



# **Municipal Association of Victoria**

**Submission to Productivity Commission Early Childhood  
Development Workforce - Draft Research Report**

**August 2011**

*The MAV can provide this document in an alternative format upon request, including large print, Braille and audio.*

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*While this paper aims to broadly reflect the views of local government in Victoria, it does not purport to reflect the exact views of individual councils.*

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## 1 Introduction

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) as the legislated peak body for Victorian local government commends the Australian Government on its increased investment and commitment to early childhood education and care through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). All Victorian councils are committed to the aim of providing children in their municipality with the best possible start in life through effective planning, development and provision of services that improve the health, connectedness, education and care of children and their families.

The Productivity Commission has defined the scope of the ECD sector to include:

- Early childhood education and care services;
- Child health services; and
- Family support services.

Local government has responsibilities for local planning around all of these services as well as providing a strong local early years platform. It is primarily the experience of councils in the services around the early childhood education and care and child health that informs the following MAV responses to the draft research report.

It is important to state from the outset that local government has the capacity and flexibility to build on, innovate and maximise the opportunities for the ECD workforce through its role in the provision and management of a range of early childhood and family services. In this submission, MAV will provide a local government perspective regarding the critical issues identified in the inquiry.

### 1.1 Previous Local government submissions

Over the past three years, the MAV has participated in a number of early childhood education and care campaigns, and provided submissions to various government inquiries on early childhood education and care including the most recent Productivity Commission Inquiry into Early Childhood Development Workforce. The MAV has been consistent in its perspective on the impacts of proposed reforms in this area based on local government experiences. Key issues of concern to councils regarding the National Reform Agenda for early childhood education and care are:

- Balancing the need for increased quality in both the ECD workforce and delivery of services against the costs of the reforms and impacts on current kindergarten participation rates in Victoria.
- Availability of facilities and the qualified ECD workforce for services other than four-year old kindergarten groups and potential displacement of important children's services such as playgroups and three-year old kindergarten groups.
- The three spheres of government responsibilities in financing of the improvements and increased costs in line with the Victorian State and Local Government Agreement.
- The required rates of growth of the early childhood workforce, particularly university qualified teachers to support the reforms.
- That the timelines of change associated with the implementation of the reforms including plans for universal access to fifteen hours of early childhood education by 2013 and the changes under the *2009 Children's Services Regulations*, should be carefully aligned to maximise positive outcomes and to reduce any duplication of effort.

- The impacts of a concurrent reform agenda by both the Commonwealth and State Governments will have a cumulative effect on local government.

MAV also has a clearly stated policy position on the COAG reform of universal access to 15 hours of kindergarten. Based on extensive capacity assessment undertaken by councils in mid 2010 there are some key aspects, which need to be addressed by the Commonwealth Government in order to achieve this reform by 2013. They are:

- Commit to a minimum investment of \$606 million for local government kindergarten facilities.
- Provide \$36 million change management funding.
- Immediately invest in workforce initiatives as an estimated 600 extra trained staff is needed to increase the participation rate from the current 10 hours.
- Fully fund the additional hours as rate payers should not be left with funding responsibility for the shortfall created by this reform.

## **2. Opportunity for further comments**

The MAV welcomes the opportunity to provide further comments on *the Early Childhood Development Workforce – draft research report*. In accordance with the Productivity Commission's request, the MAV will provide further comments in the following ways:

- General comments regarding some of the statements in the Overview Section of the draft report
- Responses to the Draft Recommendations
- Responses to the requests for additional information

The MAV wishes to restate its position regarding the capacity and flexibility of local government in Victoria to build on, innovate and maximise opportunities for the Early Childhood Development (ECD) workforce through its role in the provision and management of a range of early childhood and family services.

### **General Comments**

Policy Design and funding for effective ECD services and workers

Staff costs for ECEC services are predicted to rise. The Productivity Commission's assumption that the additional costs may be offset by staff accepting less than market wages would seem to be quite unrealistic. In Victoria both the Victorian Early Childhood Teachers and Assistants Agreement and the Local Government Early Childhood Teachers and Assistants Agreement are currently in place covering Early Childhood Teachers and Assistants. These Agreements expire in 2013; however their current terms would make it highly unlikely that renegotiations would result in a lowering of wages.

