunity Case

While the challenges are significant, the opportunity is equally clear. When childcare is treated as enabling infrastructure rather than a standalone service it becomes a powerful lever for regional development including:

- **Enabling Workforce Participation**

  Access to childcare allows parents to enter or re-enter the workforce, increase working hours and pursue training and career development opportunities. This has a direct impact on labour supply and productivity with even modest increases in participation offering meaningful economic benefits at a regional level.

- **Supporting Local Business and Industry**

  Reliable childcare supports business continuity, workforce stability and expansion opportunities. For employers, access to childcare is increasingly seen as part of the broader employment ecosystem alongside housing, transport and workforce availability.

- **Driving Population Retention and Attraction**

  Young families are more likely to stay in regional areas and relocate to regional areas when essential services, including childcare are available. This supports long-term population stability and growth.

- **Strengthening Local Economies**

  Increased workforce participation leads to higher household income, increased local spending and greater economic circulation within the community. These benefits extend beyond individual families to the broader regional economy.

- **Creating Direct and Indirect Employment**

  Childcare services themselves generate employment, including early childhood educators, management roles and support staff. There are also indirect benefits through construction (for new facilities), local supply chains and increased demand in other sectors.

5.4 From Service Gap to Investment Proposition

Traditionally, childcare has been framed as a response to community need and whilst this remains true, it is no longer sufficient. In regional areas, childcare must increasingly be understood as essential economic infrastructure that underpins workforce participation, business activity and regional growth. This shift in framing is critical. It changes the conversation from:

“Is there demand for a centre?”

to

“What level of investment is required to unlock economic and social benefits?”.

It also recognises a fundamental reality:

- Not all services will be commercially viable on their own
- Some level of coordination, subsidy or intervention may be required
- The return on investment extends beyond the service itself

The economic contribution of childcare can be estimated using simple modelling approaches.

A practical tool to help you determine the viability of a range of childcare service models is provided in Appendix 12.3 and 12.4.

5.5 A Different Way of Thinking

This toolkit is built on a simple premise, in regional communities, the question is not always “*Will the market deliver childcare?*”, it is “*What will it take to make childcare work here?*”

Answering that question requires:

- An understanding of local demand
- Assessing viability
- Identifying delivery models
- Bringing together the right partners
- Structuring investment in a way that reflects both cost and benefit

The sections that follow provide a practical framework to support that process.

The next section focuses on how to understand and quantify local demand providing the evidence base required to support decision-making, investment and advocacy.

Part Six: Understanding Local Demand

6.1 Data Collection and Evidence Gathering

Establishing a clear and credible understanding of local demand is a critical foundation for any childcare project. This is about building an evidence base that will:

- Support investment decisions
- Strengthen funding applications
- Inform service design
- Engage stakeholders and partners

If you are an existing or potential new provider hoping to establish or expand a facility or a community group grappling with childcare shortages and hoping to advocate for change, understanding supply and comparing this to demand is essential to understanding what the gaps are both from an infrastructure and service perspective.

In regional communities, demand is not always immediately visible. Waiting lists may be incomplete or inaccurate, families may rely on informal care, and workforce constraints may mask underlying need. For this reason, understanding demand requires a combination of data sources, local insight and practical interpretation.

The following steps provide a structured approach to understanding local demand. While presented in sequence, they are not always linear and may be undertaken in parallel or revisited as new information becomes available.

Part Six: Understanding Local Demand

Step 1. Defining Your Local Context

Before gathering data, it is important to clearly define the community or catchment area you are assessing.

This will vary depending on the purpose of the project but should reflect how families actually access childcare.

What to consider:

- Travel patterns (how far families are willing or able to travel)
- Connections between towns and service centres
- Locations of major employers
- School and community networks

In some cases, demand may extend beyond a single town and reflect a broader regional catchment.

In Practice

A childcare service located in one town may be relied upon by families from multiple surrounding small communities, where due to their low populations, alternative services are limited / non-viable.

Artist Hazel - 3 years old

Step 2. Understanding Population and Need

The starting point for demand assessment is understanding the number of children within the relevant age group. A commonly used benchmark is **1 childcare place for every 3 children aged 0 – 4 years**.

This benchmark, used by organisations including the Mitchell Institute (https://www.vu.edu.au/mitchell-institute/about), provides a useful baseline for estimating demand at a population level. However, in practice, demand may be higher in some regional communities depending on birthrates, workforce demands and broader economic conditions. In a social planning context, a more conservative ratio of **1 childcare place for every 2.5 children aged 0 – 4 years**.

For example, a community with 150 children aged 0 – 4 years may require approximately 50 childcare places based on the 1:3 benchmark. However, local workforce participation, informal care arrangements and service accessibility will influence actual demand.

This calculation provides a clear estimate of the number of childcare places required within a community or region.

In Practice

Establishing the number of children in an area aged between 0 – 4 years is relatively simple. In the Limestone Coast region, you can go to RDA Limestone Coast's "Community Profile" page which is managed by *.ID Informed Decisions*. .ID are an online company which uses data from the Bureau of Statistics information and translates it into more user-friendly searchable interfaces. https://profile.id.com.au/rda-limestone-coast

Using the navigation menu on the left-hand side of the page, you can select the "five-year age groups" from the "How Old Are We?" option. It will bring up a table with population totals for each age group for the whole of the Limestone Coast region. For more local data, there are several drop-down menus, where you can set a variety of parameters including the Local Government area, gender and comparison years.

Using this resource, we can establish that there are 3459 children aged between 0 – 4 in the Limestone Coast region. Applying the above benchmarks, we can estimate that the region needs between 1153 and 1383 childcare places.

NB: It is important to note the age of statistics supplied through websites like profile.ID, which relies on the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), may be up to five years old. The Census, which provides the ABS with its data, is undertaken every five years and therefore, the population data available may be out of date and understated. Local Councils often keep track of population and documents expected population growth projections. You may find a more accurate figure on a Council website and it is worth having a conversation with planners at your local Council, who may be able to provide more accurate estimates – particularly if your community has had a growth spurt.

Step 3. Understanding Existing Supply

To identify the level of need for childcare services development, it is important to understand existing supply within the community. This includes the number of existing services, the number of places they are offering / licensed for, for each age group and operating hours and the type of care available (e.g., long daycare, occasional care or family daycare). This tells you the total amount of childcare places available and when compared to demand models you can assess if there is a service gap or deficit.

In Practice

The following provides you with an overview of the data points that will determine supply, how these can be collected and how they can be interpreted. Generally, this information can be gathered through desktop research or via direct contact with the Centres in town. Sometimes a survey gathering a variety of data at one time might be the most efficient way of gathering this information.

Table 5: Data Gathering – Supply

Data	How to Collect	Interpretation
Number and type of childcare Services	Desktop research	This tells you how many facilities there are in the community and the type of service they provide e.g., occasional or sessional care or long daycare. It is a limited indicator of supply as it does not tell you how many places each Centre offers.
Number of licensed places	Desktop research or direct inquiry.	If established recently an online search can generally tell you what a facility is licensed for. Approval for new facilities requires planning approval from Council and this information including the proposed number of places it will provide, will be publicly available. Between planning approval and completion however, this may change so it is worth verifying with the facility. And the total licensed places won't provide an indicator of the spread across different age groups. For older facilities the planning information may not be readily available, their website may provide this information or you can call and enquire directly to the Centre.
Number of available places	Direct inquiry	Whilst a facility might be licensed to accommodate a certain number, it may cater to less than what its licence allows. This may be due deteriorating infrastructure, room configuration, staffing shortages, kindergarten service provision or management decisions. For example, a facility might be licensed for 50 places but due to any of the above reasons they may only accommodate 40 children each day. It is also useful to get the break-down of places within each facility as gaps may be more dominant in certain age groups and this can be useful for planning and advocacy.
Other services	Desktop research, surveying	Occasionally there are other informal or alternative childcare services within the community. This can include family daycare or private unregistered services that offer "babysitting-like" services. Family daycare services need to be registered in South Australia with an approved Family Day Care Scheme and can be searched via https://www.familydaycare.com.au. You can also contact the Department for Education via their family day care site and determine if these facilities are available in the community. https://www.education.sa.gov.au/family-day-care/find-care-form

Step 4. Identifying Unmet Demand

Unmet demand can be the most important and most difficult element to quantify. On a simple level, you can identify the deficit in places on offer using a simple calculation of the benchmarks detailed in Step 2 against the current supply as per Step 3.

In Practice

Simple Population Calculation (SPC)

Take the number of children aged between 0 – 4 as per Step 2 (the number of places needed) and subtract the number of places currently available. The answer is a simple indicator of the deficit in childcare places.

For example:

1/3 of children aged between 0 – 4 years	400
Number of places currently available	– 280
Childcare Service Deficit	120

The SPC provides a starting point, but it may not capture the full extent of unmet demand. There are other pieces of data that can add further insight to understanding what the unmet demand is – particularly when considered alongside the childcare service deficit.

In Practice

The following provides an overview of these additional data points, how they should be considered and what they add to the overall picture of unmet demand. Whilst the simple calculation above is an important piece of data, it is important to get a good picture of what is going on in your community. Communities with high workforce participation / low unemployment may have a greater demand than the above calculation reflects.

Based on this additional information, you should be able to provide an evidenced-based estimate of how accurate the SPC is – and what the realistic demand is within your community based on the evidence collected and local conditions.

Part Six: Understanding Local Demand

Table 6: Unmet Demand Data Collection

Data	How to Collect	Interpretation
Waiting Lists	Surveys	The number of people on waiting lists, the length of time spent on waiting lists and the breakdown of waiting lists for each age group can provide insight. Long wait time are common for the 0 – 2 age groups but excessively long wait times across the board are a good indicator of strong unmet demand. How many additional hours / days that are desired by those on waiting lists is also a useful piece of data that articulates the quantum of unmet demand. It is important to note that adding up the number of people on waiting lists is not a definitive indicator of the unmet demand. People who are seeking childcare often put their names down at multiples centres, inflating waitlist numbers. Others who are frustrated with the waitlists may have removed themselves or not registered at all on the waitlists.
Personal stories and anecdotal data	Surveys + Interviews	Collecting personal stories of those affected by a lack of childcare can paint a powerful picture and be a strong anecdotal indicator of unmet demand. The stories may relate to waiting lists, return to work delays, travel constraints and other stresses / barriers that a childcare deficit can impact on. Talking to kindergartens and schools and their associated parents and friends' groups may also provide some insight into population levels and growth projections, which they have determined as part of their planning. This can provide an indicator of demand above and beyond the SPC outlined above.
Impact on businesses and essential services	Surveys + Interviews	Businesses and essential services can be impacted by a childcare service deficit in a variety of ways. This includes an inability to attract suitably qualified / experienced staff, limited number of applications for job vacancies, an inability to grow or expand services and a reduced service offering. A lack of access to childcare may prevent workers from entering or returning to the workforce, they may not be able to increase their work hours, despite a need and/or desire and some who may be interested in relocating to fulfill essential service roles may not do so due to a lack of access to childcare. Other issues may also be impacting businesses including a lack of access to housing but through surveys and interviews, businesses can provide some indication if an inability to access childcare is a factor.

