

Should support be extended to types of childcare not currently funded or funding increased for specific types of childcare — for example nannies providing in-home care? What standards or assurances should these carers have to meet or provide?

A: Yes, I do believe care should definitely be extended to Nannies. You should not be allowed to call yourself a Nanny unless you have the “Rebate” qualifications or be allowed to charge the fees equivalent of a Nanny. They should all have the standard background checks for childcare workers, first Aid certificates and qualifications in Child Care. Anyone who does not meet these qualifications can only call themselves a babysitter. They also need to be involved with a network of Nannies to allow the children they care for to be incorporated in socialisation events during day time care.

In many professions, as the one I am in we are required to complete Professional Development as a requirement for maintaining registration and qualifications within the industry. A lot of this occurs after 6pm at night. Most Day Care Centres close by 6pm. However, as it is a work and professionally related expense required under the Acts that govern our registration, in home care should be included as a form of care available as a rebate option, or claimable on tax for work related expenses for Primary Carers only. My husband work hours extend beyond 6pm, works inter-state one week out of every month, and also is required to meet the same professional requirements, and therefore is not always available to be home to care for the children at a time that allows to transit to the courses in time.

There also need to be guidelines about the fees Nannies could charge. For example, during standard working hours when children are most active and learning, they could charge up to \$20/ hour. However, if they are caring after 8pm, when children are typically in bed, a reduced rate of say \$15/ hour could be charged only. If they are also required to prepare family meals for night time, and additional chores throughout the day, they may also “tack on” a set fee only to incorporate the additional services. These fees too, need to be capped.

Are problems with access to, or the flexibility, cost or quality of ECEC preventing you from undertaking work or study (or the number of hours you would prefer to work or study)? How should any problems be addressed? Would, for example, extending childcare centre hours or the length of the school day make it easier for you to work?

A: The costs of child care is the number one factor that is preventing me from choosing work or study. I don't have family support available and therefore have to rely on paid care for my children. With the centre I had my children at, it was going to cost before rebates, \$10,000 per year for every day of care they were in, (equates to \$200 per day and \$50,000 per year for 5 days). For me to return back to work, I need to be earning that Net to cover those costs, plus the costs of getting to and from work, and other related costs for working. I could not earn that, as I can not work a standard 7.5hr day and fit in drop off and pick ups before additional charges from centres for late pick ups, (which should also not be allowed to be charged, as circumstances for that may be out of your control).

I had my now 3.5 year old in nursery care in a child care centre and the costs per day were \$78/ day. By the time my now 1.5 year got into nursery care, the cost had risen to \$98/day, and have risen again since. This had been all in the time frame since the introduction of the Early Years Learning Framework. We would receive letters approximately every 6 months advising of price increases due to curriculum development, professional development and other centre upgrades. Whilst the centre upgrades were visible, the Standard of teaching was not increasing with the reasoning behind the increases. This too, became unjustifiable for the prices that were being asked.

I believe to help working and professional primary carers, there needs to be a change in business culture, school systems need to change and not only the hours. I believe the school hours need to change from 8:30am to 4pm, where drop off times can work within standard business starting hours, and out of hours school care can occur for people requiring additional care for working hours that may not finish until 5:30pm (in some offices). There also needs to be encouragement for no homework for busy working families, where children by the time pick up occurs, are more than likely too tired and hungry to concentrate and do more school work. This needs to be incorporated into the final hour of the school day (3-4pm after a mid-afternoon break), where review of the lessons can occur. Teachers can then pick up if children are understanding the work, rather than a parent being a judge of that and dividing their time between more than one child, while trying to get the evening meal prepared.

I believe additionally believe incorporating pre-kindy (3yo) and kindy (4yo) (I am in QLD) into the school environments, and having the curriculum for these ages run by the school environment, not the Day care centres. It's evident prices have increased significantly since the Early Years Learning Framework introduction, but there is not a change in standard of teaching. It is critical developmentally from the age of 3 that kids start learning more and are encouraged in a way to learn in a semi-structured play environment. Also by doing this, it would allow primary carers to work a decent day and incorporate drop off and pick-ups at reasonable hours that could work for business and families. It would also benchmark Australia against those countries where students do start at a younger age. It may still be play based learning, but at least the quality of teaching is within a controlled schooling environment, where teachers can share ideas, experiences, and problem solve together which equates to quality. Curriculum is then also a whole school approach providing ongoing and consistent standards. That is not evident in day care centres, where Kindy teachers tend to be the only qualified teachers in the centre (which may only be one of). It would additionally free up day care centres to increase their intake of the under 3 year old age

group, of which seems to be the hardest and most competitive group to get care for. This may also create more Nursery rooms, which are also in high competition, but not readily available.

