

## Media Release

# New toolkit aims to boost childcare access in the Illawarra

**Monday, 19 January 2026**

The NSW Government is today launching a new toolkit to help boost early learning supply in the Illawarra, with a one-stop-shop for information on embedding childcare in new and existing developments.

The Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) co-location toolkit offers practical guidance for developers, businesses and ECEC providers on setting up quality childcare in places like business or residential precincts, schools and community centres.

This community-centred approach to childcare helps share infrastructure costs, clarify approval processes and support working families.

The toolkit aims to support the development of more quality ECEC services in the region by providing a step-by-step guide to the process, benefits and key considerations in integrating childcare into work, residential or community spaces.

When included in business precincts or by employers, ECEC services can also help attract and retain staff and promote gender equality in the workforce.

The toolkit will be piloted in the Illawarra Shoalhaven, before being rolled out to other areas of regional NSW.

The toolkit aims to address childcare shortages in regional, rural and remote communities in NSW, where some families face greater challenges in accessing formal early learning.

Currently, more than 70 per cent of children aged 0 to five in the Illawarra Shoalhaven region live in areas undersupplied with ECEC.

These gaps deepen social and economic inequality, making it vital to support more consistent, inclusive and accessible planning across regional NSW.

The toolkit is a collaboration between the NSW Government, Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation of Councils, Business Illawarra, and industry providers including Big Fat Smile and ECTARC. The toolkit is available on the [Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation website](#).

**Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation CEO Roger Stephan said:**

“We know that access to quality early learning is critical, not just for our children’s development, but for strong local economies. We need to be doing everything we can to ensure we have quality services for the thousands of children and families in our region.

“This toolkit is about asking how we can better embed childcare in our region, placing services in the spaces where families already live and work to better support parents and carers, and strengthen our community connections.”

**Big Fat Smile CEO Kim Bertino said:**

“Access to early learning shouldn’t depend on a family’s postcode. When early education is built into the fabric of our communities, children have more opportunities to thrive, and families are better supported to balance work and life.

“This toolkit helps make that vision real - offering developers and businesses the practical steps to embed education and care into the places where people live, learn and work.”

**ECTARC CEO Anita Kumar said:**

“Early childhood education and care is the foundation of thriving communities - supporting children’s development, enabling workforce participation, and driving long-term social and economic growth.

“This toolkit empowers businesses and developers to play a vital role in shaping a stronger future.”

**MEDIA:** [media@premiersdepartment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:media@premiersdepartment.nsw.gov.au) |