



Dr Gordon Reid MP

FEDERAL MEMBER FOR ROBERTSON

Productivity Commission
Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)
Submission in response to Draft Report

Dear Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Productivity Commission's draft report "*A path to universal early childhood education and care*".

I write in my capacity as the Federal Member for Robertson on behalf of my constituents to provide insight on their experiences with the early childhood education and care sector (ECEC) on the NSW Central Coast.

After meeting with numerous constituents regarding their inability to access ECEC services, I decided to host a Robertson Childcare Forum to discuss the challenges facing ECEC on the Central Coast. The issues raised at the forum mirrored the draft report's findings relating to availability, affordability, inclusivity, and flexibility and I have summarised them below.

Availability

Prior to the forum I understood that access to and the availability of childcare was a priority issue for families in my electorate. This was reinforced at the forum with families sharing their experiences of waiting up to three years for a spot or accepting an inadequate number of care/hours because that was all that was available.

A further frustration raised by parents and carers was the lack of transparency around waiting lists. Parents reported that waitlist communications were not clear or timely leaving families unsure if they were progressing or had any hope of accessing the service when required.

It was made clear that the main barrier to workforce participation for parents on the Central Coast was availability and that this was disproportionately affecting women.

Also impacting upon availability was staff shortages and local educators and service providers highlighted the challenges facing their workforce. They spoke passionately about their profession, and they echoed the reports' recommendations to improve career development and pathways and higher pay.



Many educators mentioned they were overwhelmed by the demanding regulatory environment that necessitates a high level of documentation and how it was difficult to schedule enough time for staff to leave the floor to complete essential programming work.

Affordability

Families spoke about the cost burden and fees associated with childcare. They also mentioned their frustrations with the CSS activity test. Some families spoke about how the financial burden of childcare was impacting upon their decision to have more children.

Inclusivity

The availability of training for complex needs children was raised as an issue and one that creates a barrier for inclusivity at ECEC's on the Central Coast.

Although not in the direct remit of the draft report or inquiry it was raised at the forum that a review of the change to the NDIS early childhood approach to include children younger than 9 might be useful to assess how NDIS service providers are working with ECECs.

Flexibility

Accessing care outside of hours was mentioned as a barrier especially for essential workers. It was suggested that perhaps a model similar to the Urgent Care Clinic rollout could be applied to the ECEC sector.

Out of School Hours Care (OOSH) services also commented on what they believed was an unfair regulatory burden. Although generally providing different types of care than ECECs they had to complete similar amounts of administration and are often not provided with the space to complete it as they are operating out of school halls or similar venues that have no dedicated office space

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission. The Central Coast community looks forward to hearing about the solutions that will chart the course for universal, and affordable early childhood education and care.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Gordon Reid MP
Federal Member for Robertson