

Childcare

Personal Situation

I am a working mother with three young children that attend long day care four days a week. My husband and I share the care on the fifth day to allow each of us to work a nine-day fortnight. Our day-care centre is a 'not for profit' centre and I volunteer time as a member on the board of directors which is essential for the ongoing operation of the centre. Our day-care fees are comparably lower than others in the Canberra-Queanbeyan region, however are now just under \$100 a day. I have recently returned to work after 12 months maternity leave, half of which I funded from my long service leave. My experience with this centre has been nothing but positive for myself and my children. They have flourished under the care of the centre, who take a real interest in their development and well-being.

Childcare costs

Fees have increased dramatically since I began using day-care end of 2011. When I first enrolled my oldest child fees were \$76 a day. They have increased to \$92 a day as of 2014. As a board member I understand the costs involved in the running of a centre and the majority of costs are for staff entitlements and wages. The child care rebate needs to be reassessed in light of the increases to child care fees compared to wage increases.

I would also like advertisements about the rebate being 50% of the out of pocket costs to be revised as this is rarely the case (I do note that while the advertisements read up to 50% or \$7500, the message that people hear is that the government pays half. It should just be communicated that up to \$7500 is available). With the current fees as they are and if care is required for 3 days and over, this rebate usually runs out several months before the end of financial year when the rebate begins again.

Perception of child-care rebate

It is upsetting and somewhat offensive hearing comments about the availability to parents of the childcare rebate and benefit. People believe that as women have chosen to have children they should not rely on the government to supplement the costs of day-care and if women want to return to the workforce they should fund it solely themselves. This argument is not however applied to other publicly provided services such as bulk billed medical expenses, concession cards, public schools for example. I believe that this criticism stems from areas of the community that do have a misogynistic view of women.

Child care rebate

The Childcare Rebate is essential for working mothers to be able to re-enter or continue in the workforce. Without this support, childcare would simply be unaffordable, even for parents earning above average wages. The childcare rebate is more than what some people consider a welfare handout. It shouldn't be seen as a burden to other members of the community that do not have children or do not access childcare. Rather it is a mechanism to supporting women to remain in the workforce, if that is what they choose to do. Women in the workforce pay tax rather than being reliant on welfare payments. They contribute to superannuation, which is essential for their long term wellbeing in the future, rather than relying on her husband's/partner's superannuation or her own reduced superannuation. They contribute to the productivity of the country through work and access higher education, which again further contributes to productivity.

Returning to Work

It is difficult to return to the workforce if a substantial break in service occurs. Especially in the current economic climate, if you leave the workforce, it is difficult to return back to an equivalent position. I know that many women return to work to 'keep a foot in the door'. I was fortunate enough that I held my position while on leave. Others are not so fortunate. However I did find it difficult to transition back to the workforce with a young family as I now required part time work arrangements and more recently flexible working hours to allow me to pick up my children from day care.

Regulation

The requirements on child care providers is substantial, however I do feel necessary to ensure appropriate care is given to our children. Whilst the regulation has increased, support for child care providers to complete these requirements has not. In some instances there is an increasing reliance on volunteers/parents to help out or staff complete these tasks after hours and often without overtime or increased pay to reflect additional duties. As the majority of the child care workforce is female, again demonstrates why females are paid lower than their male counterparts in equivalent sectors. Where regulation is required and is increased significantly, funding should be provided to supplement the staff time to undertake these tasks rather than relying on them to work unpaid, or for less pay.