



Strengthening Safeguarding Systems: Protecting Australia's Children across Childcare

For childcare & Early Learning Providers

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Executive Summary

Australia's childcare sector faces a critical safeguarding crisis with an estimated 27% of the 200,000-strong early learning workforce unmonitored and unsuitable workers engaging with children during their most vulnerable developmental years.

27%

credentials nationally remain **unmonitored**

1 in 434

workers are estimated to carry a **critical safeguarding failure**

15%

of worker credentials are estimated to be **expired, revoked or invalid**

This crisis exists because of a fundamental system gap between government worker suitability data and employer systems. When right-to-work checks are revoked or suspended, it may take days, weeks or months to notify employers, if the notification arrives at all. During this window, children remain at risk while unsuitable workers continue in roles involving intimate care.

Automated, continuous workforce verification closes the gap, providing near real-time visibility across credentials and immediate alerts when worker suitability changes, eliminating dangerous notification delays and equipping providers to act quickly.

One large care provider using continuous monitoring identified 6 red flags, acting quickly to remove 6 unsuitable workers before they could cause harm. Continuous monitoring also provides real-time workforce visibility across contractors and workers that previous fell outside their manual verification processes, demonstrating how blind spots can easily leave children exposed.

Every week of delay represents an estimated \$8 million in preventable costs across the care and education sector and leaves vulnerable Australians exposed to unnecessary risk. Childcare providers must assess their current verification gaps and implement continuous monitoring technology to strengthen protection for the children and communities they serve.

Next Steps > [Get in touch with Oho here](#) | [Access the full whitepaper](#)

The Childcare Workforce Crisis

Australia's early learning sector employs approximately 200,000¹ educators caring for children in their most developmental years. The broader sector of child facing organisations includes millions of individuals caring for children in intimate settings during their most crucial developmental years.

Independent data from 224,000 worker records estimate that one in every 434 workers carries a critical safeguarding failure, such as a revoked clearance².

Recent media coverage of alleged sexual abuse and the broader childcare crisis in Australia has sent shockwaves through the country. In New South Wales alone, the largest ever database of childcare regulator files revealed more than **700 cases involving missing, expired or unverified** Working With Children Checks³.

The Hidden Reality

- An estimated 27 per cent of credentials nationally remain unmonitored due to fragmented systems⁴
- 15% of credentials are estimated to be expired, revoked or invalid at any time⁵
- The childcare sector faces \$12 M - \$62 M in annual fine exposure⁶
- Total national safeguarding risk across care and education sector is estimated at \$2.4 billion⁷
- Staff turnover in early learning exceeding 30% annually⁸, creating constant challenges managing compliance for both new staff and an existing workforce
- Workers interact with children during vulnerable moments and throughout intimate care routines
- Children's developmental vulnerability means they often cannot articulate or recognise inappropriate behaviour

For childcare providers, this translates to immediate risk: unsuitable workers engaging with your most vulnerable children in moments of high trust and low visibility, all while worker suitability is checked manually and typically annually, if at all during employment.

¹ Department of Education, 2024. Early Childhood Providers Workforce. <https://www.education.gov.au/earlychildhood/providers/workforce/about>

² Oho, 2025. Anonymised, aggregated data.

³ Adele Fergusson, 2025. Paedophiles exploiting Australia's broken childcare system as safeguards crumble. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-10-27/childcare-centres-paedophiles-abuse-four-corners/105926324>

⁴ Oho 2025. Oho's anonymised, aggregated data. Estimated 27% of unmonitored workers of WWWCs before they implemented continuous checking solutions with Oho.

⁵ Oho 2025. Oho's anonymised, aggregated data.

⁶ Total Sector Exposure equals the number of workers multiplied by the credential failure rate multiplied by average maximum fine

⁷ Oho, 2025. Cost of Inaction on Safeguarding Systems: See Safeguarding Australia: Strengthening Systems to 11 Protect Children & Vulnerable People whitepaper, <https://www.weareoho.com/whitepapers/safeguarding-australia>

⁸ Jackson, J, 2021. Early childhood educators are leaving in droves. <https://www.vu.edu.au/mitchell-institute/early-learning/early-childhood-educators-are-leaving-in-droves-here-are-3-ways-to-keep-them-attract-more>



The Cost and Complexity of Reform

“Critical weaknesses remain in right-to-work credential systems, which are a cornerstone of proactive safeguarding and compliance assurance.”

