

**INQUIRY INTO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND  
CARE SECTOR IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** RSL NSW  
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Ms Abigail Boyd MLC  
Chair, Inquiry Early Childhood Education and Care Sector in New South Wales  
Portfolio Committee 3 – Education  
NSW Parliament House  
6 Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

**By:** Lodgement via NSW Parliamentary Portal

Dear Chair

The Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL NSW) is the largest ex-service organisation and a leading voice for veterans and their families in New South Wales, comprising more than 310 sub-Branches and some 30,000 members state-wide.

Since the height of the Great War in 1916, RSL NSW has provided care, camaraderie, and charitable support for current- and former-serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel – and led our state in commemoration of their service and sacrifice.

The League works collaboratively with government at all levels to advance issues raised by our members and secure improved public policy outcomes for the local Defence and veteran community. According to the 2021 census, 18,007 current-serving, 127,657 former-serving and 6,506 reservists, and their families, call NSW home.

RSL NSW remains a dedicated advocate for Defence-connected families and continues to push for improved support, recognising the unique challenges faced by those serving in the Australian Defence Force (ADF), as highlighted by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

Childcare services for Australian families are provided by a range of public, private, and not-for-profit operators. ADF members may use these same services for their children or, where applicable, enrol their children into Defence-contracted centres.

Defence-contracted centres are managed by One Tree Community Services, which operates 16 daycare and three out-of-hours centres across Australia – including five in NSW: two in Richmond, two in Nowra, and one in Moorebank. Several key garrison areas, such as those near RAAF Base Williamtown, RAAF Base Glenbrook, Defence Establishment Orchard Hills, and Kapooka, remain underserved.



Defence families have consistently raised concerns about difficulties with enrolment and limited access to appropriate childcare, reinforcing the need for this Committee to consider the needs of modern, mobile family structures as part of its inquiry. Increased recognition and targeted support for Defence-connected families within the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector in New South Wales is vital.

The health, safety, and wellbeing of children in ECEC services must be a shared responsibility across our communities. Defence-connected children, who often experience frequent relocations and the disruptions that follow, should be explicitly recognised as a vulnerable sub-group within the ECEC sector.

The Royal Commission emphasised the importance of consistent education, stable support networks, and coordinated care — all of which are often compromised by the posting cycles inherent in Defence life. While such mobility is an accepted part of service, more must be done to support the families affected.

Access to affordable, quality childcare is essential not only for a child's development but also for enabling parents — including ADF members and their partners — to maintain employment and financial stability.

For Defence families, the challenge is even greater. Many live far from extended family and social networks, meaning informal care options are often unavailable. Without reliable childcare, serving members struggle to balance the demands of work and family, leading to increased stress and potential conflict between service obligations and home life.

RSL NSW acknowledges that childcare is a high-demand service across Australia; however, while it may be convenient to frame the issue as a “national problem”, it is important to recognise that Defence service is a key driver of these childcare challenges. ADF members are routinely relocated — often to areas with limited childcare availability — at the direction of Defence. This systemic reality creates a Defence-specific impact that requires a Defence-specific response.

RSL NSW believes there is an opportunity to strengthen the NSW ECEC Regulatory Framework. While the current framework promotes national alignment and encourages collaboration between state and federal jurisdictions, it lacks specific provisions addressing the needs of Defence-connected families. Amending the framework to reflect these considerations would significantly improve outcomes for these families.

In her testimony to the Royal Commission, Lieutenant General Natasha Fox, the Department of Defence's Chief of Personnel, emphasised the need for greater coordination between state and federal bodies to ensure continuity in education and healthcare during relocations.

In its Final Report, the Royal Commission recommended the Department of Defence – in “recognition of the critical role that Defence families play in Defence capability, and the stressors that service life places on the member and their family unit” – should work with the Australian Government to identify and realise opportunities to improve the provision of childcare services to its members (Recommendation 103). RSL NSW asserts this must be a priority for Defence moving forward.

However, RSL NSW argues both the Commonwealth and NSW Governments owe it to the brave men and women who make sacrifices in service of our nation to do more to ensure they have access to high-quality early childhood education and care services for their children, particularly in cities and towns with large Defence and veteran populations.

Expanding ECEC capacity for Defence-connected families would reduce a major source of stress — a concern reported by 26% of respondents in the ADF Families Survey. It would also improve operational readiness, support workforce participation among Defence partners, foster greater community integration, and enhance family wellbeing.

As such, RSL NSW urges this Committee as part of its inquiry to consider making the following recommendations:

- **support Defence-connected families in NSW to access ECEC** through a policy for priority placement in public, private and not-for-profit childcare centres for Defence-connected children, particularly in cities and garrison towns.
- **review and promote resources to support Defence-connected families and children** at various transition points in ECEC and relocation.
- **increase awareness among ECEC operators, educators and other staff of the unique challenges faced by Defence-connected families** through the provision of training and resources that allow them to effectively support the emotional and wellbeing needs of Defence-connected children.

RSL NSW stands ready to work with the NSW Government in whatever way we can to ensure our Defence-connected families receive the consistent high-quality care, education, and support they deserve. By working together, we can promote stronger family cohesion, ease unnecessary stress, and ensure Defence-connected families are not left behind.

For further discussion, please contact Troy Deighton, Head of Government Relations & Corporate Affairs, at .

Yours sincerely

Isaac Ohlin

The logo for RSL NSW, featuring a yellow trapezoidal shape with the text "rslnsw.org.au" in blue lowercase letters.

[rslnsw.org.au](https://rslnsw.org.au)



**RSL**  
**NSW**

**General Manager – Policy & Services**