What factors other than ECEC are influencing your decisions about participation in work or study? Is government assistance, or the withdrawal of that assistance, for example family tax benefits, a significant factor?

A:

COSTS – It costs to go to work, upskill and maintain standards of a professional. It additionally costs to return to study. With a single household income that varies from year to year, to return to study and have more debt upon graduation, without guarantee of work, is not a viable debt option for our family situation. Returning to work seems pointless when the cost of returning to work is more than the income I could earn, and therefore places more pressure on the already stretched household income.

TIME OUT OF WORKFORCE/ WORKFORCE CULTURE – It has been over 18 months since I was last employed, There is no incentive for employers to create positions, want or take on board women with children looking for part-time work. A HR magazine I saw says the most desirable employees are Male, 18-50 unbroken employment records, ambitious, willing to work extra hours, and are without children. Least likely is a woman with children. Women trying to return to the workforce after having children are already facing an uphill battle in trying to obtain employment. This attitude is also reflected by recruiters, and so a look in is not necessarily available. This is where business culture needs to change substantially. The standard 37.5Hr- 40 week is not family friendly, and people should not be penalised, whether primary carer or not, for wanting to maintain their career paths, in a less substantial way. A 30hr week may be more achievable as a full time standard for those who choose that path of working full time and primary carers. More positions could potentially be created in the work force such as job share positions, if people didn't work extra long hours, shared that workload or role, or potentially two full time roles could be done in staggered manner throughout one working day. This potentially could mean care could be shared between parents, and less impact on waiting lists for day care centres, family balance could be achievable. This method too could have a positive impact on the economy, unemployment rates and potentially health care system as people could live a more balanced and healthy lifestyle.

FAMILY QUALITY TIME – For the lack of part-time positions available, it seems the only options are all (ie, 5 days a week, 7.5+hrs/ day) or nothing (stay at home with children). If I were to work 5 days a week, my children will not get the best of me, which could potentially have long term effects on their development, and societal integration. A happy balance would be ideal to ensure they are getting a well rounded life experience. However, work options leave an all or nothing choice. If a woman with children goes for a position that is advertised as full time, it should be made easy for her to negotiate a pro-rata rate to work less hours and days, or have the role created as a share role. I believe for me to maintain family balance, a maximum 6 hour working day is achievable by the time drop off, commute to work, commute back from work, pick-up occurs, within the opening and closing hours of centres, and what is a feasible time to have young children fed, and into bed at night, and up and fed in the morning.

What factors influence whether you use early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, care for your child at home or have your child cared for by another family member? Is affordability a significant barrier to your use of ECEC services or does it influence the type of service you use?

A: Affordability, quality of teaching, quality of centre, services provided, eg if food and nappies are included, proximity to work, or home.

Affordability of day cares can be equivalent of private school fees or greater. Day care centres need to be benchmarked against each other more easily, and have a fee scale range that they can charge for the services they provide. For example, the child care centre I had my children at want to charge \$103 for under 2.5yo, and \$98 for 3.5yo. They do not provide food, nappies or extra curricula activities for this fee. Other centres in the CBD, charge similar fees for the inclusion of nappies and food. Other centers in the same area charge less fees but provide food and or nappies, and may include an extra curricula activity such as a language lesson, or outside providers of children's activities. Anything over \$80-\$90/ day is generally unjustifiable for the family budget. Inclusion of other services such as food and nappies, places those particular centres under more demand, particularly when they are charging lesser fees to do the same job.

I believe if centres are going to be allowed to continually increase prices so regularly, there needs to be more transparent ways of reporting to parents where those fees are going in their monthly statements. I do not believe the increase in fees were being put back into the centre, but into the wages of staff, however quality of care/ teaching was not improving. I think fees should be structured in a way where centres charge a base fee for the costs of child care, food and supplies. Any centre improvements whether that be teaching equipment, playground upgrades, should be fund raised for, subsidised by Governments Grants (such as the DEEWR system for education loans), or have a levy paid by parents, or a combination of these. This is how schools do it. If a Day care centre is going to essentially be classified as an educational facility through the EYLF curriculum, they should be able to access the same system.

As previously mentioned (in other questions) I do not believe there is a quality of teaching that is consistent or accountable from centre to centre. I recently tried to get my children into another centre. One centre I looked at, I did not have the confidence in the teachers that I would like to have, for the age that my children are at. I also observed a child I knew who was at the centre. I believe as a pre-kindy child, she was bored and under stimulated by the teaching that was occurring at that centre. The quality of the facility was also not great, as there were aged flooring from the 1980's (which may have contained asbestos). The centre also did not have an approved commercial kitchen for use by the children to meet the curriculum criteria, of which I do not understand how they were able to obtain Kindy program approval. As a result I concluded that fees are likely to increase as the improvements to the centre would be required, and a risk to the family budget that I was not willing to take at this point of time.