Consecutive Australian Governments have introduced numerous reforms designed to **strengthen safeguarding and rebuild public confidence** in response to Royal Commissions and accelerated by distressing media reports of alleged paedophiles.

The Federal Attorney General’s leadership in August 2025 set in motion important reforms to allow a person with a working with children check **banned in one jurisdiction to be tracked and banned across the country**, underpinned by the National Continuous Checking Capability. Australian states and territories are now in the process of reviewing, introducing, and passing important legislation, which will transform government-to-government system data sharing.

The **Victorian Child Safe Standards**, which came into effect on 1 July 2022, now require all employers working with children to implement ten core child-protection principles. Similarly, Queensland’s Child Safe Organisations Act, introduced in a staged rollout from 1 October 2025, establishes an equivalent set of ten mandatory features designed to embed a culture of child safety and accountability.

Building on this momentum, the Victorian Rapid Child Safety Review (commissioned July 2025) delivered **22 recommendations to enhance standards in early childhood education and care**. These changes, alongside new safeguarding measures announced in New South Wales in late 2025, demonstrate a strong policy response and an evolving regulatory landscape.

The Critical Gap That Remains

Despite this positive progress, these reforms primarily address government-to-government data sharing. **A critical weaknesses persists: the employer-side systems that turn policy into protection.** Employers are forced to rely on fragmented manual processes in their dutiful attempts to comply with new requirements.

However, when a Working With Children Check is revoked notifications can take days, weeks or months; workers can nominate themselves as the employer; manual verification processes can leave 27% of the workforce is unmonitored; and constant compliance gaps persist.

The policy framework is strengthening with these reforms, but the systems employers rely on to implement these policies remain dangerously inadequate.

The System Gap: Why you can't Always Act When you Need to

The government-to-employer system gap

When a Working with Children Check (WWCC) is revoked, barred or suspended, employers are relying on fragmented government registers, notifications that could take the form of email, phone call, in-portal notification, or even a letter, and manual verification of hundreds or thousands of checks every 12 months, if that. In some states, workers can even nominate themselves as the 'employer' ensuring their real employer isn't notified of a status change.

How long are you willing to wait between a revocation and being able to act?

Employers manually verifying, only on recruitment, maybe once a year, or not even at all, are exposing themselves to major gaps in workforce oversight, and contributing to significant risk of preventable harm.

Despite great steps forward by governments across Australia and increased data sharing between government agencies, the gap between registers with the data and your HR system remains dangerously wide.

