

Submission to the inquiry into childcare and early childhood learning by Carewest.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning.

Carewest

Carewest is the peak body for Western Australian community based early childhood education and care services and is a non-profit organisation. Carewest operates as the WA branch of the Australian Community Children's Services National peak body (ACCS). It has a membership of 42 centres within the metropolitan area of Perth and up to 10 country services covering the breadth of the state.

It was established in 1973 as the Association of Government Subsidised Child Care Centres (WA) Inc. and changed its name in the early 1990's to reflect the changes within the early childhood sector.

Carewest has members that operate long day care, before and after school care and vacation care services.

National Quality Framework

Carewest supports the full implementation of the National Quality Framework. Members have not reported an increase in regulatory burden. The changes in ratios nationally have brought the rest of the country in line with the ratios in Western Australia. In fact, many members are staffed with higher than the minimum requirements for qualified educators in each room due to their commitment to quality early childhood education and care.

The Nominated Supervisor/ Certified Supervisor Certificate has not placed additional burden on services as Western Australia already had a similar system in place.

The Early Years Learning Framework validates the vital role that educators perform in their day to day work with children and families.

Affordability of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Child Care Benefit (CCB) and Child Care Rebate (CCR) have helped many families with the cost of early childhood education and care.

Currently only CCB is means tested. Families need to meet the work/study criteria for CCR to be eligible.

A means tested CCR would result in a lack of participation in the workforce of women who are typically the primary care giver and the secondary income earners.

A combination of both fee relief types, payable directly to services would be a far more efficient way of distributing ECEC funds.

Availability of Early Childhood Education and Care

Carewest has grave concerns about the possible use of nannies as an early childhood education and care option. Members are concerned about who will regulate them and monitor them within the home. Will nannies have to meet the same standard of qualifications that are required by staff in ECEC services and provide a quality curriculum too?

Carewest acknowledges that many of its members have extensive waiting lists with many families registering their interest before their child is born. Quality ECEC services are highly utilized.

Flexibility of Early Childhood Education and Care

Traditionally ECEC services have kept longer hours than regular "office hours", often opening 6.30am to 6.30pm. Whilst these hours may not meet the needs of fly in/fly out or shift workers, to provide further extended hours of service would lead to an increase costs all costs, especially wages. Would services be responsible for passing on the cost to parents or will the government devise a more flexible funding model and increase the subsidies? Will the commission consider the impact that extended hours will have on the children in care?

Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Issues

Carewest members acknowledge the difficulty some services, particularly in rural and remote areas have regarding the recruitment and retention of educators, especially early childhood teachers. Will the government consider funding the development of a bridging qualification which will enable Diploma qualified educators to teach in an ECEC service? Will the government then offer a training subsidy for educators to take up that option? **Perhaps the Early Years Quality Fund could be directed for this purpose?**

Members have concerns about the quality of training delivered especially in the "tick and flick" manner that some registered training organizations have adopted. Issuing qualifications resulting from this practice rather than delivering high quality teaching impacts on the quality of services provided to children. Many of our members have reported having to retrain educators due to their lack of knowledge and competence. The issue of professional wages needs to be addressed in some form within this inquiry. Early childhood educators have a huge responsibility, play a critical role in the learning and development of children birth to 5 years and in the support they provide to families. Hence, they should receive fair pay for this very important work that they do.

The inquiry should also address the development of professional career pathways for educators.

Carewest has many members with vast experience within the early childhood education and care sector and we hope that this inquiry will result in positive outcomes for children.