Some sample questions that could be included in a Survey are included in the Appendix 12.1.1

When the service deficit is combined with these additional pieces of data, a more accurate understanding of demand can be determined. This provides stronger evidence for advocacy and greater confidence when making planning and investment decisions.

Step 5. Building a Demand Snapshot

Once demand is understood, the next step is to consider how services can be delivered including who takes carriage, what models are available, and how risk and responsibility are shared. But first bringing this information together into a simple, clear summary as a Demand Snapshot is an important step.

In Practice

The Demand Template Snapshot is included in Section 12.1 of this Toolkit. It should be populated based on the information gathered from Steps 1 – 4. It can be used to communicate need to stakeholders, support funding applications and inform feasibility and design. In addition to this snapshot, depending on how it is being used, some explanatory notes could be included.

For example, if there are more licensed places than existing available places, part of the solution to the shortfall may be rectified with improved workforce supply or small infrastructure improvements.

Key Take Away

Understanding demand is not about producing perfect data.

It's about building a credible, evidence-based picture that can support decisions, investment and action.

Part Seven: Governance and Delivery Models

7.1 Who Takes Responsibility

Once demand has been established, the next critical question is:

"Who is responsible for delivering and operating a childcare service?"

In metropolitan areas, this is typically resolved through market-led responses, with private providers identifying viable opportunities and establishing services accordingly. As characterised in many regional communities, this is not always the case – in small towns private childcare services are not commercially viable. Other challenges including workforce and infrastructure constraints in regional communities may also prevent private investment. In these instances, councils, community organisations, employers or a combination of these may need to play a more active role.

There is no single "right" model. Instead, the most appropriate approach will depend on:

- The level of demand
- The viability of the service
- Local workforce availability
- Community capacity
- Appetite for risk and investment

In Practice

Before selecting a delivery model, it is important for stakeholders, particularly councils and regional organisations to understand their role. The following questions should be considered:

- What role are you willing to play?
- What level of risk can we accept?
- What outcomes are we seeking (economic, social, workforce)?

This section outlines the most common governance and delivery models, along with their typical characteristics, advantages and risks, which will inform your answers to the questions above.

7.2 Common Governance and Delivery Models

Model 1: Private Provider (Market-Led)

Overview: A private operator establishes and manages the childcare service, typically based on an assessment of commercial viability.

Characteristics	Advantages	Challenges	In Practice
• Operator-led investment and management • Revenue driven by fees and Childcare Subsidy (CCS) • Limited direct involvement from Council	• Transfers financial and operational risk to the provider • Draws on established operational expertise • Minimal ongoing Council involvement	• May not occur in smaller or marginal communities • Service design driven by commercial considerations • Limited control over fees, access or service priorities	• Private providers are more likely to invest in larger regional centres where demand is strong and workforce availability is higher • For smaller communities, additional support or incentives may be required to attract a provider. This could include but is not limited to: – Subsidised access to facilities – Funding – Support for workforce development

Model 2: Council-Facilitated (Enabling Role)

Overview: Council plays a facilitation role, supporting the establishment of a service without directly operating it.

Characteristics	Advantages	Challenges	In Practice
• Provision of land or infrastructure • Planning and approvals support • Attraction of external operators	• Reduces barriers to entry for providers • Retains some local influence • Lower operational risk for council	• May still require financial contribution • Success depends on ability to attract an operator • Limited control once service is established access or service priorities	• Council may provide land at low or no cost • Assist with planning approvals • Actively seek out providers to establish a service in the community.

Model 3: Council-Owned / Operated

Overview: Council takes a direct role in establishing and operating the childcare service.

Characteristics	Advantages	Challenges	In Practice
• Council owns and manages the facility • Staff employed directly or via council structures • Full operational responsibility directly or via council structures	• High level of control over service delivery • Ability to prioritise community outcomes • Can address market failure directly Minimal ongoing Council involvement	• Significant financial and operational risk • Requires internal capability and expertise • Exposure to workforce and regulatory pressures access or service priorities	• This model is more common: – where no private provider is willing to operate a service – where childcare is considered critical infrastructure for the community

Model 4: Community-Managed

Overview: A not-for-profit or community organisation establishes and operates the service.

Characteristics	Advantages	Challenges	In Practice
• Community-led governance (e.g. board or committee) • May access grants and philanthropic funding • Localised decision-making	• Strong community ownership and alignment • Potential access to non-commercial funding sources • Flexibility in service design	• Reliance on volunteer governance capacity • Financial sustainability can be challenging • May require ongoing support • Some offer limited-service hours	• Community-managed models are often established: – in smaller towns where there is strong local leadership – where community members are willing to take on governance responsibility

Part Seven: Governance and Delivery Models

Model 5: Employer-Supported

Overview: Employers contribute to or facilitate childcare services to support their workforce.

Characteristics	Advantages	Challenges	In Practice
• Financial or in-kind contribution from employers • May involve reserved places or priority access • Can be standalone or integrated with other models	• Directly addresses workforce needs • Strengthens business case for investment • Creates partnerships between industry and community	• Requires employer commitment • May not address broader community demand • Can be complex to structure	• Large employers in sectors such as health, agriculture or manufacturing may contribute to childcare solutions to support workforce attraction and retention.

Model 6: Hybrid Models

Overview: Combination of two or more models, sharing responsibility across stakeholders.

Characteristics	Advantages	Challenges	In Practice
• Shared funding + governance • Council + provider + employer involvement • Flexible and context-specific	• Distributes risk • Enables tailored solutions • Often more viable in regional settings	• More complex to establish • Requires strong coordination and agreements • Governance arrangements need to be clearly defined	• A council may provide infrastructure, a private provider operates the service, and local employers contribute to capital or operating costs

In some regional and remote communities, hybrid models are further adapted to respond to specific challenges relating to scale, workforce and service integration. These approaches recognise that in some communities, standard delivery models are not sufficient and require tailored, place-based solutions.

The table below provides an overview of a couple of examples of common hybrid models

Table 7: Examples of Common Hybrid Models

Integrated Early Years Models		**Government-Supported Rural Care Models**	
Childcare services co-located or integrated with schools, early learning centres or community hubs often with the support of State Government Departments.		Services supported through targeted government programs designed to address viability challenges in smaller communities.	
Why they Work	**In Practice**	**Why they Work**	**In Practice**
• Shared infrastructure • Workforce efficiencies • Stronger early years pathways	• Integrated models may operate within or alongside schools, combining early childhood education and care with broader early years services • Long daycare managed by community combined with Kindergarten managed by Office for Education who employs a Director for the whole centre	• Address Market failure • Provide operational or capital support • Enable services where demand alone is insufficient	• These models often involve a combination of government funding, local delivery and flexible service approaches tailored to community needs • They are often fixed in terms of resourcing and have limited capacity to be flexible

7.3 Choosing the Right Model

Selecting a governance model is not simply a technical decision – it is a strategic one. The following provides an overview of the key considerations when selecting a model.

- **Viability:** Is the service commercially viable or will support be required?
- **Risk appetite:** What level of financial and operational risk can stakeholders accept?
- **Capability:** Does the organisation have the skills and capacity to operate a service?
- **Community context:** What level of community leadership and support exists?
- **Desired outcomes:** Is the priority economic development, social outcomes, or both?

In Practice

Depending on who you are and your role in the community, how you approach selecting a model will be different. The Current Model Might also need to change or adapt.

The following steps are critical in making an informed and a critical determination.

Step 1. Bring the right people around the table

Identifying and engaging key stakeholders early is essential. This may include council representatives, existing service providers, major employers, community leaders, and where possible, state government representatives. These are the people who will shape the feasibility, support and delivery of any model.

Step 2. Identify who can take leadership

Every successful project requires a champion. This may be a council, a community organisation, a provider or a combination of stakeholders. Identifying who has the capacity, authority and willingness to lead is a critical first step.

Step 3. Understand roles and expectations

Different stakeholders will bring different strengths and constraints. Being clear about who can contribute what, whether that is land, funding, operational expertise, workforce support or advocacy helps to identify which models are realistic.

Step 4. Test appetite for risk and investment

Not all stakeholders will be willing or able to take on financial or operational risk. Early conversations about risk appetite can quickly narrow the range of viable delivery models.

Step 5. Engage those who can advocate and unlock support

Strong advocacy is often required to progress childcare projects, particularly in regional areas. Identifying individuals or organisations who can influence decision-makers, attract funding or build momentum is an important part of the process.

Step 6. Consider partnerships early

In many regional communities, no single organisation can deliver a childcare solution on its own. Exploring partnership opportunities early, including with employers, education or neighbouring councils can open up more viable options.

Once a governance model has been identified, the next step is to understand the financial realities of delivering a childcare service, including operating costs, revenue and investment requirements.

Key Take Away

There is no single model that will work in all communities.

The most effective approach is one that:

- Reflects local conditions
- Aligns with stakeholder capacity
- Balances risk and responsibility
- Supports long-term sustainability

Part Eight: Financial Viability and Investment Readiness

Part Eight: Financial Viability and Investment Readiness

8.1 Understanding Operating Economics

Before selecting a delivery model or progressing a childcare project, it is important to understand how childcare services operate financially. At a basic level, childcare services rely on two primary sources of revenue including parent fees and the Child Care Subsidy (CCS). CCS is a government payment that is paid directly to childcare providers on behalf of families, reducing the out-of-pocket cost of care based on eligibility criteria such as income and work or study activity.

Together, these two income sources need to cover the operating costs of a childcare service for it to be viable. The largest cost in any childcare service is staffing, which is driven by regulated staff-to-child ratios that vary depending on the age of children. Younger age groups, particularly children under two, require higher staffing levels (1:4) and are therefore more expensive to deliver.

Key operating costs include:

- Provision, management and maintenance of facilities and associated utilities. This includes the leasing or construction of a suitable space, its fit out, which is compliant with national regulations and the ongoing costs associated with these.
- Insurance and compliance.
- Administration and management

The other key factor in viability is occupancy – the number of available places that are filled on a consistent basis. Even small fluctuations in occupancy can have a significant impact on financial performance, which is why understanding demand and ensuring it is at a level that can meet your occupancy expectations consistently.

A centre that is licensed for 60 places but only consistently fills 45 places may struggle to cover its costs, even if demand exists at certain times of the year or for specific age groups.

8.2 Understanding Viability in Regional Contexts

In regional communities, these factors are often amplified. Demand may fluctuate, workforce shortages can limit the number of places that can be offered, and the mix of age groups can significantly influence costs. It is rarely straightforward and whilst detailed financial modelling is important, recognising the key factors that influence whether a service can operate sustainably is vital. A community may clearly need childcare, but this does not always mean a service can operate sustainably under market conditions.

8.3 Factors Driving Viability

Several factors determine the viability of childcare services, which need to be considered as a collective. The first table below outlines the key viability and the second gives a brief overview of centre sizes and potential viability.

