



# Early Childhood Educators' Wellbeing Project (ECEWP)

ISSUE 16 – JULY 2026

*We pay our respects to the Traditional Owners, past and present, of the lands where we live and work.*

## Introduction

Welcome to our latest newsletter reporting on our research into early childhood educators' wellbeing in Australia.

Highlights in this issue include:

- Wellbeing initiative profiles
- StepAhead Program
- Doctoral wellbeing research
- Project Thrive expression of interest

## What's working in your service?

We're continuing to build our online collection of real-world wellbeing initiatives from across the sector – and we'd love to include yours. If your service or organisation has trialled or implemented a strategy that supports educator wellbeing, you can contribute a short profile to help others learn from your experience.

## How to participate

To contribute a wellbeing initiative profile, please visit [our website](#) where you can download the invitation and profile submission form. A sample profile is also available. You can contact us for more information at [ecewp@mq.edu.au](mailto:ecewp@mq.edu.au)



## StepAhead Program

Macquarie University is advancing opportunities for early childhood educators through its Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) StepAhead Program, a new initiative designed to help Diploma-qualified educators become early childhood teachers.

From 2026, the StepAhead Program will support up to 100 students to become early childhood teachers, building expertise in leadership, critical reflection, theories of learning, child development, wellbeing, inclusion and pedagogy. The program combines high-quality flexible university study with workplace-based learning, including a 'work while you learn' final placement to provide optimum support for transition into an early childhood teaching role. Students are also supported with mentoring, a community of practice, academic coaching and financial support.

StepAhead is funded by the NSW Government's Early Learning Diploma to Degree initiative, which aims to support hundreds of early childhood educators across the state through partnerships with participating universities.

Backed by \$2.26 million in funding from the NSW Department of Education, the StepAhead Program offers a flexible, sector-informed pathway that allows educators with at least two years' experience to transition into early childhood teaching and make meaningful impact across early-learning settings.

More information:

[New StepAhead Program expands pathways to early childhood teaching \(The Lighthouse\)](#)

[Bachelor of Education \(Early Childhood\) – StepAhead Program](#) (Macquarie University)

## Doctoral research into wellbeing

We would like to introduce you to **Xuanying Lin**. Xuanying is a PhD student at Macquarie University, supervised by Sandie Wong, Rebecca Bull and Nicole Jamison. Her research experience includes early childhood educators' wellbeing, turnover intention and formative assessment in early childhood education.



Her interest in educator wellbeing was sparked during her Master's studies, where she was involved in and led projects on early childhood educators' turnover intention. These experiences deepened her understanding of the critical role of high-quality educators in shaping early childhood education and the challenges they face in their daily work, and she was motivated to further explore educator wellbeing in her doctoral research.

Xuanying's current PhD research explores how early childhood educators conceptualise wellbeing across different cultural contexts, and how wellbeing interventions can be designed and implemented in practice.

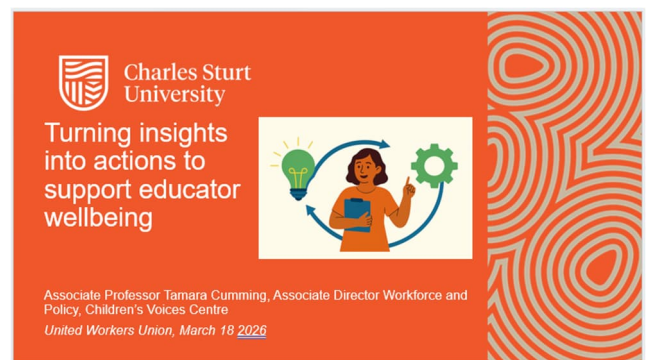
Through this work, she aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of wellbeing and to inform the development of effective, context-sensitive support strategies.

## Professional presentation

### Turning insights into actions to support educator wellbeing

On 18 March Tamara Cumming shared ECEWP research findings on educator wellbeing as part of the Big Steps Professional Learning Program offered to members of the United Workers Union (UWU). Tamara also discussed practical ways to manage team and individual wellbeing in the context of ongoing challenges facing the early learning sector.

Her presentation is available to members through the [Big Steps Professional Learning archive on the UWU website](#).



## Join Project Thrive

Expressions of interest are still open for Project Thrive – a national research trial testing a tiered wellbeing program for early childhood educators. With only a limited number of centres participating, this is a unique opportunity to access structured wellbeing supports for educators and leaders while contributing to evidence that will shape the future of the sector.

### How to participate

Kinex Health are taking expressions of interest for the intervention that will start in late 2026. See the next page for further information.

