

BIG FAT SMILE SUBMISSION TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION INQUIRY INTO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

About Big Fat Smile

We enrich the lives and minds of our children and families in their communities.

Big Fat Smile has both humble beginnings and solid foundations. Established in 1981 as the Illawarra Children's Services Action Group, we sought to bring positive, lasting change to the Illawarra region through active campaigning for the rights of families to affordable early education and care.

Big Fat Smile is a not-for-profit, sector-leading provider of child education, care, recreation, cultural and inclusion services in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

Fast forward 42-years, and we have grown into one of the largest and most respected providers of early education and inclusion services in our region. We exist for children and families, working to provide access to the highest quality early education and care in Australia. In fact, quality is central to everything we do.

Big Fat Smile operates 24 Community Preschools (18 of which are long day care funded through Child Care Subsidy and 6 of which are term only funded by the New South Wales Government) and 14 Fun Club OSHC service for 5–12-year-olds. All of our services that have been rates have been assessed as Meeting the National Quality Standard, with 65% of our Community Preschools (including our Bellambi Point Community Preschool which has a Excellence rating from ACECQA) and 15% of our Fund Clubs assessed as Exceeding. We employ around 650 staff.

In 2021, Big Fat Smile merged with Goodstart Early Learning, and we support their submission to this Inquiry. This submission deals only with the area of Outside School Hours Care.

Our Response

The Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) sector provides a vital service for children and families across Australia. As of September 2022, 536,660 children were accessing an OSHC program across 4,889 approved services; with this program type catering for 38% of all children enrolled in a Child Care Subsidy approved service¹.

The wider community's perception of the OSHC sector is that of a facilitator for workforce participation only. Whilst OSHC programs are a vital economic enabler, this perception



**We enrich the
lives
and minds of
our children
and families
in their
communities.**

Big Fat Smile Head Office
ABN: 82 002 796 232

1/276 Keira Street,
Wollongong, 2500

PO Box 957
Wollongong, 2520

e) info@bigfatasmile.com.au
ph) 02 4283 9900
fx) 02 4283 9901

¹ Australian Government, Department of Education, Early Childhood Data and reports, September 2022 Data

overlooks the critical social and emotional support and development that occurs within this space². Whilst children's average hours within an OSHC program have not retained pre-covid status, children on average are attending 12.7 hours per week in these programs¹. For some children, they may spend more hours in their OSHC program than within their school day². It is vital, therefore, that funding models focus on the provision of a high-quality, affordable and accessible OSHC sector within Australia to improve outcomes for all children and young people.

Ensure affordability and access to high-quality programs

Since 2013, there has been a 26% growth in approved OSHC services¹. However, the for-profit share of the sector has grown from 37%-48%, whereas the not-for-profit share of the sector has remained stagnant. This distribution of provider type is concerning when considering outcomes for children, as not-for-profit services typically provide higher quality programs as recognised within the National Quality Framework³.

The growth of private provision reflect an increasing tendency by schools to award tenders for OSHC provision predominantly on the basis of basis of the highest financial offer rather than considering quality, inclusion and community connection. The submission by the National Outside School Hours Services Alliance to this Inquiry raises concerns about schools using OSHC services to

The Out of School Hours care sector is largely seen as a more affordable program within the education spectrum. The average hourly fee within OSHC services has risen by 7.3% from 2018⁴-2022¹, compared to an increase of 19.9% in Centre based care.

However, drivers for this lower cost include the lower (or NIL in some States and Territories) qualifications required within an OSHC program, an emergence of a one-person model, lower staff to children ratio and environments that are not permanent or suited to quality pedagogical approaches. Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) data demonstrates that these lower cost drivers are translating to a lower quality provision of care for children in this age range³, and provide significant child protection concerns, particularly as older children have increased agency and the school environments where OSHC are often located provide increased supervision and safety risks.