Table 8: Viability Factors

Factor	Why it Matters
Occupancy	Revenue depends on filled places. Consistent occupancy is critical.
Centre size	Larger centres can spread costs more effectively.
Staffing availability	Without suitably qualified staff, places cannot be filled, regardless of demand.
Age mix	Younger children require more staff, increasing costs.
Fee level and CCS	Fee levels need to be competitive and but also attract the necessary revenue.
Capital Costs	Leasing costs, capital expenditure debt and depreciation costs can impact viability.

Table 9: Centre Size - Rules of Thumb

Centre Size	Why it Matters	Viability Outlook
< 30 places	Small scale, limited flexibility	Challenging, can require subsidy or alternative models.
30 - 60 places	Moderate scale	Marginal – viable under the right conditions.
60 - 90 places	More efficient operations	More stable in larger regional centres.
90 + places	Full economies of scale	Strong – but only viable in high demand locations.

As services increase in size, they not only become more financially efficient, but also require more structured workforce models and management capacity.

Refer to Section 12.2 which provides an overview of staffing requirements for childcare centres.

8.4 Creating a Viability Snapshot

While detailed financial modelling is often required, it is useful at an early stage to develop a simple understanding of how a childcare service may perform financially.

A basic "Viability Snapshot" can be used to estimate revenue, costs and potential gaps based on key assumptions such as service size, occupancy and staffing requirements. This should be informed by:

- Demand analysis (Part 6)
- Service scale (Section 10.3)
- Staffing requirements (Appendix 12.2)

The table below provides a simple way to consider how viable a childcare service may be within a given community. In regional areas, there is often a gap between what a childcare service costs to operate and what it can realistically earn. A template is provided in Appendix 12.3 to support this process.

Table 10: Viability Assessment

Zone	Description	What it Means
Commercially viable	Revenue is likely to cover operating costs	Private providers are more likely to invest and operate services
Marginally viability	Close to viable, but some constraints	May require targeted support, partnerships or incentives
Not viable	Revenue is unlikely to cover operating costs	Requires intervention, alternative delivery models or ongoing support

8.5 Understanding a Viability Gap

Understanding whether a childcare service is viable in a regional context is not always straightforward. A community may have a clear need for childcare, supported by strong demand and workforce requirements. However, this does not always mean that a service can operate sustainably in the context of standard market conditions. For this reason, it is useful to consider viability as a spectrum rather than a simple yes/no outcome.

Viability Gap = Operating Costs – Revenue

This gap exists even where demand is clear. A service may be well used and valued by the community but still operate at a financial loss without additional support. The reality in regional communities is:

- Smaller populations limit the scale of services
- Workforce constraints reduce number of places that can be offered
- Costs, particularly staffing, remain relatively fixed.

8.5.1. Closing the Viability Gap - Practical Options

Closing the viability gap can be addressed in a number of ways and often requires a combination of strategies. In many regional communities no single intervention will resolve viability challenges on its own. Instead, a combination of approaches is often required to create sustainable model.

In Practice

In many cases, successful childcare projects in regional areas involve a combination of these approaches. For example, a Council may provide land, a provider operates the service, and employers contribute to workforce attraction or capital costs.

Table 11: Closing the Viability Gap Options

Approach	Example	Rationale
Capital Support	Council provides land or buildings	Council may have surplus buildings or land that it can provide to a private or community provider for free or at a reduced rate.
Operating subsidy	Government contributes to ongoing costs	Government will rarely subsidise childcare operating costs indefinitely, but they may provide funds that support the set-up phase or until the facility grows large enough to become viable.
Shared infrastructure	Co-location with schools or community facilities	Not only does this provide a one-stop location for families of different ages, schools and Councils often have surplus land or facilities.
Workforce incentives	Housing, relocation support or training pathways	Workforce supply is essential to ensuring a centre can operate at full capacity. Incentives can encourage people from other areas to relocate to the region.
Employer partnerships	Local industry contributes funding guarantees demand	Industry, particularly those who are experiencing rapid growth, need to attract workforce and securing childcare is an important enabler.
Staged development	Starting small and expanding over time	Smaller developments also offer a lower risk profile in terms of investment required.
Alternative models	Family day care, mobile or flexible service models	Alternative models may require lower investment, can be developed more quickly or can attract funding / support from a variety of stakeholders.
Fundraising	Fundraising to support either capital or operational investment.	Communities can fundraise to support the development of a facility or help support the purchase of equipment and materials for a childcare service.
Council operational support	Council supports with the provision of administrative services	Council may be able to provide support for smaller facilities with administrative responsibilities including WHS and compliance, financial management, HR and communications, which may reduce operating costs for a childcare centre.

8.6 Capital Development Pathways

Council may be able to provide support smaller facilities with administrative responsibilities including WHS and compliance, financial management, HR and communications, which may reduce operating costs for a childcare centre.

8.6.1. Expansion Versus New Development

A key early decision is whether to expand an existing service or develop a new facility.

Expanding Existing Services

This may be appropriate when:

- **Existing services are well-utilised** – high demand with reasonable high and long-standing wait lists.
- **There is capacity to increase licensed places** – from a regulatory perspective, for example reclassifying room to allow for more children.
- **Infrastructure can be upgraded or extended** – there is existing built space that can be repurposed or redeveloped e.g., Storage moved off site to extend a childcare room or building. Or there is enough land to accommodate an extension of the building.
- **Workforce can be increased** – there are available staff able to increase hours or a high likelihood of attracting new staff.

Table 12: Service Expansion Assessment

Advantages	Challenges
• Lower capital cost	• Physical constraints of existing buildings – old or heritage listed
• Faster to deliver	• Limited flexibility in design
• Builds on existing operations	• May not fully address long-term demand

Building a New Development

When this may be appropriate when:

- **Existing services are at capacity** – high demand with reasonable high and long-standing wait lists
- **Demand cannot be met through expansion** – expansion options are limited or may not be enough to meet the identified demand.
- **New population growth areas are emerging** – there has been consistent population growth over a number of years and/or new or existing industries are growing.
- **There is an opportunity for co-location or integrated development** – a school or other community / government facility has unused land that could be repurposed and a co-location brings mutual benefit.

Part Eight: Financial Viability and Investment Readiness

Table 13: New Development Assessment

Advantages	Challenges
• Purpose-built facility	• Higher capital cost
• Increased flexibility in design and scale	• Longer delivery timeframe
• Opportunity to integrate with other services	• Greater complexity

8.6.2. Other Considerations and Needs

- **Site Selection and Location**

  The location of a childcare facility has a significant impact on its success. Key considerations include accessibility for families (including proximity to work and schools), connection to population centres, availability of land zoning. In practice co-locating with schools, community centres or health facilities can reduce capital costs and improve accessibility for families.

- **Detailed Design and Planning Approvals**

  Regardless of the approach, expansion or building a new facility, detailed drawings will need to be developed. These should meet the required childcare regulations and design standards, which can be found on the Department for Education website https://www.education.sa.gov.au/docs/infrastructure/ecec-design-standard/facilities-design-standards.pdf. Sample plans are also included in the Appendix.

- **Staged Development**

  In some communities it may not be feasible to develop a full-scale service immediately and a staged approach can allow services to start at a smaller scale. A service may begin with a smaller number of places and expand as workforce availability and demand increase.

Key Take Away

The scale and design of a childcare facility should align with:

- Current demand
- Future growth potential
- Workforce availability
- Long-term viability
- The needs of stakeholders who are developing the facility

Part Eight: Financial Viability and Investment Readiness

8.7 Funding and Blended Finance

Securing funding is often one of the most challenging aspects of developing childcare infrastructure in regional communities. Unlike metropolitan areas, where services may be delivered entirely by private providers, regional projects often require a combination of funding sources.

8.7.1. Funding Sources

There are a range of different funding sources that can be considered when developing childcare services. The large majority of these, support capital investment, but from time to time, there are opportunities, that will fund the development of programs. These generally need to be innovative, reduce barriers to accessing early childhood education, improve service provision, provide efficiencies or improve workforce supply.

Securing funding for ongoing operational expenses is highly unlikely, and ongoing viability will rely on the regular revenue that service can attract. As suggested in Section 8.5.1 Closing the Viability Gap, there are ways to limit operational costs or for them to be supported through other means.

Funding is generally divided into three sub-groups, public funding, which is from government, private investment and in-kind contributions. The following provides an overview of potential funding sources:

- Australian Government programs e.g., Building Early Education Fund
- State Government grants and initiatives e.g., Flying Start Infrastructure Grants
- Local Government contributions e.g., The provision of land or buildings, or in-kind administrative support
- Philanthropic funding e.g., This could be a local business that has the capacity to be philanthropic or from a more formal philanthropic organisation like the Paul Ramsay Foundation.
- Employer contributions e.g., A large manufacturer may invest in the development of childcare services in exchange for dedicated spaces allocated to their workers.
- Local fundraising where community organisations undertake activities to support capital works or equipment.

In practice a project may involve Council providing land, State Government funding contributing to construction, and a provider or employer contributing to fit-out or operational costs.

8.7.2. Strengthening Funding Applications

Securing funding is not easy, it takes time and effort to apply for government funding or build relationships with potential philanthropic bodies. The landscape is also competitive, and funding programs are generally over-subscribed, and applications are assessed according to their criteria with only a limited number selected to be funded.

In Practice

When looking at funding there are a range of important considerations. The following provides you with overview of these and the best approaches to increase the likelihood of success.

Table 14: Funding Applications

Funding Considerations	Approaches
Bespoke approaches	• Every funding program is different, and you should familiarise with the program, what is expected, what they fund and what the objectives of the funding program are. • Read the funding guidelines and make sure you are eligible; you are clear on what you need to provide and any pertinent dates including when the applications are due and when the projects need to be completed. • Contact the funding body and take advantage of any support they have to offer. There are often staff dedicated to support applicants or they may even have an information session about the funding.
Good writing	• Stick to the structure of the applications – answer all the questions they have asked within the word limits. • Be clear and concise and don't waffle – be very clear about what you want and align it with the funding or philanthropic body's objectives. Use plain language and make sure you mention the strengths of the project from the beginning – don't bury the lead!
Resourcing	• Funding applications and the preparation of proposals for philanthropic or other partners takes time and effort – this will most likely be several weeks or even months. • Be sure to allocate sufficient time to prepare the application and the associated support materials. • There are professional funding and development consultants that can also provide support to you and help with funding applications, but this will come with a cost.
Relationships	• Developing relationships is important – very few projects are achieved independently so think about who you can partner with and the mutual benefits your project offers. Partners may also bring a financial or in-kind contribution. • Relationships with stakeholders takes time, be sure invest in developing these. • Be sure to discuss and document the mutual benefits of a project with a partner or potential funder. Communications between you and your partners should be consistent and informative.
Strength of the project	• Clearly identify the strengths of your project, its goals and what it will achieve when you are writing your funding application or proposal. • Remember funding programs are often about solving problems and the project should demonstrate how it will address these problems. • The application needs to offer economic and social benefits and your funding application or proposal should articulate these – aligning with the objectives of the funding program, philanthropic organisation or other project partners. • Ensure you have a strong governance and delivery model in place for the project and ensure this is articulated within the application. • Detailed design drawings that clearly define the infrastructure that will be developed – this should directly respond to the identified need and potentially cater to future needs.
Evidence and support materials	• Large scale projects, particularly those that involve the development of infrastructure require a significant number of support materials and evidence. These will be outlined in the funding guidelines, but the following provides an overview of what may be expected: – Evidence of your organisation's legal status – you need to be a legally recognised entity to apply for grants. – Audited financial records and evidence of capacity. – Research and relevant data that supports the information provided in the application this could include evidence of current supply and demand and service deficits. – A detailed project plan outlining how the project will be managed and delivered. – Detailed design drawings outline the infrastructure development. – Evidence of any partnerships and what partners are contributing. – Support letters from stakeholders. – Evidence of the necessary approvals from any relevant regulatory bodies. – Details of key personnel involved in the project. – Evidence of project costs e.g., Quotes from builders and other suppliers – A strategic plan may be required or reference to a broader community or sector strategic plan – conveying how the project is responding to broader strategic ambition.