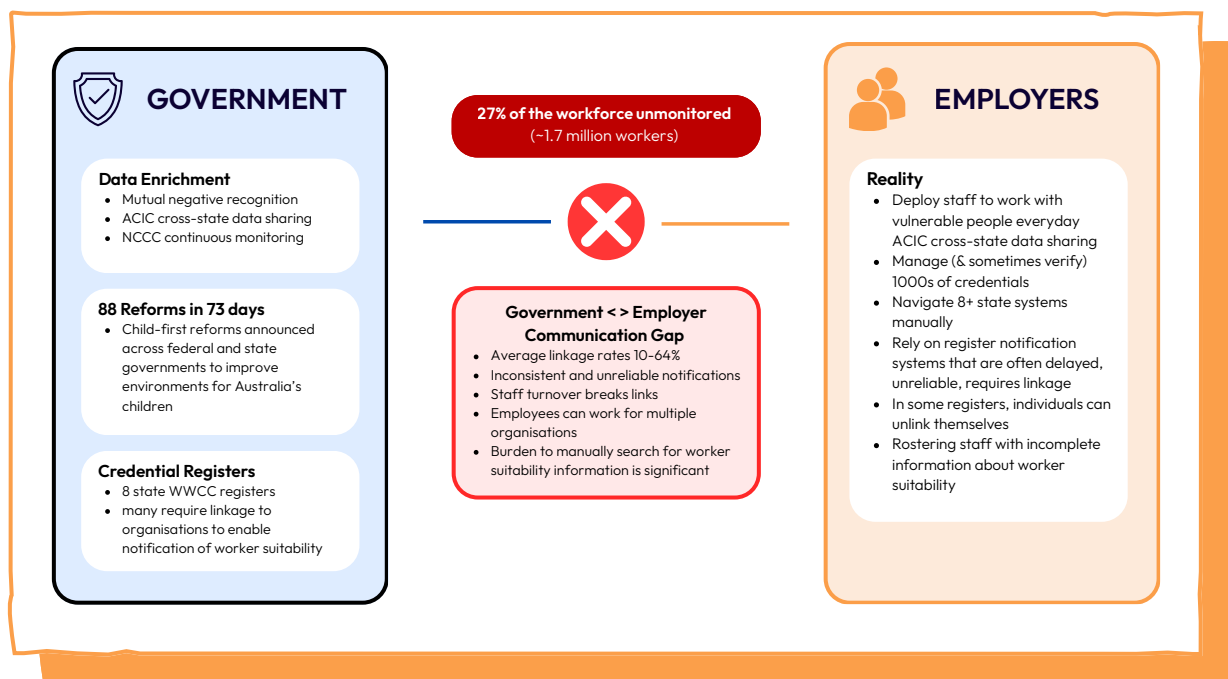


Figure: Data Visualisation of Employer and Government System Gaps in Right-to-Work Safeguarding⁵

Without technology to bridge this gap, **you cannot act when you need to most.**

The systems employers rely on were not built for the size, growth and churning shape of this workforce.

⁵ Publicly available data on child safety reforms, right to work registers and Oho's anonymised, aggregated employer side data, 2025.

The Cost of Inadequate Safeguarding

The Human Cost of Safeguarding Failures is Incalculable

Behind every safeguarding failure is an immeasurable human cost. Up to 88% of those affected by abuse may never disclose their experiences. Childhood maltreatment is linked to 40% of mental health conditions, while **survivors account for 34% of all presentations across the mental health sector**¹⁰. The psychological aftermath includes complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, with intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, emotional numbing and social isolation that can persist throughout a lifetime.

Abuse fundamentally disrupts life trajectories, with educational underachievement and failure to obtain skills and qualifications widespread among survivors. A male survivor of child sexual abuse is twice as likely to be out of work due to illness, with lifetime earning impacts reaching up to \$1.5 million in lost consumption¹¹.

Most devastatingly, **32% of child sexual abuse victims attempt suicide, with 43% considering it**¹².

The evidence is clear: when survivors receive early support and when systems prevent harm before it occurs, outcomes improve dramatically¹³.

Strengthening systems, embedded continuous monitoring, and ensuring every organisation is accountable can help break this cycle, protecting not just vulnerable children today, but generations to come.



32% of child sexual abuse victims attempt suicide, with 43% considering it¹².

¹⁰ NSW Health, 1998. Child sexual abuse: Information for mental health professionals. NSW Department of Health

¹¹ Economic and Social Research Institute & Trinity College Dublin, 2013. Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing. <https://www.esri.ie/>

¹² Plunkett, A., O'Toole, B., Swanston, H., Oates, R. K., Shrimpton, S., & Parkinson, P., 2001. Suicide risk following child sexual abuse. *Ambulatory Pediatrics*, 1(5), 262-266.

¹³ The Front Project. (2021). How Australia can invest in children and return more: The cost of late intervention. Melbourne: The Front Project. Retrieved from https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/images/downloads/THE_COST_OF_LATE_INTERVENTION/Summary_report_How_Australia_can_invest_in_children_and_return_more.pdf

The Economic Impact of Inadequate Safeguarding in the childcare Sector

National price tag

The estimated annual cost of safeguarding failures across Australia's care and education sectors is \$2.4 billion¹⁴. This figure includes legal redress, insurance claims and regulator fines, but excludes the broader costs of healthcare, investigations, lost productivity, workforce disruption, and long-term social services.

Childcare Sector Exposure

The Early Learning sector, with an estimate of 200,000 workers and a **credential failure rate range of 0.05 per cent to 0.25 per cent**, faces a national exposure of approximately **\$12M- \$62M** annually based on average maximum fines.

