

MEDIA RELEASE – 11 OCTOBER 2019

BUILDING CODE OF AUSTRALIA AMENDMENT CAN NEGATIVELY IMPACT CHILDCARE FEES WITHOUT MAKING CENTRES AND CHILDREN ANY SAFER

The Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) NSW has released its [submission](#) to the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB)'s [proposed amendment](#) to the Building Code of Australia arguing that the ABCB may have opened a Pandora's Box for all childcare centres and consequently increase childcare fees and introduce new hazards to children and their carers without making children any safer.

"We appreciate the ABCB's and the Building Ministers' intentions, but without any prior discussion with the early childhood education and care sector, their proposal as drafted will increase childcare fees by mandating sprinklers and other fire infrastructure even for two storey buildings and can make evacuations of young children aged 0-5 years old even more dangerous under wet conditions," said Chiang Lim, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) NSW.

Prophetically, ACA NSW had been approaching government authorities for over three years about its concerns of the lack of empirical standards for how quickly children must consistently be evacuated and where they should appropriately be evacuated to.

"Our fire expert has identified the futility of purely relying on the introduction of sprinklers and fire infrastructures as the solution to protecting children. What if childcare centres can consistently and safely evacuate all their children even before the sprinklers are activated? Why have governments not considered the consequential impact of new childcare centres' ever-increasing capacities of children? And why do governments still approve childcare centres where the nearest appropriate evacuation assembly area may be blocks away?" asked Mr Lim.

The national law and regulations for early childhood education and care came into effect on 1 January 2012. They enabled childcare centres to have unlimited numbers, thereby giving rise to new childcare centres with significant capacities. The largest childcare centre is currently 300 places. Prior to 2012, the maximum capacity was 90 children per centre.

"New South Wales already has the dubious honour of having the highest proportion of household expenditure on childcare across all the OECD countries. Why do we want to increase costs especially when the proposed solutions will not work in the overwhelming majority of childcare services? To protect children, we need a holistic and truly consultative approach, not a piecemeal nor we-know-better approach," said Mr Lim.

The Society of Fire Safety Engineers Australia (SFSEA) is anticipated to release their High-Rise Childcare Guide. The Education Council and the NSW Department of Education are reviewing emergency and evacuation requirements for revision in 2021-2022. The NSW Department of Planning has said they will begin their review of the *State Environmental Planning Policy (Educational Establishments and Child Care Facilities) 2017*. But none appear to be coordinated nor harmonised.

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Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) NSW (www.nsw.childcarealliance.org.au) is the peak body for privately owned early childhood education and care services in NSW, numbering approximately 1,600 childcare services, employing over 25,000 staff and supporting over 125,000 families. ACA NSW provides advocacy, policy and regulatory and business support and advice, member services and professional development for members and their staff across the state.

**For further media inquiries, please contact
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