Funding Considerations	Approaches
Finances	• Very few projects will be funded for the full amount of the project cost. Some funding programs may even require a specific percentage or matched contribution. You will need to demonstrate how you and or you partners can provide this. • The project will need a detailed budget, which will be a key part of the application – ensure it is accurate, reasonable in the context of current pricing and demonstrates long-term financial viability. • Ongoing operating costs will also need to be prepared and provided, including income and expenditure projections that demonstrate ongoing feasibility and capacity to maintain infrastructure and other project outcomes. • A detailed case for investment or feasibility study may also be required that details the return on investment including how it will continue to provide economic benefit in the subsequent years.

Key Take Away

Projects that clearly demonstrate the following are more likely to be funded – but there are no guarantees. It may take multiple application attempts before it is successful. If you are unsuccessful, seek feedback which should inform future applications.

The project should:

- Reflect clearly evidenced need
- Align with community priorities
- Include strong partnerships

Artist Hazel - 3 years old

Part Nine: Workforce Strategy

9.1 Workforce as the Critical Enabler

Access to childcare is often framed as a barrier to workforce participation. However, the reverse is also true. Without a suitably skilled and available workforce, childcare services cannot operate, regardless of demand.

In regional communities, workforce availability is frequently the single biggest constraint on service delivery in early childhood education.

Many services in regional areas operate below their licensed capacity due to staffing shortages. This can create the appearance of supply, while masking underlying unmet demand. A childcare centre may be licensed for a certain number of places and have strong demand, but without educators to staff those places, it cannot operate at full capacity. For this reason, workforce should be considered early in any childcare planning process, not as a secondary issue. The size and nature of the workforce you will require for childcare centres, depending on size are included in Section 12.2.

9.2 Understanding Workforce Challenges

Workforce constraints in regional areas are influenced by a combination of factors, which may include limited training and career pathways, housing availability and competition from other industries. In many cases, these challenges extend beyond the childcare sector and reflect broader regional workforce dynamics, but it is important to understand the workforce conditions within the sector. There is a Workforce Readiness Checklist in the Appendix to support workforce development and the following outlines key workforce considerations for the Childcare Sector:

9.2.1. Workforce Availability and Pipelines

A sustainable childcare service relies on a pipeline of trained and qualified educators. Understanding whether there is a local workforce, or the potential to attract one is critical. This includes:

- Existing qualified educators in the region
- People currently working in related roles
- Potential workforce returning to work
- Migration and relocation potential

In Practice

Engaging with local training providers, employment agencies and regional development organisations can provide insight into current workforce availability and future pipeline opportunities.

Key Take Away

Workforce is not just a constraint, it is a critical enabler.

In many regional communities, addressing workforce challenges is:

- Key to unlocking childcare supply
- Essential to overall service viability

9.2.2. Housing and Liveability

Access to housing is a significant factor in workforce attraction and retention in regional areas.

Even where jobs are available, a lack of suitable housing can prevent people from relocating or remaining in a community. In some communities, workforce housing initiatives have been used to support key workers, including childcare educators, to relocate and remain in the region.

9.2.3. Workforce Incentives

In some cases, additional incentives may be required to attract and retain staff. These act as sweeteners which make the prospect of relocating more attractive. Incentives do not always need to be financial. Flexible hours, supportive workplace culture and opportunities for career progression can also be important factors in attracting staff.

9.2.4. Workforce and Viability

It is important to restate that workforce availability is directly linked to the financial viability of a childcare service. If a service cannot recruit sufficient staff, it cannot operate at full capacity, revenue is reduced and costs remain largely fixed. This can create a situation where demand is high and the infrastructure is available but the service remains financially constrained. For example, a centre that is licensed for 80 places but only able to staff 50 places may struggle financially, despite strong demand.

Artist Hattie - 3 years old

9.2.5. Addressing Workforce Challenges

In Practice

There is no single solution to workforce challenges in regional communities. However, a combination of approaches can improve workforce outcomes. The table below details a range of approaches dealing with workforce challenges that can help to mitigate the risk of a childcare centre not being viable. Working with local partners including Council, economic development agencies and other industries (e.g., health, education) is recommended and may make facilitating these approaches easier and more viable.

Table 15: Addressing Workforce Challenges

Approach	Example
Local training pathways	Partnering with TAFE or schools to build local workforce with flexible learning options and reduced fees.
Traineeships and cadetships	Supporting people to train while working, e.g., Offering a study day every fortnight to support their learning and development.
Housing initiatives	Providing or facilitating access to accommodation – this could be either temporarily or permanently.
Relocation incentives	Attracting workers from other regions, e.g., Paying for furniture removalists or one-off starting bonuses.
Employer partnerships	Shared workforce strategies across sectors, e.g., For couples working across two different industries.
Flexible delivery models	Adjusting service models to match workforce availability, e.g., Job sharing or flexible hours for both part- and full-time roles.
Other incentives	Increased leave entitlements, professional development programs and above award wages can also help attract and retain workers.

9.3 Workforce Readiness Checklist

Workforce availability is one of the most critical factors influencing the success of a childcare service. Before progressing further, it is important to assess local workforce conditions and identify any potential constraints. The following checklist provides a simple way to test workforce readiness and highlight areas that may require further attention.

Local Workforce Availability

- [ ] Do we understand the availability of qualified educators currently live in the region?
- [ ] Are there existing services struggling to recruit or retain staff?
- [ ] Are there people in related roles who could transition into childcare?

Training and Pipeline

- [ ] Are there local training providers offering early childhood qualifications?
- [ ] Are there pathways for school leavers to enter the sector?
- [ ] Are traineeships or on-the-job training options available?

Workforce Demand and Competition

- [ ] Are other sectors (e.g. health, retail, hospitality) competing for similar workers?
- [ ] Are wage levels and conditions competitive within the local labour market?

Housing and Relocation

- [ ] Is there suitable and affordable housing available for incoming workers?
- [ ] Are there barriers to relocation (cost, availability, quality of housing)?

Workforce Incentives

- [ ] Are there existing incentives in place (financial or non-financial)?
- [ ] Could incentives be introduced (e.g. relocation support, flexible work arrangements)?

Partnership Opportunities

- [ ] Can local employers support workforce attraction or retention?
- [ ] Are there opportunities to collaborate with other sectors facing similar workforce challenges?

Service Design Considerations

- [ ] Does the proposed service size align with likely workforce availability?
- [ ] Could a staged or flexible model better match workforce capacity?
- [ ] Does the proposed operating model (hours, age mix) align with workforce availability?

Part Ten: Advocacy and Stakeholder Mobilisation

10.1 Building Regional Momentum

Developing childcare in regional communities is rarely achieved by a single organisation acting alone, with success very much relying on strong partnerships, collaboration and a capacity to build momentum. It requires coordination, advocacy and an alignment of multiple stakeholders including councils, providers, employers, community leaders and government.

Even where demand is well understood and viable solutions have been identified, projects will not progress without support, influence and investment. Successful childcare projects in regional areas are often the result of sustained advocacy and collaboration over time, rather than a single decision or funding opportunity.

10.1.1. Who Needs to Be Involved

Effective advocacy begins with identifying and engaging the right stakeholders and articulating how an issue or challenge is not only relevant to them but that resolving it will provide mutual benefit. Stakeholders may include:

- **Local Government** – Planning, infrastructure, facilitation, potential investment
- **Childcare Providers** – Service delivery expertise and operational insight
- **Employers and Industry** – Workforce demand, potential funding partners
- **State and Federal Government** – Policy, funding programs and regulatory support
- **Community Organisations and Leaders** – Local knowledge, advocacy and mobilisation.

It is also vital across these stakeholder groups to know who you need to talk to and what makes them tick. People who can inform the advocacy process in practical ways and people who have the capacity to influence and make decisions in their own right are the most useful. Understanding the priorities of other stakeholders and how they operate will ensure your advocacy can be targeted, relevant and ultimately more effective.

10.1.2. Communicating the Case

Developing a strong a strong childcare project is only part of the process. To build regional momentum, being able to clearly communicate the issue and the proposed solution is essential. Effective advocacy relies on the ability to present a clear, consistent and evidence-based narrative that resonates with different stakeholders. This means being able to articulate:

- The scale of the problem
- Who is impacted?
- Why it matters?
- What can be done about it?

It may incorporate a combination of personal stories from individuals or organisations that are impacted alongside well-researched data, which supports the stories.

It is also important to work with the media from your local community and beyond. They can raise awareness about the issues you are addressing and your project and if managed well, they may help influence your advocacy in a productive way. Media engagement should be strategic and carefully managed.

In Practice

The work undertaken in earlier sections of the toolkit provides a foundation for strong communication. It starts with:

Using evidence to strengthen the message

This includes:

- Data on population and demand (Part 2)
- Understanding and identifying a delivery model (Part 3)
- Identifying what will be viable and the investment and subsidy thresholds (Part 4)
- Workforce constraints and opportunities (Part 5)

When combined, this information provides a clear message that supports advocacy and decision making. It will also be a foundation for tailoring communication with different stakeholders including:

- Employers, who will respond to workforce and productivity impacts.
- Councils, who will respond to economic development and population growth.
- Governments, who will respond to regional equity, policy goals and service access.

10.2 From Evidence to Action

Advocacy is most effective when it is clear, targeted and actionable with a credible case that translates into a defined and actionable ask. In many communities, the challenge is not a lack of understanding the issue, but a lack of clarity about what needs to happen next.

10.2.1. Workforce Availability and Pipelines

A strong case draws on the work undertaken in earlier sections of this toolkit and brings it all together as a clear narrative. The following provides an overview of how you can build your case.