Currently, funding streams and the complexity and variety of pay and conditions across the ECD workforce actively work against developing the workforce into a more flexible and responsive one. Local government continues to report an ongoing mismatch between the supply of appropriately qualified professionals and the growth in the areas of children's health, care and education.

Leaders in the ECD sector need to be well trained and supported to be able to work across traditional divides as changes to the delivery of services occur. A change management strategy for the existing workforce, parents and the community will be essential in supporting and achieving the goals of the COAG reform agenda.

The MAV has recently undertaken extensive research into the impacts of the universal access reform alone and it is estimated that an additional 600 – 800 full time staff is needed across Victoria for the implementation of fifteen hours of kindergarten<sup>1</sup>. This will rise again when staff/child ratios change to 1:11 in 2016.

In addition with the combined National and Victorian regulatory changes, the changed staff: child ratios for children under three years of age, the demands for workers in these sectors will increase and this will result in overall increased costs to delivering early childhood education and care services.

### **3. Responses to Draft Recommendations and information requests**

#### **Chapter 3 Government involvement in the early childhood development sector**

3.1 The requirement for ECEC regulators to publish all relevant information on service quality needs to be supported through a carefully designed communication strategy and process. The information provided to parents needs to focus on being easily understood and accessible and should be provided and promoted in such a way that will make sense to busy parents looking for ECEC services.

3.2 The MAV also recommends that as well as adequate financial support for disadvantaged and low-income families, there also needs to be adequate funding of the support services they may need to access.

3.3 The MAV supports this recommendation.

3.4 The MAV supports this recommendation.

3.5 The MAV supports this recommendation and would also proffer that a range of options and models for professional management support is developed. Currently the funding streams for coordination of different services and the accompanying reporting requirements make it difficult for those organisations that manage and/or deliver a range of ECEC services to achieve efficiencies and economies of scale in the overall management and coordination of these services. Cluster management could be remodelled to not only cluster like service types, but could also cluster different ECEC services to offer place-based responses. Local government in Victoria is generally well positioned to pilot different models of cluster management.

3.6 The delivery of training to the ECD workforce is done through a range of providers including public, private and not-for-profit. The quality of training delivered as well as the availability is a key issue for the future of the ECD workforce. The complexity of these institutional arrangements on the ECD workforce is such that quality, coordination and responsiveness are impacted which in turn will have an effect on implementation of the COAG agenda. It is not just a question of adequately resourcing the regulators, but ensuring the entire sector can meet the training needs of the ECD workforce.

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<sup>1</sup> MAV Policy Position – Universal Access – 15 hours Kindergarten :June 2010

## Chapter 4 The early childhood education and care workforce

No recommendations have been made to which to respond.

## Chapter 5 The preschool and long day care workforce

### 5.1 The MAV supports the recommendation.

## Chapter 6 The family day care workforce

The MAV continues to support the need for choice for parents with regard to ECEC. Public provision and retention of ECEC services is vital to maintaining affordable and accessible ECEC and family day care is an important service that must remain in the mix. Family day care continues to meet a range of social outcomes that are important to Australian society. To simply state that family day care schemes could decline demonstrates a lack of understanding of how these schemes can meet a range of needs in the community. Family day care inherently builds social capital in communities. It offers women the opportunity to build their own businesses, participate in the workforce and achieve financial independence. Family day care also has the potential to provide the level of specialised care needed by children with developmental delays or diagnosed disabilities such as autism, and it offers an option for care in rural areas when often centre-based care cannot be found.

In the recent National Survey of Early Childhood workforce over 9% of the total workforce was engaged in Family day care. This equates to approximately 12,600 educators.

