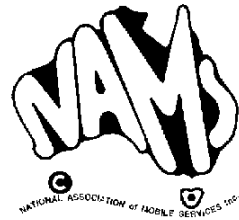


**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MOBILE SERVICES
FOR RURAL AND REMOTE FAMILIES AND CHILDREN INC.**

NAMS is a peak body which represents service members (funded mainly under the BBF Program) by advocating on their behalf, placing submissions, presenting concerns and challenges, celebrating achievements, relaying relevant information, and providing a forum for exchange with like-minded people. Executives have the opportunity to meet with other peak bodies at NCSF (National Children's Services Forum) at least 3 times a year, where there are opportunities to communicate with officers from DEEWR and ACECQA. Other opportunities are also taken to meet with relevant Government Bodies and officers. This dialogue and consultation is greatly valued as it is a necessary process to introduce and consolidate understanding about the way in which mobile operations can enable access to services which assists in alleviating "market failure" in remote, rural and isolated circumstances.

There are two big challenges for us as executives. One is to be able to act on behalf of such a widely spread group of mobiles which offer a diverse range of services. Creches, playsessions, parent support, pre-schools, toy libraries, long day care being some of the responses to community needs. The other challenge is that Executives from this peak body, accept the responsibility of their positions, with the necessary understanding of the organisations which are their "core business". That is, all Executives manage or direct mobile services in different States.

Some of the differences to be considered between centres and urban provision are the long distances travelled by both staff and families, communication challenges, and sparseness of population. These are the main commonalities of challenges facing mobile delivery.

- Distances (includes the factors of weather, roads and vehicles). Distances affect ability to offer regular services, freight costs, utilisation numbers (attendances sometimes unpredictable), access to staff training.
- Communication between base and team, between staff and service, between staff and families is continually challenging.
- The sparseness of numbers can be a result of the population dispersal / or the itinerant nature of employment / or inaccessibility due to prevailing weather.

Against this background of realities for mobile services, NAMS addresses the three desired outcomes as noted in the Discussion Paper Document (pages 5 and 6). They are the areas of Program Principles, Program Administration and Program Funding Principles

PROGRAM PRINCIPLES

The BBF program could best reflect ECEC policy and reform directions, including the focus on increasing participation and continuous quality improvement by examining the way in which funds are allocated and how services are developed. The review needs to determine whether fund allocations (to whom and where), is still relevant to local community needs, and whether it enables BBF services to meet current ECEC policy and reform agendas.

Determining Areas of Need

There are various national data sources on population needs. Although data and census information is critical in planning, there needs to be awareness of the hidden pockets of disadvantage in some communities, which are not always visible in large data sources. These are the communities where *direct community consultation and development needs to occur*. Consultation should take into consideration other programs and services that may impact on children's access to ECEC. Many of the existing programs currently hold data and information about what services are required, and what community needs exist. *Consulting and planning with existing services* that are ready to expand and provide additional direct service delivery will be an effective use of resources and time. Linking with services that already have relationships with these communities is a critical factor when allocating and developing new services.

Mapping Existing Service Areas.

Mapping what services currently exist and what knowledge these services hold in relation to the needs their current communities should be a high priority for the review.

- Mapping is an exercise that should be undertaken in the 'physical sense' of where current services are located, what programs they currently offer and what unmet needs or 'market failure' exists around these services/communities. For example: A Mobile Childrens Service offering Playsessions can identify the unmet need in the community where they work.
- The Mobile Childrens Service will usually hold data about how they can be flexible and responsive and extend their program to provide a Long Day Care Service for the community as the need arises.
There is a great potential to build on these solid relationships and long term established services

Principles for Allocation

The BBF review has to consider very carefully how the funding is allocated across Australian communities. This certainly is a great challenge, and it is something that direct service providers attempt to manage every day. There are many communities that are currently on waiting lists and that services already liaise with, but no direct service can be provided. For example Gabi Guban service in NSW, knows of seven communities which would value playsessions. Whilst each service has their individual method of allocating services to communities, the review needs to address a list of principles *that provide a guide to funding allocation*.