Estimated Workforce	200,000
Credential Failure Rate	0.05% - 0.25% ¹⁵
Average Maximum Fine	\$124,504 per breach ¹⁶
Total Sector Exposure	\$12 million - \$62 million annually¹⁴

What's Keeping Childcare Leaders up at Night?

- **'One and done' compliance trap:** if you're only screening at recruitment and not continuously monitoring right-to-work checks, you won't know something's gone wrong until it's too late.
- **Contractor and relief staff visibility:** your centres likely use relief educators and agency contractors to maintain ratios and fill staffing gaps, but do you have visibility of their credentials? Do you know if they are expired, or worse revoked?
- **Multi-state nightmare:** the administration burden to manage a multi-state workforce and verify manually across a fragmented system of right-to-work registers
- **"Knowing or recklessly" standard:** new regulatory frameworks create significant liability when employing unsuitable workers, even if doing so unknowingly
- **Reputation cliff:** one safeguarding failure can destroy decade of trust with families and communities overnight
- **Human cost:** each credential failure represents a child left at risk in moments of trust and vulnerabilities

¹⁴ Oho, 2025. Cost of Inaction on Safeguarding Systems: See Safeguarding Australia: Strengthening Systems to Protect Children & Vulnerable People whitepaper, <https://www.weareoho.com/whitepapers/safeguarding-australia>

¹⁵ Low estimate uses the state WWCC register average revocation or suspension rate using publicly available data. The high estimate is based on an employer-side revocation or suspension dataset from Oho's anonymised, aggregated data, 2025.

¹⁶ Assumes all failed credentials are fined

¹⁷ Total Sector Exposure equals the number of workers multiplied by the credential failure rate multiplied by average maximum fine

Your Pathway to Proactive Safeguarding: Prevention is Essential

The Role of Childcare Providers

While governments establish policy frameworks and regulatory standards, early learning providers bring these principles to life every day. Real safety depends on your collective action; every educator, director, manager, and board member has a role to play.

The pathway to reform requires **shifting safeguarding from a reactive compliance task to a proactive, child-centred culture of care**. This means:

- Embedding safeguarding accountability from board level to classroom practice
- Investing in education and trauma-informed training
- Implementing transparent reporting systems
- Deploying technology infrastructure to detect and prevent harm before it occurs

Foundations & Pilots



- **Link all worker records** to the relevant registers and commence quarterly re-verification.
- Join **government pilots and partner with approved technology** providers to validate methods for secure, continuous, and automated verification processes.



Monitor & Integrate



- Move to **continuous monitoring** across all roles in scope.
- **Integrate** verification with HR and rostering systems via government approved integration partners.
- Apply **risk-based compliance** methods in line with the organisation's size and service scope. Provide regular compliance reporting to boards, funders, and regulators.



Proactive Prevention



- Treat continuous verification as a core governance and **risk prevention responsibility**.
- Maintain **live workforce visibility** and partner with accredited providers to enhance analytics, reporting, and client safety.
- Demonstrate a **proactive safeguarding posture** (not just compliance) easily through independent audits aligned with national standards.

Anonymised Case Study

Contractor workforce visibility is required but rare

Organisation Profile: Large education provider

Organisational Context: A large education provider operating across 6 states and territories in Australia, **employing over 3,500 people and contractors, caring for over 50,000 children per week.** This provider manages a dynamic workforce with a **hiring rate of 30% per year.** The CEO is a strong advocate for child protection, with a philosophy that ensuring children are safe and feel safe is the social and moral responsibility of everyone.

Challenge: Getting **visibility of the entire workforce ongoing,** including contractors, because the regulators require it and the safety of children depends on it.

Despite government requirements to verify the whole workforce, including contractors, the practical reality in education and care settings is that this rarely occurs. Providers rely on a worker credential check the day they are employed but the recruitment companies rarely provide visibility of that worker's ongoing suitability.

For this provider, this gap was too risky. With a dispersed workforce spanning hundreds of locations, and seasonal contractors supporting peak periods like school holidays, the organisation needed complete visibility of the entire workforce to meet both regulatory compliance standards and their own benchmarks for safeguarding excellence.