## Chapter 7 The outside school hours care and occasional care workforces

### 7.1 Occasional care

In Victoria the Occasional Care workforce will be impacted upon by the withdrawal of funding for the Take a Break program by the Victorian State Government on 31 December 2011, and prior to that the Commonwealth Government in 2010. The recent DEEWR National ECEC Workforce Census shows that over 70% of staff who work in occasional care actually have an ECEC or related qualification. Therefore although children may spend a limited time in occasional care, the majority of children are being provided with ECEC from a qualified person.<sup>2</sup>

## Chapter 8 The early childhood education and care workforce for children with additional needs

In Victoria local government has historically played a major role in the Inclusion Support Program. The main challenge has been the deficit in the funding provided by the Commonwealth Government and what it actually costs to employ staff to deliver the targets set.

The Productivity Commission should note that the next tender process by the

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<sup>2</sup> Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2010 National ECEC Workforce Census

Commonwealth Government for the Inclusion Support Service is soon to commence in order to have in place by June 2012 the next set of contractual arrangements. The MAV suggests that the recommendations made by the Productivity Commission in this area be referred to in the developing the Request for Tender process as arguably many services and families would benefit as the current system is inadequately funded, requires onerous administration and reporting, and does not meet the current and increasing needs of families and children.

## Chapter 9 Rural and remote ECD workforce

The MAV supports the recommendations. However, in addition to providing incentives governments will also need to look at new and more flexible models of how ECEC can be delivered in these areas.

## Chapter 10 Training the early childhood education and care workforce

The set of recommendations under this heading are supported and may go some way to alleviate the variability in the quality and duration of training currently offered by providers.

However, there is an urgent need for Commonwealth investment in the development and introduction of new, more flexible training options to meet the proposed workforce targets and to encourage existing staff across Victoria to increase their current level of training and qualifications.

These options could include:

- On-line study opportunities
- Part-time course of study delivered locally to ensure staff in regional and rural locations are not disadvantaged;
- Paid release for on-campus study.
- Flexible timelines to allow the ECD workforce to upgrade qualifications also need to be considered.

## Chapter 11 Planning the ECEC workforce

Changes in population will impact on the demand for ECEC services and hence the workforce. Demand for preschool is likely to increase in all States and Territories due to the increase in the four year old population, which is predicted to grow by almost 30 per cent in high growth areas (WA and Queensland) and up to 10 per cent in other areas: growing in total by approximately 18 per cent across Australia from 2008 to 2020.<sup>3</sup>

In the period 2000 – 2007, Victoria experienced a significant increase in the number of births. For this period there was a net increase of fifteen per cent in the number of birth notifications.<sup>4</sup> Since 2007 births have continued to increase each year by an average of up to ten percent. The impact of this increase in the birth cohort will carry throughout the life span of these individuals<sup>5</sup> which will have a significant impact on

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<sup>3</sup> Preschool education in Australia – ACER December 2009

<sup>4</sup> A preliminary investigation into the recent increase in birth notification in Victoria : Statewide Outcomes for Children Branch: October 2007

<sup>5</sup> A preliminary investigation into the recent increase in birth notification in Victoria : Statewide Outcomes for Children Branch: October 2007



local government service planning and delivery of early childhood services and, as such will impact on the demand for an early childhood development workforce to cope with this unexpected increase in numbers of children.

In addition to the data sources referred to in recommendation 11.2 the MAV would also suggest that access to Birth Notifications would also be an important source of data, particularly when the National Census of Population and Housing data starts to become out-of-date.

## Chapter 12 Child Health workforce

12.2 Scholarships are a real incentive for a course that costs between \$12,000 - \$14,000. The Victorian Government scholarships prioritise to areas of workforce deficit – seen as responding to a need. Local government scholarships are very much utilised to attract nurses to particular councils, as often the difference between a nurse responding is the availability of a scholarship.

12.3 To state that requiring Midwifery qualifications is “an unnecessary obstacle” is not helpful. Rather than delay the arrival of child health nurses entry into the field, it adds an enormous degree of knowledge and expertise to the MCH service. Victoria requires Maternal and Child Health (MCH) nurses to have nursing and midwifery qualifications as well as qualifications in child and family health.

The MAV (representing local government employers who are partners in the funding of MCH services and responsible for the delivery of services) abides with/complies with the Victorian Department and Education and Early Childhood Development Standards requirements for qualifications of MCH professionals.