The NSW State Children's Services Forum (chaired by ncoss), proposed the following principles to the Department of Education and Communities ECEC Funding Review.

These can also be applicable to BBF. These are the principles:

- Fairness, Integrity and Transparency – the funding system is, and is seen to be, accessible, appropriate and fair.
- Universal Access (Inclusiveness) – all children have equitable access to ECEC services.
- Outcomes – decisions should be based on a focus of achieving real outcomes for *children*
- Consistency – grants administration procedures should be consistent within programs and across agencies.
- Accountability – government agencies and the ECEC sector must be accountable and transparent in the way they spend public funds, in a manner that is appropriate to the level of funding

- Value for Money – making sure there is the best mix of services that meets the needs of the early childhood and education care sector by selecting the best mix of resources that delivers the best possible outcomes for children and the community.

In addition to these principles geographical location, access and affordability, cultural and community needs must be added to the mix when designing a program and allocating funding that is attempting to meet 'market failure'.

The principles should not take into account an economic rationale that is based on utilisation and numbers. Often the most effective and 'best work' that Mobile Children Services do is in the remote or isolated communities working with 2 or 3 children that would otherwise never access an ECEC service. This work emanates and extends community capacity building beyond the ECEC program with children, to parents and community members. The outcomes for the program are broader, and the program enriches the community along with the children.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

The BBF Program Administration could more reasonably support mobile services by taking in those aspects of mobile service delivery which reflect the difference or uniqueness and flexibility of responses to community needs. The diversity of service types reflects the variety of needs for children's services in rural and regional areas.

The 'market failure' which occurs for rural and regional areas, and for isolated families is often met by the ability of 'mobile services' to provide access for families when there are no other services available. Outback Child Care, Playsessions and Long Day Care are facilitating links to the intervention, care, mentoring, referral, and empowerment that these children and families have previously not experienced.

X is three and has cochlear implants. She cannot talk and is not toilet-trained. A Professional educator from a mobile child care service have been able to support the family as X prepares to transition to Kindergarten. A staff member has accompanied mother to a Regional Health case Management meeting, and has interpreted for the mother, the discussion and information received from an Adelaide Paediatrician and other specialists. This has enabled Mum to understand the program put in place for X, and has empowered her to work with her daughter at home, with ongoing support from the mobile staff.

This is social capacity building, as well as nurturing, and provision of optimum opportunities for the child's growth in developmental skills necessary for the transition to kindergarten.

Examples of scaffolding and support (like the above) need to be accepted as *performance indicators* and evidence of supporting quality outcomes for children and families. *Present templates and reporting procedures* do not allow services to tell their stories and indicate their achievements.

The *needs of communities do change* over time, and administration must have the flexibility to change so that the community needs can still be met. Services may need to alter their delivery from for example, offering play sessions to offering long day care. This can be facilitated /enabled by close partnerships between DEEWR and services, so that *Funding Agreements can appropriately reflect the necessary responsive changes*.

There is evidence that IT allows families to take their businesses away from cities. Coastal regions in particular are showing *growing* populations, often removed from family origins and in *need of children's services*.

Robe Child Care On Wheels Service offering long day care at 4 sites in the southeast of South Australia, has a waiting list for 120 places. There is no possibility of expanding the service to meet the needs without a change to the funding provision. Clear service delivery obligations would assist to allay frustration in small communities where there are no other services.

Funding Agreements for three or more years would enable more effective, efficient strategic planning for the delivery of service and the implementation of projects to benefit operations. Present agreements for one year do not allow for ongoing planning to meet the operation and delivery needs.

Mobile service delivery is not widely understood. *NAMS values the partnerships*, support and rapport with stakeholders, and organisations. The ability to have ongoing conversations with *informed* DEEWR officers would increase the efficiency of meeting and contact time. When there is no familiarity or hand-over of information to officers, it becomes necessary to revisit definitions of mobiles, their purposes and delivery and this takes up much of the meeting time.