Solution: This provider implemented Oho's workforce compliance platform to **remove manual workforce credential checks by continuously screening right-to-work credentials** for both permanent staff and contractors, even if hired through agencies. For this provider specifically, a special dashboard was created for their contractor workforce to provide 'snapshot' compliance and the ability to manage exceptions easily and immediately.

This approach ensured that every person working with children – whether directly employed or engaged through third parties – maintained current and valid credentials throughout their engagement with this employer.



30%

hiring rate
per year



Impact:

Example cost of inaction on a 3,500-person workforce based on fines, legal claims and manual staff costs

- Fines across two states: ~\$279K each
- 4 small and two large legal claims across 3,500 staff annually: \$65K –\$520K each
- Manual staff: \$63K for every 1000 staff
- **Potential Cost of Inaction: \$1.89M**

Return on Investment

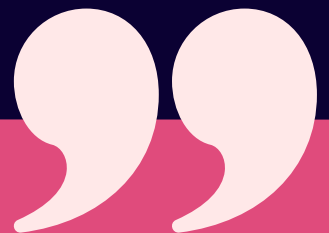
- **42x Return on investment** in continuous workforce credential checking of \$45,000.
- Oho core subscription cost: \$35,000 (\$10 per person, workforce of 3,500 people) plus \$5000 on implementation, plus an integration fee of \$5000.

Social Return on Investment

- Impacts extend far beyond cost savings.
- Through Oho's continuous verification system, we identified **6 red flags - 6 individuals who were unsuitable to work with children**, before they could cause harm, avoiding an estimated **\$3.18M in lifetime psychological costs** on the persons abused¹⁸
- **Board confidence:** peace of mind for the CEO, executive team, and board, mitigating director liability risks
- **Regulatory leadership:** the provider set a new standard for contractor workforce visibility in the education sector.
- **Commitment to families:** reinforced the organisation's commitment to child safety and provides an ongoing commitment to families and children that this employer is doing everything they can.



“Oho is part of doing all we can. They allow us to ensure continuous attention and visibility and suitability of our people to work with children and ensure ongoing robust insurance coverage. “Doing” is imperative to ensure children are safe and feel safe!”



¹⁸ Child predators typically offend against an average of 1-9 children (average of 4.5), Richards. K, 2011. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi429>, with each child experiencing lifetime psychological and economic costs averaging \$176,437. Averaged impact per predator: 4.5 X \$176,437 = \$793,966. Total prevented harm from 4 unsuitable workers: \$3.175 million.

The time to act is now.

The Reality

- Approximately 1 in 434 workers carries a critical safeguarding failure
- 27 percent of the workforce remains unmonitored
- The early learning sector faces \$12M-\$62M in annual fine exposure
- Staff turnover of 30% means constant verification challenges

The Solution

- Automated, continuous workforce verification for complete visibility across your entire workforce
- Embedded safeguarding accountability from boardroom to frontline with a culture of prevention
- Application of risk-based compliance methods and a proactive human-centred approach to compliance, safeguarding and quality care

The Outcomes

- **Immediate risk reduction:** detect revoked or suspended credentials in near real-time, removing unsuitable workers from vulnerable settings before harm occurs
- **Close critical blind spots:** continuous visibility across all workers including contractors and casuals, eliminating the dangerous gaps created by manual processes
- **Strengthen compliance and accountability:** demonstrate proactive due diligence to boards and regulators, reducing legal exposure and regulator penalties up to \$277,500 per breach
- **Protection of your vulnerable people through prevention, not reaction**

The Investment for Continuous Verification

- \$20 per worker annually¹⁹
- 46x financial and social return on investment²⁰

Every week matters.

Each week, Australia bears an average of \$8 million in preventable cost across the care and education sectors, and every missed credential represents a person (or multiple people) left at risk.



¹⁹ Oho data on the average continuous verification cost of \$20 per year per worker.

²⁰ The cost of inaction continuing with manual checks or checks only at recruitment is approximately \$937 per employee. That cost is based on one manual admin role, one fine and one legal claim for every 1000 workers. Continuous monitoring is an estimated cost of approximately \$20 per employee annually, providing a combined financial and social return of approximately 46 times that small \$20K investment.