Evidence of Demand (Part 6)

This information can be formulated as per the instructions in Part 6 of this Toolkit. It needs to include:

- The number of age-relevant children
- Service deficits
- Waiting lists
- Workforce impacts

Clear Delivery Approach (Part 7)

This information can be determined utilising the information in Part 7 of this Toolkit. It needs to include:

- The preferred governance model – who is going manage the facility
- Roles and responsibilities
- Existing and potential partnerships
- Type and nature of facility
- Infrastructure needs / expectations

Understanding of Viability (Part 8)

This information can be articulated using Part 8 of the Toolkit and may influence the delivery approach in Step 2 above. It needs to consider:

- Where the project sits on the viability spectrum – this could be based on current and future conditions
- Identification of the viability gap
- Proposed solutions to address it
- The nature and size of the building is needed in the context of demand and viability.

Workforce Considerations (Part 9)

This information can be articulated using Part 9 of the Toolkit. It needs to include:

- Workforce availability
- Pipeline strategies
- Constraints and opportunities

Economic Impact of Construction

This information can be sourced from your local Regional Development Australia office. They will be able to run the numbers related to the development and estimate the economic value of the construction. The table below provides an example of what this calculation looks like for a $4 million construction budget.

Table 16: Economic Impact of Construction Sample Calculation

	Output	Value added	Jobs
Direct value	4.0 million	1.05 million	9
Indirect value	3.44 million	1.42 million	15
Total	**7.44 million**	**2.46 million**	**24**

10.2.2. Translating the Case into an Ask

Once the case is established, it needs to be translated into a clear ask. This means moving beyond

"*We need more childcare*" to…

"*We are seeking support to develop a [size] childcare service in [location], including [specific supports required such as capital funding, land, workforce initiatives or partnerships].*"

In Practice

Preparing a strong "ask" answers three simple questions:

- What are we trying to do? E.g., Develop a 60-place centre / expand an existing service.
- Why is it needed? E.g., Based on demand and economic impact etc.
- What do we need, and from whom? E.g., Funding, land, building design, policy support, partnerships.

A clear ask allows stakeholders to assess feasibility, understand their role and respond with action rather than interest.

An advocacy letter template is included in Appendix 12.5.4. of the Toolkit.

10.2.3. Demonstrating Economic Impact

Childcare is not only a social service, but also a critical enabler of workforce participation and regional economic activity. Quantifying this impact can strengthen advocacy by demonstrating the broader economic benefits of investment. Funding applications generally will expect some economic impact modelling.

An indicative approach to estimating economic impact is provided in Appendix 12.4.

Economic Impact estimates can be particularly useful when engaging:

- Local employers experiencing workforce shortages
- Councils considering infrastructure investment
- State and Federal Government funding programs

Part Ten: Advocacy and Stakeholder Mobilisation

Key Take Away

Stakeholders are more likely to respond when they understand the scale of the issue, the proposed solution and the role they are being asked.

All your advocacy efforts should be underpinned by this key message:

"*Childcare is not just a community service; it is essential economic infrastructure.*"

10.2.4. Delivering an Advocacy Campaign

Once you have articulated your case and translated it into an ask, the next step is to deliver an advocacy campaign. Your campaign might have a range of stages but it should include the following:

- **Specific goals and timelines:** Generally, your advocacy goal will be the realisation of your "ask" but there might be several milestones along the way that demonstrate progress. Articulate these from the outset, not only does this give you a pathway but you can celebrate progress and success throughout, what is likely a very long process.
- **Know who you are asking:** Make a list of all the people / groups you are targeting in relation to your advocacy. Learn about who they are and what contribution they can make for your project. Is it influence, resourcing, approval or something else – be very clear about what you want from them – this will inform your ask. The list of key contacts included in Appendix 12.6 may provide you with a starting list of the people you should / could talk to.
- **Strong engagement strategies:** Who and how you are advocating is vital, and whilst determining the "who" is outlined above, identifying what methodologies you will need to employ to reach these people is important. For example, if you want to advocate to a high-level Minister, a formal meeting may be necessary and a specific process for organising this will be required. Also, be clear about why you are engaging, be consistent with messaging – and always have the ask in mind – which should be tailored.
- **Build an advocacy community:** Advocacy tends to be more effective when a multitude of voices, all delivering a consistent message. Partners you are collaborating with will be part of your community but you may also seek out other voices, that may have access or influence or can deliver your message and "ask" in a slightly different way. For example, local families, struggling to access childcare or local business owner, who can't fill vacancies could also be part of your advocacy community.
- **Having a Solid Plan:** Critical to successful advocacy is a clear and detailed project plan. Some partners will want evidence that you know what you are doing and how to achieve the end goal. This will be a detailed project plan with key milestones and financials and may include concept plans. These can be particularly powerful for some as it clearly articulates a tangible vision of what investment will achieve.
- **Maintaining Momentum:** Childcare projects can take time to develop and deliver and maintaining momentum is vital. Ongoing advocacy activities, regular stakeholder engagement, celebrating the "wins" and communicating progress and refining approaches as conditions change will all help to maintain momentum.

A range of Templates that will support your advocacy planning and delivery have been included in Section 12.5 of this Toolkit.

Part Eleven: From Idea to Delivery

11.1 Turning Planning into Action

The earlier sections of this toolkit provide the evidence, analysis and frameworks required to understand childcare demand, viability and delivery models. The next step is to bring these elements together to progress a project from concept through to delivery.

11.2 A Staged Approach

Progressing from an identified need to an operational service requires coordination, persistence and clear decision-making. This section outlines the typical stages involved in moving a childcare project from concept through to delivery.

Not all projects will follow this pathway exactly, but most will move through these stages in some form. It is also important to note that this process can take between 2 – 4 years, sometimes longer. Along this journey, completing different elements, detailed below, may involve drawing on the expertise of others including government and industry bodies as well as professional consultants.

Table 17: Childcare Facility Development Stages

Step		Details	What to watch for
1.	Confirming the Need	Using the demand analysis undertaken in Part 6 of this toolkit, this stage focuses on clearly defining the scale and nature of the problem. This includes: • Validating population and demand data • Identifying service gaps and unmet demand • Engaging with existing providers and stakeholders	• Is demand consistent and sustained? • Are there existing services that could expand? • Is the issue access, affordability or availability?
2.	Testing Feasibility	Building on the demand analysis, this stage draws on Parts 7, 8 and 9to assess whether a service is viable and deliverable. This includes: • Considering appropriate delivery models (Part 7) • Assessing financial viability and identifying any gaps (Part 8) • Understanding workforce constraints and opportunities (Part 9)	• Is the project viable under current conditions? • What is the viability gap and how will address this? • What are the key risks and constraints?
3.	Identifying the Delivery Approach	At this stage, the focus shifts from analysis to defining how the project will be delivered. This includes: • Selecting a preferred model (Part 7) • Clarifying roles and responsibilities • Identifying potential operators and partners • Identifying and articulating infrastructure needs	• Is there a capable operator? • Who is leading the project? • Are roles clearly defined and agreed?
4.	Securing Support and Funding	Using the advocacy framework outlined in Part 10, this stage focuses on building support and securing the resources required to progress the project. This includes: • Articulating a clear and evidence-based case • Defining a targeted and actionable "ask"	• Is the ask clearly defined? • Are the right stakeholders engaged? • Is there alignment across partners?
5.	Planning and Development	Once support and funding are secured, the project moves into detailed planning and development. This includes: • Site selection and planning approvals (Part 8) • Design and infrastructure development • Procurement and construction	• Are timelines realistic? • Are there planning or regulatory constraints? • Is the scope aligned with available funding?
6..	Workforce and Operational Readiness	Drawing on Part 9, this stage focuses on preparing the service for operation. This includes: • Recruiting and training staff • Establishing operational systems and processes • Finalising regulatory approvals	• Can the service be fully staffed? • Are operational systems in place? • Are all regulatory requirements met?
7.	Opening and Ongoing Operation	The final stage is transitioning into an operational service and ensuring its ongoing sustainability. This includes: • Enrolments and community engagement • Workforce management and retention • Monitoring demand and service performance	• Is occupancy building as expected? • Are there workforce retention challenges? • Does the service need to adapt over time?

Artist Hattie - 3 years old

11.3 Timeframes and Development Costs

It is important to be realistic about the time and resourcing it takes to develop a facility from inception of the idea or identification of the need / demand to completion. This can take several years, and whilst this is frustrating for the families who need care, it is important to have a reasonable timeline in mind and communicate this to stakeholders.

Along with realistic timeframes, the cost of developing the idea, before construction even begins must also be considered. Funds will most likely be required for a range of consultants / professionals to help get the project "shovel ready".

11.3.1. Indicative Timeline and Milestones

Every project is different and the length of time it takes can vary depending on the size and nature of the project, local, state and national conditions and available funding. The following provides an example of a timeline and the key stages of childcare development.

Table 18: Childcare Facility Development Indicative Milestones

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Project Inception Preliminary identification of need Research needs analysis and demand modelling Formation of Partnerships Site identification Advocacy planning	Feasibility and Business Case Development Confirmation of Governance + Operational Model Development of Concept Plans Preliminary planning discussions Continued advocacy Application for registration (new centre) as a childcare centre or increase in current license (existing centre)	Fundraising and submission of funding applications Development of detailed plans Lodgement of planning and development application Workforce planning Continued advocacy	Grant funding received Matched funding secured (if required) Planning and development approvals granted Tender process to identify Building Firm Contract Builder Construction commencement Stakeholder management	Build continues Stakeholder management Staff recruitment Equipment procurement Marketing Build completion Opening Funding acquittals

11.3.2. Project Costs - as of 2026

Every project is different and the length of time it takes can vary depending on the size and nature of the project, local, state and national conditions and available funding. The following provides an example of a timeline and the key stages of childcare development.

Pre-Construction Costs

Table 19: Childcare Facility Development Indicative Pre-Construction Costs

Item	Details	Indicative Costs
Research / Needs Analysis	Needs analysis to understand demand and get a snapshot of local conditions, partners and opportunities.	$10,000 - $20,000*
Feasibility / Business Case	Detailed business case that attests to the project feasibility and ongoing viability, operating model and impact.	$20,000 - $25,000
Funding Applications	The development and submission of a funding application by a professional funding consultant.	$5,000 - $10,000*
Architectural Fees	Design fees to develop the concept and detailed construction plans	$ 30,000 - $40,000
Site Fees	Traffic, stormwater, engineering reports if required	$8,000 - $25,000
Planning and Development Costs	Submission of planning and development applications	$5,000 - $15,000
Building certification	Structural certification of the building by a building rules certifier.	$3,000 - $10,000
General Administration	Advocacy, communication, record keeping, stakeholder management and general project coordination	$30,000 - $40,000*
INDICATIVE TOTAL		**$111,000 - $185,000**

*The above costs are indicative if a professional consultant was engaged to undertake this work. Those with an asterisk could be done / managed in-house, depending on the skills and capability of the group or organisation instigating the project.

Costs can vary substantially depending on local planning requirements, site constraints, consultant fees and the complexity of the proposed development. Early discussions with the relevant council and qualified professionals are strongly recommended.

Part Eleven: From Idea to Delivery

Construction Costs

The cost to per metre to build a childcare centre is estimated to be between **$5,500 and $7,000 per square metre** depending on location, complexity, site conditions etc. this does not include the funds required to purchase land.