### MORE INFORMATION ON ECEWP

- Web [ECEWP website](#)
- Facebook [ECEWP](#)
- Email [ecewp@mq.edu.au](mailto:ecewp@mq.edu.au)
- Video <https://youtu.be/QqfNX7f4XnQ>

# Project Thrive

## A Randomised Control Trial for ECEC Wellbeing

Kinex Health and the Early Childhood Educators' Wellbeing Project (ECEWP) proud to present Project Thrive - an incredibly exciting development in educator wellbeing. This 12-month research project - the first of its kind in Australia - is designed to rigorously test a tiered wellbeing program for early childhood educators.

It will use a randomised controlled trial (RCT) across 32 services to measure how different levels of support (digital resources, leadership supervision, and individual health consultations) affect educator wellbeing, service quality, absenteeism, retention, and workforce stability. The findings will provide credible evidence to guide the future of wellbeing initiatives and funding in the ECEC sector.

### Why your service should be involved

- **Direct benefits for your educators:** Depending on your assigned tier, your staff will gain access to digital wellbeing tools, leadership training and supervision, and in some cases individual health consultations. No matter which tier you're assigned to, this means practical support for stress, resilience, and day-to-day wellbeing challenges that affect attendance, engagement, burnout, and retention.
- **Support for your leaders:** Directors and leaders will receive structured supervision and upskilling, helping them better support their teams, reduce conflict, and improve workplace culture.
- **Improved staff stability and satisfaction:** By strengthening wellbeing and leadership capacity, your service is more likely to reduce absenteeism, lower turnover, and improve recruitment.
- **Professional development:** The interventions count as professional development for educators and leaders, aligning with the *National Quality Standard (NQS)* - particularly *Quality Areas 4 and 7* - and the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST)*. This means your participation not only supports staff wellbeing but also strengthens professional practice and compliance.
- **Exclusive participation:** Only 32 services will be included. You'll be part of a select group shaping how the sector addresses educator wellbeing.
- **Have your say:** The feedback and findings from this project will help to shape policy and the future of wellbeing in our sector. Being part of it adds your voice to this important work.

### Why it matters for the sector

- **Rigorous evidence:** This is the first randomised controlled trial in Australia focused on educator wellbeing. Findings will provide robust data to drive policy, funding, and sector-wide initiatives.
- **Scalable solutions:** The project will test digital, leadership, and individual wellbeing supports, making it possible to design interventions that work in metro, regional, and rural settings.
- **Long-term impact:** The outcomes will shape sector standards, help services demonstrate ROI on wellbeing, and ultimately improve educator retention and quality of care for children

### Why join now

- Be at the forefront of tackling one of the sector's biggest challenges: educator wellbeing and workforce sustainability.
- Give your educators and leaders access to immediate supports that improve their day-to-day working lives.
- Contribute to research that will benefit the entire ECEC sector for years to come.
- Show families and your community that your service is serious about supporting the people who care for their children.

**We are now taking expressions of interest for the study that will start in mid-2026.**

**Please fill in [this form](#) to register your interest or email [engage@kinexhealth.com.au](mailto:engage@kinexhealth.com.au) for more information.**

### How it works

1. **Onboarding:** Each service takes part in a comprehensive, digital onboarding process.
2. **Random assignment:** Services are randomly allocated to one of three tiers (A, B, or C) or a waitlist control group (which at the conclusion of the intervention receives the tier with the highest estimated ROI, at no cost). This ensures the trial produces credible, publishable evidence that meets the highest tier of evidence standards.
3. **Intervention period (12 months):**
  - **Tier A:** access to on-demand digital wellbeing resources.
  - **Tier B:** access to digital resources + leadership supervision and training.
  - **Tier C:** access to digital resources + leadership supervision/training + individual wellbeing consultations for staff.
4. **Assessment points:** All services will be assessed pre-intervention, then at the 6 month point, and the 12 month point.
5. **Final stage:** Findings are compiled into a sector-wide report, shared with participants and the ECEC community.
6. **Confidentiality:** All services will remain anonymous. All individual data is kept strictly confidential and will be de-identified before publishing.

### Costs

Kinex Health and the ECEWP are bearing the majority of the cost of the intervention to make it as accessible as possible for all services. The cost to participate depends on which tier your service is assigned:

**The cost to participate depends on which tier your centre is assigned:**

- **Tier A:** \$1,200
- **Tier B:** \$2,600
- **Tier C:** \$4,800
- **Control group:** \$0

These amounts cover the full 12-month intervention and assessment period, plus onboarding.