About Oho

Oho is a compliance automation and safeguarding platform, purpose-built to protect vulnerable Australians through automated, ongoing screening of workers and volunteers across the employee lifecycle.

Oho was born out of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse after the founders witnessed testimonies while attending the Commission an impacted friend. The founders built a product to create safer environments for Australia's vulnerable people, commencing in 2021.

Mission: **"Oho protects vulnerable people and organisations from abuse and its impacts".**

Oho Safeguarding Verification Impact (2021 - 2025)

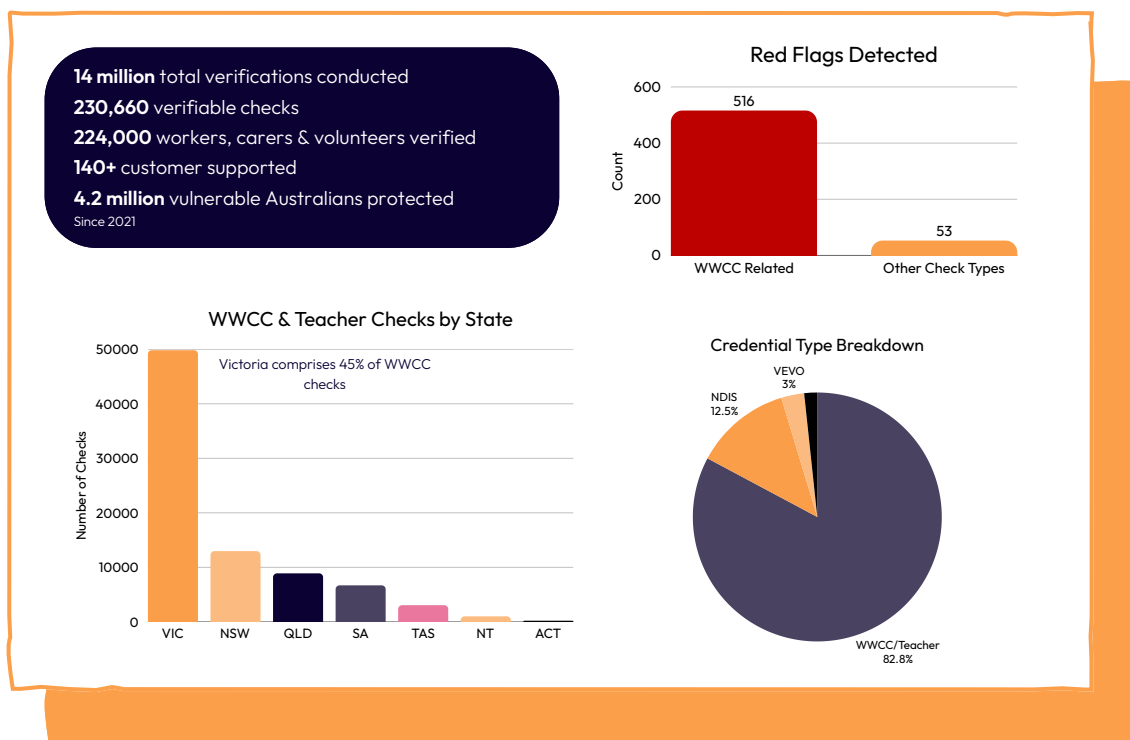


Figure: Data Visualisation of Oho anonymised data

Oho has also witnessed and supported the dedicated employers raising the bar on safeguarding and investing resources into their people, while grappling with the administrative burden and cost pressures.

This experience has reinforced a critical insight: **while no solution is perfect, Australia's current right-to-work and credential verification systems fall short of the safeguarding standards** that vulnerable populations deserve.

Let's Connect

Ready to strengthen your safeguarding systems?

Get in touch with our team here

Or read more

Access Oho's full care sector whitepaper here

Your workforce is changing everyday. Is your safeguarding keeping up?

- How long would it take your team to identify a red flag on a right-to-work check in your workforce?
- Do you have visibility of contractor credentials in real-time?
- Can you demonstrate continuous compliance to your board and leadership?
- What is the real cost of your current manual verification processes?

Let's work together to protect the people you serve.