The ability to enhance the quality of services is possible in many ways:

- *Local Government* recognising 'rights of the child' and children as citizens from birth, will provide an informed network and community in which to raise a child. Children are part of 'the village' or 'community' and local and regional strategic plans need to recognise and include them.
- *Staffing*: Incentives for educators to spend time in country service would be helpful. Housing subsidy or affordable and accessible housing also needs to be considered. The expectation of travelling long distances also has to be monitored and managed.
- The *part-time nature of employment* limits the attraction of mobile staff to some areas. Part-time employment may be due to the location of the staff residence compared to the location of working sites, or may also be a result of itinerant, transitory work patterns of families in the serviced areas. The limited hours of employment may also affect the ability of part-time staff to take up traineeships as their hours of employment are deemed to be insufficient to access traineeships.
- *NAMS is a peak body* representing mobile services. NAMS executives fulfil their responsibilities with the understanding of their organisations. This responsibility comes beside that of their 'core business', managing a mobile service or organisation. This is not the most efficient way to meet all the responsibilities which accompany those positions. A funded executive position may facilitate a more efficient and effective means of governance.

FUNDING PRINCIPLES

The COAG Early Childhood Education and Care Reform agenda has identified that the first five years of life are critical for children's development. The challenge is to be able to meet the ECEC needs of all Australian children, including children living in regional, rural and remote communities.

Where families are living in areas of "market failure", it means that ECEC programs and services would not be financially viable under existing funding models. This becomes a challenge for Governments promoting access and equity in relation to the long term benefits of a positive start to life.

Funding Models

The current funding models, *Child Care Benefit* and *Budget Based Funding* are limited in their ability to meet the needs of regional, rural and remote communities.

Child Care Benefit is currently accessible for Approved Services within a viable, market based model, relying on a sustainable enrolment base number to ensure viability. This model limits rural communities' participation as it requires a minimum population base with a renewable resource, a minimum number of families with children.

In Australia, there are numerous rural and remote towns and communities who do not currently meet this criteria. Many Australian rural towns/communities have limited access to State funded Preschool/Kindergarten programs for children aged three to five, prior to school entry, but do not have access to ECEC programs and services to allow parents to meet their work commitments or to ensure families and children equity in accessing quality Early Childhood Education and Care.

Budget Based Funding has historically been a funding model to assist with operational costs for programs and services that have applied for funding to attempt to meet a community demand for services, and that would not meet the criteria for approval within current CCB legislation.

Review of the Budget Based Funding model has allowed broad discussion, while not acknowledging the limitations of a funding model that has had no prescriptive approach to its design.

Designing a Funding Model

Governments support for Australian children to have the best start in life through access to ECEC services requires a review of funding models, including a review of the Child Care Benefit legislation to assist with possible models that would allow for a service design that gives opportunity for all communities to have access to ECEC programs that meet their needs.

The opportunity to discuss broadly the BBF issues has raised the requirement to review the unmet ECEC requirements of regional, rural and remote communities. All mobile services can identify need in their geographic area that the limitations of current Budget Based Funding cannot address.

The commitment to access and equity requires Government to be responsive to unmet needs and the BBF review process provides an opportunity to design funding and service models to be adaptive to the flexibility required to meet the changing needs of regional, rural and remote communities.

NAMS values the opportunity to offer this submission.

Information for this submission was gathered at meetings of service members and delegates, and put together and submitted on their behalf by the NAMS Executive Members.

<i>Chairperson:</i>	<i>Robyn Paterson</i>	<i>(Robe CCOWS, SA)</i>
<i>Vice Chair:</i>	<i>Anne Bowler</i>	<i>(ceyc, Albury-Wodonga)</i>
<i>Secretary:</i>	<i>Anne Bremner</i>	<i>(Mallee COGS , Lameroo SA)</i>
<i>Treasurer:</i>	<i>Meg Mendham</i>	<i>(Galloping Gumnuts, NSW)</i>

September 21, 2012.