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BAROSSA GAWLER LIGHT ADELAIDE PLAINS

Media release

Your Voice Matters: Help shape future access to early childhood education and care across our region.

RDA Barossa, Gawler, Light and Adelaide Plains is in early childhood planning mode with councils and communities across the region.

January 2026

Background

Population growth across Adelaide's northern regions is expected to accelerate over the next 20 to 30 years, with the areas identified in this study to accommodate a significant share of South Australia's future greenfield housing under the Greater Adelaide Regional Plan.

As new communities develop, demand for essential social infrastructure will increase, including early childhood education and care services that support families and workforce participation.

Early demographic analysis conducted by Community Early Learning Australia (CELA) indicates existing and future shortfalls in early learning provision across parts of the region. For example, Adelaide Plains Council is currently estimated to face a shortfall of around 140 long day care places and more than 80 preschool places, with gaps projected to widen by 2031. Light Regional Council is also experiencing pressure, with long day care shortfalls expected to increase from more than 90 places currently to almost 180 by 2031, highlighting the need for targeted, place-based planning as growth continues.

Listening to the community – survey and consultation

Families, carers, employers and early learning providers across Barossa, Gawler, Light and Adelaide Plains are invited to share their experiences of accessing early childhood education and care as part of a new regional study.

Feedback will help build a clearer picture of what families need, where gaps exist, and what is preventing services from expanding. The findings will support evidence-based planning and advocacy to the Australian Government by councils, government and service providers to improve access to quality early learning and care so children thrive, families can balance work and life, and local businesses benefit from stronger workforce participation.

How to participate

Community members and stakeholders can participate by:

Completing the online survey:

- Opens: Monday 2 February, 11,00am
- Closes: Friday 6 March
- Link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ecec-survey>

The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete, and input will help ensure early learning and care services evolve in step with local needs now and into the future.

Attending a community consultation session (optional):

Start: Monday 2 March

End: Friday 6 March

(Preferred location and time can be requested by the respondent within the above survey.)

Responses will be deidentified and will be used to inform the final report and recommendations.

About the survey

The study is a joint project commissioned by Regional Development Australia Barossa Gawler Light Adelaide Plains (RDABGLAP) and RDA Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island (RDAAHFKI). CELA has been engaged to assess early childhood education and care supply and demand and identify service gaps. The study is funded by the South Australian Government's Office for Early Childhood Development.

The research also supports South Australia's move to universal three-year-old preschool by 2032, which is expected to increase demand for early learning services.

“Access to early childhood education and care is critical for families and for a productive, resilient regional economy,” said Jennifer Lynch, CEO of RDABGLAP. “When early learning and care is hard to find, unaffordable, or doesn’t match working hours, it affects parents’ ability to work or study and impacts local businesses trying to attract and retain staff. This study will give decision-makers the local evidence they need, and we encourage the community to have their say.”

“Community input is at the heart of effective early childhood planning,” said CELA CEO Michele Carnegie. “By sharing your experiences, you can help shape services that reflect local needs, support working families, and give children access to quality early education opportunities.”

The study will consider issues including:

- Where there is unmet need for early childhood education and care
- Gaps in existing care arrangements (such as operating hours, days available and location)
- Preferences for different models of care (including long day care, family day care, preschool and outside school hours care)
- Economic, social and educational impacts when childcare is difficult to access

- Impacts on employers and local workforce participation
- Barriers to expansion for existing early childhood care and education providers
- Opportunities to grow, attract and retrain the early learning workforce locally

Participating council areas

RDA Barossa Gawler Light Adelaide Plains (RDABGLAP):

- Adelaide Plains Council
- The Barossa Council
- Light Regional Council
- Town of Gawler

RDA Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island (RDAAHFKI):

- Adelaide Hills Council
- Mount Barker District Council
- City of Onkaparinga (McLaren Vale Preservation District)
- District Council of Yankalilla
- Alexandrina Council
- City of Victor Harbor

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Media contact

For media comment from RDA BGLAP, please contact Simon Wales [via email](#).