For a 45-place centre, the minimum regulatory space required is:

- 146.25m^2 indoor unencumbered space
- 315m^2 outdoor unencumbered space

This does not include kitchens, bathrooms, storage rooms, offices, corridors, plant rooms, foyers etc. With these things in mind, a 45-place centre would need to allow somewhere between 1200 – 1800m^2. This would include:

- 220 – 300m^2 internal building area
- 315 – 450m^2 outdoor play area
- Additional space for car-parking, access, landscaping and setbacks

The above puts the cost for the construction of a new 45-place centre at $1.65 million and $3 million or $37,000 - $67,000 per place.

<u>**These figures are indicative only**</u> and costs can vary significantly depending on site conditions, location, design complexity, service capacity, compliance requirements and market conditions.

11.4 Facility Scale and Design Options

Where a new childcare service is being considered, the scale and design of the facility will have a significant impact on both viability and service delivery. Based on the analysis in earlier sections of this Toolkit, different facility sizes may be more appropriate depending on demand, workforce availability and financial viability.

The following examples provide indicative layouts and considerations for childcare services of different scales.

Table 20: Childcare Facility Size Descriptions

Service Size	Typical Capacity	Key Characteristics
Small Service	~30 places	• Limited number of rooms • Smaller team, often multi-role staff • May operate with Director also working in ratio • Lower upfront capital cost
Medium Service	~45 places	• More defined room structure • Greater separation of management and educator roles • Broader age mixes possible • Moderate operational scale
Larger Service	~60+ places	• Multiple rooms across age groups • Dedicated Centre Director and structured staffing model • Greater operational efficiency • More flexibility in age mix and enrolments

The appropriate facility size should align with the demand and viability analysis undertaken in earlier sections of this Toolkit. In many regional contexts:

- Smaller services may be easier to establish but harder to sustain
- Larger services are often more viable but require stronger demand and workforce availability

Some communities may consider a staged approach, beginning with a smaller service and expanding over time as demand and workforce capacity grow.

Detailed example layouts and plans for each facility size are provided in Section 13.1

Part Twelve: Demand Snapshot

12.1 Turning Planning into Action

Details of how to populate this template are outline in Part 6: Understanding Local Demand of this Toolkit.

Community / Catchment Area: ______________________________

Date: ______________________________

Population Demand

Indicator	Data	Notes
Children aged 0–4		
Estimated places required (1:3)		
Estimated places required (1:2.5)		

Existing Supply

Indicator	Data	Notes
Number of services		
Total licensed places		
Available places (actual)		
Key service types		

Population Demand

Indicator	Data
Average Number of Unmet Hours per survey respondent	
Average length of time on Waiting lists	
Number of unmet hours based on waiting lists – gathered directly from existing services	

Gap Analysis

Indicator	Data
Indicative shortfall (1:3)	
Indicative shortfall (1:2.5)	
Estimate accuracy based on Other Data / Evidence	

12.1.1. Sample Survey Questions

The following survey questions may help you to test the SPC and ensure this is an accurate estimate based on local conditions. It is recommended that an online surveying platform like Survey Monkey is utilised to ensure ease of distribution and analysis.

For Families – Current, Potential and Future Childcare Service Users

1. What is your postcode?

   Answer Layout:

   - Open text box,
   - Drop down menu or
   - Multiple choice with local towns / regions listed.

2. How many children aged 3 months to 4 years are in your care? What are their ages?

Number of children aged 3 months - 4 years	
Age of Child 1	
Age of Child 2	
Age of Child 3	
Age of Child 4	
NA - I don't have any children	

3. If you have children, do you currently utilise childcare services?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ NA I don't currently have children

4. If yes, how many hours per week are you currently accessing?

Number of hours for Child 1	
Number of hours for Child 2	
Number of hours for Child 3	
Number of hours for Child 4	
NA - I don't have children / I don't use childcare	

5. What type of childcare do you currently use?

- ☐ Nanny/Au Pair
- ☐ Informal care (family or friends)
- ☐ N/A I don't currently use childcare
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ Occasional Care
- ☐ Family day care
- ☐ Long day care

6. Are you currently able to access childcare that meets all of your needs?

- ◯ Yes, fully
- ◯ Partially
- ◯ No
- ◯ N/A - I don't currently need childcare

Part Twelve: Demand Snapshot

7. If no, how many additional hours per week, per child would you like to access?

Number of hours for Child 1	
Number of hours for Child 2	
Number of hours for Child 3	
Number of hours for Child 4	
NA - I don't have children / I don't use childcare	

8. If your needs are not fully met, what are the main barriers

- ☐ Not enough places available
- ☐ Hours don't suit my work schedule
- ☐ No options in my town/area
- ☐ Cost is too high
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ I have concerns about the quality of childcare available
- ☐ My child has additional needs that aren't supported in local childcare facilities
- ☐ I don't have transport to access care

9. If you are dealing with a reduced access to childcare compared to your needs, to what degree has this had a negative impact on the following?

	No impact	Low impact	Considerable impact	Significant impact	N/A
Delayed my return to work	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Unable to increase hours at work	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My business/work is less productive or limited	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Family members (e.g. grandparents) are overburdened	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Mental health of parents / guardians	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Child's development / wellbeing	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
It has influenced my decision to delay having children or expanding our family.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

10. What additional childcare services would you like to access?

- ◯ Care outside standard hours (e.g., early mornings, evenings)
- ◯ Occasional/emergency care
- ◯ Occasional care
- ◯ Vacation care
- ◯ Other (please specify)
- ◯ After school care
- ◯ Family daycare
- ◯ Long daycare

11. Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know/Unsure
A lack of access to childcare has or will prevent me from returning to work.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
There are businesses in my community which cannot attract staff because of the lack of childcare options.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Not having enough childcare in the Tatiara has a negative impact on our community.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I feel supported by the current childcare options in my area.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I would increase my work hours if more childcare was available.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I have considered moving elsewhere because of the lack of access to childcare.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

12. Do you have any additional comments or would you like to share your personal story relating to childcare access

- Answer Layout: Open Text Box.

Part Twelve: Demand Snapshot

For Childcare Centres / Operators

1. What type of childcare service are you operating?

- ☐ Long daycare centre
- ☐ Integrated centre with kindergarten and long daycare
- ☐ Occasional childcare service
- ☐ Family daycare service

Other (please specify)

2. What is your operating model?

- ☐ Private / Commercial Business
- ☐ Government owned and operated
- ☐ Community owned and operated
- ☐ Hybrid model - community and government operated
- ☐ Other (please specify)

3. How many childcare places are you licensed for?

- Answer Layout: Single blank “fillable” text box

4. How many children on average per day do you cater to?

- Answer Layout: Single blank “fillable” text box

5. Do you have a waiting list?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Unsure

If yes, how many children are on your waiting list as of today's date?

6. If yes, how many hours per week are wanted in total, from your waiting list. E.g., There are 15 children on the waiting list and collectively they would like to access 24 hours each (3 days per week) = 336 hours.

- Answer Layout: Single blank "fillable" text box

7. What is the average length of time children are on the waiting list for each age group?

0 - 2 Years	
2 - 3 Years	
3 - 4 Years	
NA - We don't have a waiting list.	

8. How many staff do you have represented in FTE?

- Answer Layout: Single blank "fillable" text box

Part Twelve: Demand Snapshot

9. What are the critical factors contributing to your waiting lists – tick all that apply?

- ☐ Building is not big enough to cater to demand
- ☐ Increase in demand due to economic conditions - e.g. Cost of Living,
- ☐ We don't have / can't attract enough staff
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ We are at capacity based on our license
- ☐ Increased demand is expected to be short-lived
- ☐ Owner / Operator does not want / able to expand

10. Do you have plans to expand your service in the next 1 – 3 years?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Unsure

If yes, how many children are on your waiting list as of today's date?

12.2 Staffing Ratio and Costings Guide

Table 21: Staffing Ratios

Age Group	Ratio	Example	Implications
0–2 years	1:4	16 Children = 4 Staff	Highest cost
2–3 years	1:5	25 Children = 5 Staff	Moderate cost
3–5 years	1:11	30 Children = 3 Staff	Lower cost

12.2.1. Qualification Requirements

In addition to the ratios regulations stipulate that Early Childhood Education staff are suitably qualified. The following provides an overview of the minimum qualification requirements under the National Quality Framework.

- A mix of Certificate III, Diploma-qualified educators, and early Childhood Teachers (ECTs).
- At least one qualified educator must be present in each room.
- Larger services (e.g., 50 – 60 places) typically require:
  - A Centre Director / Service Manager
  - An Early Childhood Teacher (particularly for pre-school aged children)

12.2.2. Ancillary and Support Roles

In addition to educators, most childcare services require a range of supporting roles to operate effectively. These may include:

- Administration staff (enrolments, compliance, family communication)
- Cleaning staff (daily cleaning, hygiene compliance)
- Food preparation / kitchen staff (where meals are provided)
- Maintenance / facility support (depending on the size of the service).

Part Twelve: Demand Snapshot

12.2.3. Service Size and Workforce

Workforce requirements become more complex as service size increases.

Table 22: Service Size Overview

Service Size	Places	Workforce Structure
Small services	<30 places	Typically operate with a small team and limited management structure. The Centre Director may also take on educator responsibilities.
Medium services	30 – 60 places	Require a clearer separation between management and educator roles. A dedicated Centre Director is more likely, with a mix of qualification levels across staff.
Large Services	60+ places	Typically require a more structured workforce, including: • A dedicated Centre Director / Service Manager • One or more Early Childhood Teachers (ECTs) • Multiple room leaders and a broader staffing mix • Greater administrative and compliance capacity

12.2.4. Staff Costings

Workforce requirements become more complex as service size increases.

Table 23: Typical Age Mix Scenarios

Age Mix Profile	Example Split	Implications
Balanced Mix	30% 0 – 2, 30% 2 – 3 + 40% 3 – 5	Standard model, moderate cost profile
Younger Skewed	50% 0 – 2, 25% 2 – 3 + 25% 3 – 5	Higher staffing needs, higher cost
Older Skewed	20% 0 – 2, 30% 2 – 3 + 50% 3 – 5	Lower staffing cost, more efficient

Table 24: Indicative Staffing Requirements for a 60-place service

Age Group	Ratio	Approx. Children	Educators Required
0 – 2 years	1:4	18	~5 educators
2 – 3 years	1:5	18	~4 educators
3 – 5 years	1:10	24	~3 educators

Table 25: Indicative Wage Ranges (per educator)

Role	Typical Qualification	Approximate Hourly Rate
Educator	Certificate III	$28 - $32
Lead Educator	Diploma	$32 - $38
Early Childhood Teacher	Degree	$38 - $50
Centre Director	Diploma / Degree	$45 - $60+

Sample Scenario for a 60 Place Centre

This is an illustrative example – not a full financial model. On-costs have been estimated at a rate of 25% which includes superannuation, leave loading, insurance and other employment-related expenses. It is indicative only.