Foundational undergraduate general nursing studies, leading to nurse registration with AHPRA builds a knowledge base for any future nursing specialty. Post graduate midwifery studies, leading to registered midwife further builds on this foundation through this nursing specialty pertaining to women’s reproductive, pregnancy and child bearing experience, and the postnatal and early infancy period. MCH nurses are thus prepared by extended education to be autonomous practitioners of the profession. This reflects the importance of understanding the antenatal period and the birth process in providing best practice post-natal support to mothers and babies.

The lack of evidence to suggest that training in midwifery leads to better outcomes for children is consistent with an overall lack of Australia and International research examining the outcomes of impacts of child and family health nursing services. Taken alone, it does not provide for sufficient rationale for removing the requirement for midwifery qualifications, particularly given the dual role played by MCH nurses in supporting outcomes for both children and their mothers. Rather it highlights the need for greater investment in quality research on the impacts of child health services to inform future policy. Experience in Victoria shows that the requirement for midwifery has not led to a workforce shortage - with the supply of MCH nurses in Victoria remaining healthy and with a substantial number of midwives enrolling in the child and family courses.

## Chapter 13 Workforce for family support services

The MAV supports the draft recommendations made under this heading.

## Chapter 14 ECD workforce for Indigenous ECEC services

The MAV has no specific comments on these recommendations suffice to say that any recommended improvements to ensure that indigenous children are provided with a quality, culturally appropriate early childhood experience should be paramount for any government.

## Chapter 15 The integrated ECD services workforce

The challenges for achieving an integrated ECD services workforce are complex and multiplicitous, in particular the challenge of defining what an 'integrated' service is makes developing policies, workforce strategies, funding and providing the right level of support for these services difficult. To this, add infrastructure limitations and the cost of refurbishment/renovation of existing stock. In Victoria the very stock that many ECD services operate from can be anywhere up to 80 years old.

As previously stated in our earlier submission, the MAV suggests that consideration be given to the ECD workforce being examined from a national perspective as a more homogenous workforce and that a model for an ECD workforce is developed using the concept of core and universal competencies. The development of these could go some way to addressing the issue of 'an integrated ECD workforce'.

Governments need to look at ways of developing a more integrated ECD workforce other than having people working out of the same building through co-location. The National Quality Reform Agenda offers opportunities for Governments to review how they fund ECEC services and service co-ordination. One example is using a model that looks at place-based governance arrangements for a range of ECEC services within a location. Some councils in Victoria are already developing and implementing more flexible models that make a more efficient use of co-ordination opportunities and all resources including staff. However, the barriers of such things as differing pay and conditions for staff that work in these services, the need for skills in the areas of planning, leadership, collaboration and change management, different funding streams, and developing a range of flexible models that respond to the needs of diverse communities all remain significant challenges for policy makers to address.

The MAV considers that the recommendations made by the Productivity Commission under this heading do not go far enough to address the issue of an integrated ECD services workforce.

A co-ordinated Commonwealth and State funded strategy for the ECD workforce is needed. Current workforce strategies do not appear to adequately address the impacts of reforms at both the State and National level, management of industrial issues, the diversity of the workforce, and expected costs of staffing for local government. A lead strategy of modelling and then linking to workforce targets is needed to ensure more university places are available in Victoria for Early Childhood Educators.

In addition timelines for change should be carefully aligned to maximise positive outcomes and to reduce any duplication of effort with regard to ECD workforce initiatives and planning.

## 4 References

ACER (2009) *Preschool education in Australia*: December 2009

Centre for Community Child Health (2009) *Policy brief No 17 2009 'Integrating services for Young Children and their Families'*

DEECD (2007) *a preliminary investigation into the recent increase in birth notifications in Victoria: Statewide Outcomes for Children Branch*: October 2007

DEECD (2009) *Improving Victoria's Early Childhood Workforce*: November 2009

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2010 *National ECEC Workforce Census*: June 2011

MAV (2010) *Policy Position – Universal Access – 15 hours Kindergarten*: June 2010

MAV (2010) *Retirement Intentions of Local Government Workforce Pilot Study*: August 2010