

I write regarding the Childcare and Early Childhood Learning Productivity Commission Issues Paper.

We are a family of three, two adults and one child, expecting our second child in May 2014. We currently utilise Family Day Care services provided by our local council.

The provision of child care services is very important to me, as my profession can only really absorb a 12 month absence before my knowledge and skills would become too outdated to enable my return to work. However, this requirement has meant significant financial costs to our family. I estimate that almost all of my current salary (working 0.8FTE) will be expended on child care costs, but feel that this is the only option open to me. As the population of Australia moves further away from their support networks in order to find work, the reliance on Child Care increases and flaws in the system need to be addressed immediately.

I believe there are a number of key changes that need to be made immediately to make childcare more affordable and in turn increase the workforce participation rate:

Childcare Rebate

Whilst the current scheme is effective in principle, I feel as though the cap that is placed on this rebate is not high enough to accommodate full time work without significant costs being incurred. As the cost of child care increases (this year my day care costs rose from \$85 to \$120 a day) the cap should also be increased to reflect this. I also feel as though the Child Care Rebate (and other Government benefits) can cause an artificial increase in child care fees. Perhaps there should be some capping of fees to ensure that the system is fair for all.

Children per adult

I understand that lowering the child to adult ratio is beneficial for the children placed in child care, but this should be consistent across all forms of child care. Large day care centres in NSW are currently allowed to have 5 children (aged over 18 months) per carer, whereas Family Day Care centres are only allowed 4 children per carer. This means that the smaller Family Day Care facilities have no choice but to charge families an increased rate in order to cover their costs.

Vacancies and availability of care

We live in a northern suburb of Sydney and have noticed an extremely large shortage of long day care spaces in our area. My child was placed on the waiting lists of several day care centres before she was born, but we were only offered a placement at one centre when my child was 2 years old, which was a year beyond the date that I wanted her to start. I only happened to find a place in Family Day Care by pure chance when a friend of a friend informed me that she had turned down a place at a particular FDC centre and that I should enquire.

I also noticed during my time on various waiting lists that the Child Care Facility did not necessarily follow the chronological order in which children were placed on the waiting list. Most centres recommended to me that I simply phone them every day to enquire as to whether a position had become vacant. Surely there must be a better system in place than this.

Incentives for people to study child care

Obviously the limited number of child carers must be a huge component as to the lack of child care spaces available. Staff burn out from a demanding work load and increasing amounts of bureaucratic paper work are obviously major flaws in the system. Therefore I would encourage the Government to provide financial or career incentives to increase the number of qualified people and to decrease the amount of nonsensical paper work that needs to be completed by day care providers when their focus should be on providing care.

Out of hours school care

The problems being experienced with child care currently will become the problems of Out of Hours School Care (OOHSC) in the future. I believe your enquiry should also investigate solutions for OOHSC as well as Long Day Care.

As is the case in Sweden, I believe Child Care in Australia should be given a high priority and should become something that our country is proud of, just as the Swedish Educare model is the envy of the world.