Address the shift in the needs of children in the OSHC sector

Now is a time for funding and systems to focus on quality education provision in the OSHC space, as children's needs, development, and overall wellbeing has shifted in recent years. These shifts were first identified during the COVID-19 pandemic, with increased stress,



**We enrich the
lives
and minds of
our children
and families
in their
communities.**

Big Fat Smile Head Office
ABN: 82 002 796 232

1/276 Keira Street,
Wollongong, 2500

PO Box 957
Wollongong, 2520

e) info@bigfatasmile.com.au
ph) 02 4283 9900
fx) 02 4283 9901

² Carmel Hurst, More than Convenient Care [OSHC Policy Literature Review CartmelHurst.PDF \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

³ Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority *NQS Snapshot- NQF Snapshot Q1 2023* ([acecqa.gov.au](#))

⁴ Australian Government, Department of Education, Early Childhood Data and reports, September 2018 Data [Child Care in Australia report September quarter 2018 - Department of Education, Australian Government](#)

anxiety and trauma identified to be causal factors of increased behaviour and additional needs diagnosis⁵. The Post-Covid continuation of these concerns within school services has also triggered a current parliamentary inquiry⁶. These emotional and anxiety-related behaviours are also often exacerbated by the disciplinary climate in schools, which in Australia is among the least favourable in the OECD⁷. Children are presenting to their OSHC programs with increasing emotional, wellbeing, behavioural and diagnosed support needs, and the unqualified and transient workforce present in the OSHC sector is often unprepared to cater for the needs. A professional learning fund investment and introduction of minimum qualifications is vital to enable the OSHC sector to provide a safe, secure and nurturing space for children in the 5-12 age to engage in play and have their social and emotional development fostered to enable them to return on track with their peers.

Implement actions and increase funding to address the attraction and retention of School Aged educators.

Staffing attraction and retention within OSHC programs is a significant concern, and impacts on accessibility and the quality of programs provided to children. The OSHC sector is often considered a lower status, with a workforce that is transient in nature, highly casualised, and often part time, and this is further complicated by split shifts. To address these issues, compensation and qualification requirements for educators within the sector requires immediate attention, however without appropriately targeted Government funding, the cost to parents would have significant negative impacts on access.

Enhanced funding within the OSHC sector tied to increased qualifications and wages will uplift quality, improve outcomes for children and retain affordability and accessibility for parents and carers.



**We enrich the
lives
and minds of
our children
and families
in their
communities.**

Big Fat Smile Head Office
ABN: 82 002 796 232

1/276 Keira Street,
Wollongong, 2500

PO Box 957
Wollongong, 2520

e) info@bigfatssmile.com.au
ph) 02 4283 9900
fx) 02 4283 9901

⁵ University of Newcastle, Evaluating the impact on COVID-19 on NSW Schools

https://www.newcastle.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/704924/Evaluating-the-impact-of-COVID-19-on-NSW-schools.pdf

⁶ Parliament of Australia, The issue of increasing disruption in Australian school classrooms

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/DASC

⁷ OECD, Education policy outlook in Australia, [https://www.oecd-](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/ce7a0965-)

[ilibrary.org/docserver/ce7a0965-en.pdf?expires=1684919104&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=767a8cb168ca05a5b2a983180cc3d4b9](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/ce7a0965-en.pdf?expires=1684919104&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=767a8cb168ca05a5b2a983180cc3d4b9)

Our Recommendations:

Recommendation 1 – *Introduce a nationally consistent approach to minimum qualification in OSHC sector to drive quality pedagogical approaches for children.*

Recommendation 2 – *Increased funding within the OSHC sector, tied to increased qualifications and wages, to support the attraction and retention of educators, lift community perception, and drive quality outcomes.*

Recommendation 3 – *A targeted professional development fund to be developed for the OSHC sector, addressing the gaps in qualifications and increasing support requirements of children and families*

Recommendation 4 – *Recommendations previously identified within “More than convenient care” report across the four key areas of Support the OSHC workforce, Research, develop and promote the benefits of OSHC, Develop ways to uplift Quality while improving the image of OSHC, and take steps to improve the partnerships between schools and OSHC be analysed and provide a framework for review in approach to developing a comprehensive funding mechanism and approach.*

Contact Details:

Kim Bertino
Chief Executive Officer



**We enrich the
lives
and minds of
our children
and families
in their
communities.**

Big Fat Smile Head Office
ABN: 82 002 796 232

1/276 Keira Street,
Wollongong, 2500

PO Box 957
Wollongong, 2520

e) info@bigfatmile.com.au
ph) 02 4283 9900
fx) 02 4283 9901