Assumptions:

- Service size is 60 places with a balanced age mix.
- Operating model includes:
  - Room educators based on ratios
  - 1 Early Childhood Teacher
  - 1 Centre Director
  - 1 float / relief educator
  - 0.6 admin support
  - 0.5 food prep / cleaning support
- Indicative hourly wages assumptions
  - Educator average $32/hr
  - ECT: $42/hr
  - Centre Director: $50/hr
  - Float educator: $30/hr
  - Admin support: $34/hr
  - Food prep / cleaning: $28/hr
- Weekly paid hours per FTE: 38

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Table 26: 60 Place Centre Financial Modeling - Indicative Staffing Requirements for a 60-place service

Age Group	Ratio	Approx. Children	*Educators Required	Est. Weekly Cost
0 – 2 years	1:4	18	5 educators	12 x $32 p/h
2 – 3 years	1:5	18	4 educators	
3 – 5 years	1:11	24	3 educators	
Total Room Educators			**12.0 FTE**	**$15,360**
Additional Roles		**FTE**	**Indicative Hourly Rate**	
1 x Early Childhood Teacher		1.0	$42	$1,596
1 x Centre Director		1.0	$50	$1,900
1 x Float / Relief Educator		1.0	$30	$1,140
0.5 Food prep / cleaning		0.6	$34	$775
0.6 Admin Support		0.5	$28	$532
Indicative Staffing Cost				**$21,303**
On costs (25%)				**$5,325.75**
TOTAL Staffing Cost Per Week				**$26,628.75**

*Reflects minimum staffing levels to meet regulatory ratios. In practice additional staff are often required to support management and compliance, programming and quality requirements and leave and operational coverage

12.3 Viability Snapshot Calculator

The purpose of this template is to provide a simple, early-stage indication of whether a childcare service may be financially sustainable based on local conditions.

How to Use This Tool

This is not a detailed financial model. It is a high-level snapshot designed to help you:

- Understand the relationship between demand, revenue and costs
- Identify whether a service is likely to operate at a surplus or deficit
- Inform discussions about viability and potential support requirements

Where exact data is not available, use reasonable estimates based on:

- Information gathered in Part 6 (Demand)
- Insights from existing providers
- Benchmarking against similar services

Table 27: Viability Snapshot Calculator Sample

Input	Source Material	Value
Total licensed places	Based on proposed service size, which is informed by the demand modelling undertaken as part of Section 6 of this Toolkit	
Target occupancy (%)	Typically, 75% - 90% depending on local demand and workforce availability	
Estimated filled places	Multiply total places x occupancy (e.g. 80 x 0.75% = 60)	
Average weekly revenue based on occupancy.	Parent fees + Childcare Subsidy (CCS) Use local provider fee data or an indicative range to estimate daily fees per child attending (e.g., $120 - $160 per day per child). The calculation would look like this: 60 (occupancy per day) x $130 (fee per child) = $7800 (Daily income) x 5 (number of days operating) = $39000	
Total Revenue	**Fees based Income (E.g., $39,000 as per above scenario) +** **Other income including fundraising and programming grants** **= Total Weekly revenue**	

Table 28: Viability Snapshot Calculator Template

Input	Source Material	Value
Staffing	Largest cost, typically 60 – 70% of total costs. It will be influenced by: • Staff-to-child ratios (Appendix 12.2) • Age mix (Under 2's cost more) Refer to the cost recommendations and scenarios in Section 12.2.4	
Facility	Depending on if the building is owned or leased these costs can vary but it may include: • Rent • Utilities • Servicing debt (e.g., capital expenditure loans) • Maintenance	
Admin	This includes management costs such as stationary or ICT, compliance, marketing, record keeping, reporting etc.	
Other	This includes food, cleaning, equipment including toys, books and other educational resources.	
Total Costs	**Add all of the above to determine the total costs**	
INDICATIVE POSITION		
TOTAL REVENUE		
TOTAL COSTS	Minus	
SURPLUS / DEFICIT	Equals	

12.3.1. Viability Decision Tool

This tool is designed to help interpret the results of the Viability Snapshot Calculator and determine the most appropriate pathway forward.

Table 29: Viability Snapshot Outcomes Overview

Result from Snapshot	What it Means	Typical Response
Revenue ≥ Costs	Likely viable	Potential Market-led Solution*
Small deficit	Marginal	Targeted support and partnerships may support viability
Significant deficit	Not Viable	Intervention / alternative or subsidised model will be required

* It is important to note that despite evidence of viability, market-led solutions in regional and remote areas are not always forthcoming. Lower populations can see viability fluctuate year on year and the cost of developing infrastructure can also present challenges in attracting private providers in regional areas.

The other market related factor is the competition for investment by private providers in larger urban or metropolitan. If there are more lucrative opportunities in larger communities, private providers are more likely to invest there.

Artist Louisa - 3 years old

12.4 Economic Impact Estimator

The purpose of this template is to provide a simple, early-stage indication of whether a childcare service may be financially sustainable based on local conditions.

How to Use This Tool

This tool estimates the economic impact of additional childcare places by calculating the potential increase in workforce participation. It is designed as a high-level estimate, not a precise economic model.

Step 1: Estimate the number of additional childcare places that will be developed based on the Demand Snapshot (Section 12.1), identified service gaps or a proposed new facility size.

Step 2: Estimate workforce participation impact. This is not an exact science and will vary depending on local conditions, including workforce participation and unemployment rates and workforce shortages. As a rule of thumb, each additional childcare place can enable 0.5 workers to participate in the workforce. This is a conservative estimate and is recommended for early-stage planning.

Where more detailed analysis is required, it may be useful to seek advice from organisations with expertise in regional economic development such as RDA Limestone Coast.

Step 3: Estimate Value per worker. This represents the economic contribution of a worker to the local economy. You can estimate this using local average income data or Gross Regional Product (GRP) per worker, if available. RDA Limestone Coast or the Local Council may be able to provide you with this calculation. If this is not available an indicative range of between $90,000 and $130,000 per worker per year is reasonable.

Step 4: Calculate Economic Impact. Populate the table below following Steps 1 through 3 detailed above along with the simple formula which is included.

Economic Impact = Childcare Places x Workforce Participation x Value per Worker

Table 30: Economic Impact Calculator Scenario Sample

Item	Input Value	Sample Scenario
New childcare places (Step 1)		60 x
Workers enabled (Step 2)		0.5 x
Value per worker (Step 3)		$127,968*
Economic Impact		**= $3,839,040**

* Current estimated value per worker to the Limestone Coast economy based on RDA Economic modelling.

12.5 Advocacy Templates

The following templates will help with advocacy and funding.

12.5.1. Case for Investment Template

The following provides you with an overview of the content that should be included in a Case for Investment. A large majority of this content can be sourced using various sections in this Toolkit. It is designed to bring together elements of the Toolkit into a single, concise summary that can be used to support funding applications, stakeholder engagement and decision making.

Table 31: Case for Investment Key Elements

Item	Input Value	Sample Scenario
The Issue	What is the problem e.g., demand, shortages and impact	See Part 6: Understanding Demand
The Evidence	Key data and insights e.g., demand gap, waiting lists, workforce constraints	See Part 6 and Appendix 12.1
The Impact	Economic and social impact e.g., workforce participation, productivity	See Part 5 and Appendix 12.4
The Opportunity	What could be delivered e.g., service model, facility size	See Part 7 (Models) and Part 11.3 Facility Options
The Ask	What is required e.g., funding, land, partnerships, policy, support	See Part 10 Advocacy and Stakeholder Engagement
The Outcome	What success looks like, demonstrating how the issue will be resolved e.g., community, economic/service outcomes	Draw from all sections above

12.5.2. Advocacy and Stakeholder Planning Tool

Effective advocacy requires more than a strong case, it depends on engaging the right stakeholders with clear, tailored messages. This tool is designed to help identify key stakeholders, understand their role and interests, and plan a coordinated approach to engagement. By taking a structured approach, communities can build broader support, align messaging and improve the likelihood of securing funding, partnerships and long-term outcomes.

Advocacy and Stakeholder List Template

Stakeholder	Interest / Role	Key Message	Engagement Approach	Priority
Council				
Employers				
State Government				
Community				
Families				

12.5.2. Advocacy Readiness Checklist

This checklist provides a simple way to assess whether you are ready to advocate for investment in childcare. It brings together the key elements of a strong case and helps identify any gaps before engaging with stakeholders or seeking funding.

- [ ] Demand has been clearly identified and supported by evidence
- [ ] The scale of the problem and service gap is understood
- [ ] Financial viability and any funding gap has been considered
- [ ] A preferred service model or approach has been identified
- [ ] Workforce availability and constraints have been considered
- [ ] Key stakeholders have been identified
- [ ] Local stakeholders are broadly aligned on the need and approach
- [ ] A clear delivery pathway has been identified
- [ ] A clear and specific “ask” has been defined

12.5.4. Advocacy Letter Template

The following letter is a sample letter template for you to utilise as part of your advocacy efforts. When writing to stakeholders, decision makers or others you would like to advocate to, it is important to state the following in your communication:

- **Outline of the Issue** – include a clear outline of the issue or challenge and the negative impact of the issue both now and into the future if it is not addressed.
- **Evidence** – include information the supports your statements about the issue and its impact. Focus on the things that the recipient of the letter will care about. For example, if it is the Minister for Social Services, they will be interested in the social impact, if it is the Minister for Small Business, they will be interested in the impact on small business. You should give a broad overview of the impact across all areas but there may be a need to drill down into one area over another to garner interest from particular individuals / organisations.
- **The Solution** – Outline what the solution is or how you will address the issue and reduce the negative impact that you have outlined. This should be practical and achievable – pie in the sky will be difficult to get across the line.
- **The "Ask"** – Clearly state what you want from the person you are writing to. Letting them know what the problem is and how it can be fixed is important but they are more likely to offer their support if you specify exactly what it is you are asking for. At the very least, you should ask for a meeting, so you can discuss the issue further and help build a relationship with this stakeholder. You may also ask them for financial or in-kind support, to help influence others, further evidence or information that they may have access to or something else specific e.g., assistance with planning and regulatory processes.

[Date]

The Hon [Minister Name] MP

[Ministerial Title]

[Department / Address]

Dear Minister [Surname],

Re: [Insert Issue or Project Title]

I am writing on behalf of [organisation/community/group name] regarding [brief description of issue].

[Provide a short overview of the issue or challenge being experienced by your community, organisation or region]. This issue is having a significant impact on our community [Clearly explain why this issue is important and who is affected.]

We have undertaken research and have found [Insert evidence or supporting information that demonstrates the scale and impact of the issue. This may include statistics, workforce impacts, waiting lists, community feedback, economic impacts, service gaps or future growth pressures.]

We have developed a proposal which directly addresses this issue, [Outline the proposed solution or response. Explain how this approach would help address the issue and what positive outcomes it would deliver for the community, local economy or sector.] Please see the attached, for further information [Attach any relevant materials, which adds detail to what you are proposing. This could be a strategy, concept plans, application to Council or a more detailed proposal].

We are seeking your support for [clearly state the specific ask. This may include Funding support, a meeting to discuss the issue further, assistance progressing the project, advocacy within Government, support for future planning or feasibility work, a letter of support, assistance identifying relevant programs or opportunities]

This issue is important to the future wellbeing and [Insert community name] community and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss it further with you.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

[Name]

[Position]

[Organisation]

[Phone]

[Email]

12.6 Key Contacts and Links

The following provide you with some useful contacts and links, that may support the development of your project, collecting evidence and/or your advocacy efforts. It is important that these are accurate at the date of publication of this toolkit (June 2026).

12.6.1. Key Contacts

Table 32: Key Contact Details List

Name	Overview
Federal MP for the Electorate of Barker	7/2 Sturt Reserve Rd, Murray Bridge 5253 GPO Box 9867, Adelaide SA 5001 Tel: 132 326 Tony.pasin.mp@aph.gov.au
State MP for the Electorate of MacKillop	146 Smith Street, Naracoorte, SA 5271 08 8762 211 mackillop@parliament.sa.gov.au
State MP for the Electorate of Mount Gambier	24a Bay Road, Mount Gambier, SA 5290 08 8727 9944 mtgambier@parliament.sa.gov.au
Federal Minister for Early Childhood Education	Senator the Hon. Dr Jess Walsh Ministerial Office PO Box 6100, Senate, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600 02 6277 7200
State Minister for Education, Training and Skills	The Hon. Lucy Hood GPO Box 1152, Adelaide SA 5001 08 8429 3400 Minister.hood@sa.gov.au
Office for Early Childhood Development	Oecd.engage@sa.gov.au Tel: 1800 868 657
Department for Education and Child Development Mount Gambier (Blue Lake / South-East Coast and Vines / Wrattonbully)	64 Commercial Street West, Mount Gambier 08 8724 5300
Family Day Care – South-East Riverland	Mulga Street, Mt Gambier 5290 08 8723 0080

Contact with local government will be essential for your project – particularly in relation to planning and development. Refer to your local Council website to find out the right person to speak to about practical issues associated with your project. From an advocacy perspective talking to the Mayor is recommended – the following outlines the Mayors within each Council but these details may change and it is important to check Council websites to confirm the name and contact details of the current Mayor.

Name	Overview
City of Mount Gambier	Mayor Lynette Martin mayormartin@mountgambier.sa.gov.au 0455 782 535
	CEO City of Mount Gambier, Paul Simpson Executive Assistant, Kate Gilmore psimpson@mountgambier.sa.gov.au 08 8721 2598
Naracoorte Lucindale Council	Mayor Patrick Ross Patrick.ross@nlc.sa.gov.au 0427 658 049
	CEO Naracoorte, Kelly Westell Executive Assistant, Uana Jericho kelly.westell@nlc.sa.gov.au 08 8760 1100
District Council of Robe	Mayor Lisa Ruffell mayorruffell@robe.sa.gov.au 0474 581 595
	CEO Robe, Nat Traeger Executive Assistant, Molly Murdock ceo@robe.sa.gov.au 08 8768 2003
Tatiara District Council	Mayor Liz Goossens lizgoossens@tatiara.sa.gov.au 0448 292 821
	CEO Tatiara, Kingsley Green Executive Assistant, Mandy Clarke kingsleygreen@tatiara.sa.gov.au 08 8752 1044

Name	Overview
Wattle Range Council	Mayor Des Noll mayor@wattlerange.sa.gov.au 0428 515 967
	CEO Wattle Range, Ben Gower Executive Assistant, Catherine Allen bjg@wattlerange.sa.gov.au 08 8733 0900
District Council of Grant	Mayor Kylie Boston Kylie.boston@dcgrant.sa.gov.au 0407 231 547
	CEO Grant, Gary Button Executive Assistant, Fiona McGregor gary.button@dcgrant.sa.gov.au 08 8721 0444
Kingston SE District Council	Mayor Jeff Pope mayor@kingstondc.sa.gov.au 0407 114 700
	CEO Kingston, Ian Hart Executive Assistant, Tess Armfield ceo@kingstondc.sa.gov.au 08 8767 2033
RDA Limestone Coast	https://rdalc.org.au 08 8723 1057

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12.6.2. Key Links

Table 33: Relevant Online Links

Name	Overview	Link
Office For Early Childhood Development	State Government department that leads South Australia's early childhood reforms and provides information, policy direction and resources relating to preschool, childcare, early learning and child development.	https://www.earlychildhood.sa.gov.au
Australian Government – Early Childhood Education and Care	Australian Government policy, funding, programs and reforms relating to early childhood education and care, including childcare subsidies, workforce initiatives and preschool access.	https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood
Flying Start Pathways Program	The South Australian Government's Flying Start Pathways Program supports people into early childhood careers through training, mentoring and employment pathways, helping grow the workforce needed to deliver expanded preschool services.	https://www.earlychildhood.sa.gov.au/working-in-early-childhood/flying-start-pathways-program
Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority	ACECQA is the national body responsible for guiding and supporting quality standards, regulation and workforce development across Australia's early childhood education and care sector.	https://www.acecqa.gov.au
Education and Early Childhood Services (Registration and Standards) Act 2011	South Australia's key legislation governing the registration, regulation and quality standards of education and early childhood services.	http://bit.ly/3PvOkI7
Educations Standards Board SA – Early Childhood Services Regulation	This agency provides guidance on how early childhood services are defined, approved and regulated in South Australia, including information about service types, provider responsibilities and compliance requirements.	https://www.esb.sa.gov.au/advice-and-guidance/how-are-early-childhood-services-defined-and-regulated
Family Daycare Australia	This organisation provides information and links relating to the regulatory requirements, national quality framework and operational standards for family day care services in Australia.	https://www.familydaycare.com.au/resources-and-links/regulations
SA Department for Education – Early Education and Care Facility Design Standards	An outline of planning and design standards for early childhood education and care facilities in South Australia, including considerations relating to safety, functionality, accessibility and learning environments.	https://www.earlychildhood.sa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1036276/South-Australias-Preschool-Infrastructure-Guidance-Pack-Quick.pdf
Department of Education SA – Become a Family Daycare Educator	Information for people interested in becoming family day care educators in South Australia, including qualifications, responsibilities and application requirements.	https://www.education.sa.gov.au/family-day-care/become-an-educator
Starting Blocks	The Australian Government's family-focused website providing information about early childhood education and care, including service quality ratings, childcare types, costs and choosing a provider.	https://startingblocks.gov.au
Become an Approved Childcare Provider	This Federal Government Website provides information about the process and requirements for becoming an approved early childhood education and care provider in Australia.	https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/providers/howto/approval
Thrive by Five	A national advocacy organisation calling for a high-quality, affordable and universally accessible early learning and childcare system that supports children, families, workforce participation and Australia's economy.	https://www.thrivebyfive.org.au
The Parenthood	A national parent advocacy organisation that campaigns for policies and systems that better support children, families and carers, including accessible early childhood education and care, family wellbeing and gender equity.	https://www.theparenthood.org.au
Minderoo	A philanthropic organisation that supports research, advocacy and initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for children and families, including work focused on early childhood development, learning and wellbeing.	https://www.minderoo.org
Early Childhood Australia	The national peak body for early childhood education and care in Australia, providing advocacy, resources, research and professional support to improve outcomes for children, families and the early childhood sector.	https://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/advocacy/early-childhood-australias-advocacy/
Building Early Education Fund (BEEF)	Federal funding program to support the development of early childhood education infrastructure. It is important to note that grants like this come and go and you should always do your research and contact your local Regional Development Australia Office to find out more about grant opportunities.	https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/about/building-early-education-fund

12.7 Childcare Centre Development Examples

Communities who have addressed childcare shortages and developed facilities are generally happy to share what they've learned with others. If you are looking at developing a new or expanding an existing childcare facility it is recommended that you talk to others who have undertaken similar projects. You can learn more about governance and operational models, and the challenges related to developing new or expanding services and how these can be overcome. You can learn from their mistakes and hopefully avoid unnecessary pitfalls. The following provides an overview of recently completed or projects that are currently in train as of June 2026 that have had or are having an interesting journey – all worth checking out.

Table 34: Childcare Case Study Examples

Project	Points of Interest	Link
Karoonda Childcare Centre	• Responded directly to community need • Partnered with Ausco to build a custom built modular / transportable facility. This reduced capital investment risk – if the facility was not sustainable the building could be on-sold. • Federal funding supported the project, and it was established as a co-located facility with childcare and a community centre. • Opened in 2019 and is run by Karoonda Council.	https://malleekids.com.au/
Yorke Peninsula Childcare Centre	• Funding provided through Bushfire recovery. • Dramatically increased childcare places through the renovation of an existing facility and the construction of a new one. • Infrastructure owned by Council but is run by a private operator who is also a Registered Training Organisation (RTO). • As an RTO the managing group are able to address some of the workforce development challenges by offering unique "on-the-job" accredited training opportunities.	https://yorkepeninsulalearningandcare.au/
Kingston SE Childcare Centre	• New facility commencing construction in 2026. • Situated on Department for Education land at the Kingston SE Area School R – 12 • Successful advocacy campaign during federal election with commitment from both major parties to provide funding. • Challenges securing an ongoing management model in the context of a small volunteer-reliant community workforce.	No website available at time of creating this report as new facility is under construction.

Project	Points of Interest	Link
Barossa Community Kids	• Began as a small community creche and has grown to be an accredited Long Daycare Centre. • 100% Community owned and operated. • Renovated and relocated to a larger facility with funding and community support.	https://www.barossacommunitykids.org.au/
Balaklava Community Children's Centre	• Integrated facility that encompasses long daycare, pre-school, out of school hours care and vacation care. • Community run childcare and Dept. for Education Pre-school program.	https://www.preschools.sa.gov.au/balaklava-community-chn-ctr
Roxby Downs Children's Centre	• Partnered with BHP, Uni Hub Spencer Gulf and CQ University to tackle workforce challenges in the community of Roxby Downs. • Training program enabled flexible, accessible study options, allowing students to learn close to home. • BHP as a large multi-national company actively supporting local childcare services through infrastructure development and training programs. This was a clear acknowledgement of childcare as critical to the sustainability of BHPs workforce.	https://unihubsg.org/2025/08/06/roxby-locals-take-next-steps-in-early-childhood-careers/

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13.1 Sample Childcare Facility Plans

RDA commissioned GHD and DAS Studio to develop a suite of Design Documents for Common Reference Designs for Regional and Rural Childcare Centres.

The Reference Design documents prioritise low-cost, easily adaptable solutions suited to a wide range of site conditions, while also anticipating future ready opportunities for off-site prefabrication of components or volumetric modular units. The designs comprise capacity variants for 30, 45 and 60 licensed childcare places, with consistent modular and services interface philosophy across each configuration. These can be accessed below.

1. Sample Childcare Facility Plans https://rdalc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Sample-Childcare-Facility-Plans.pdf
2. Early Childhood Education and Care webpage https://rdalc.org.au/early-childhood-education-and-care/

Warwar - Blue Lake

Local people developing local solutions **rda.gov.au**