

## **SUBMISSION FOR PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION**

### **EDUCATION AND TRAINING: EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT WORKFORCE STUDY PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION,**

Email [ecdworkforce@pc.gov.au](mailto:ecdworkforce@pc.gov.au)

#### **Submitted by**

**Individual: Andrea Rowe**

*Please note: My submission contains no material supplied in confidence and can be placed on the commission's website*

#### ***My submission:***

*To the Productivity Commission team,*

*I write to you as a mother of two children, a volunteer President of Tootgarook Pre-School Committee of Management , past Secretary of the Southern Peninsula Toy Lending Library and an active member of my community. I also have past career experience as a regional Victoria communicator for a state government agency, and a background in media and communications. Recently I became aware of a series of draft recommendations and information requests pertaining to the cost effectiveness of child health services and possible changes to Maternal Child and Health nursing services throughout various state and national governments.*

*I write to express my grave concern for the potential removal for the Maternal and Child Health Nurse Role as we now experience it, and beg you as a committee to consider the long-term impact upon communities.*

*Sadly we live in an era of disconnect. Mothers no longer live near family members for crucial support in early years of parenting, face several demands*

*juggling careers and families, and the learned parenting skills our grandparents gained through living in a family environment are no longer as familiar to us. For many first time mothers having babies and stepping out of the workforce which is a known 'community' to many women, means that we often become a foreigner in our own neighbourhood....navigating not just motherhood with all its physical and mental challenges...but also who we are in the community and how to connect with others.*

*For so many women, the Maternal and Child Health Nurse is a critical link to feeling connected and valued, in addition to being a barometer to testing the physical and mental health of both a baby and its parent, and ensuring that their safety and long term health is of paramount importance.*

*Here's an account of my own experience. I moved to the Mornington Peninsula two months before giving birth to my first child. I knew no-one and felt very lonely. Whilst I am an outgoing communicator it was a feeling of extreme isolation, coupled with the challenge of becoming a new mother and being responsible for a small baby for the first time. My Maternal Child and Health Nurse was my lynchpin who connected me with others, checking in on my physical and mental well being, ensuring my child was thriving, and importantly, guiding me to other services and contacts within the community.*

*As my child grew, and developed challenging behavioural issues, my Maternal Nurse provided wise and experienced counsel, forming a bond with me that enabled her to understand my needs and how to direct me towards assistance. Two children and 7 years later this same Maternal and Child Health nursing service provides my family, and many friends families with caring, empathetic advice and guidance in times of need. Here on the Peninsula, there are several Maternal and Child health Nurse centres which have over the years become 'drop in' advice and support centres for parents in times of need. In fact, the Maternal Child and Health nurse organised Mum's groups (which for many parents become a valued legacy of the early check-up process for mums and babies, and continue to connect families long after babies are grown) continually utter the mantra "Have you spoken with the Maternal and Child Health Nurse, what do they say?" in times of trouble!*

*Frankly it is the caring, understanding and experienced staff which make the Maternal Child and Health Nurse service the supportive success it is today. In our community alone, as a leader in several community groups, I can vouch for their input, guidance, referral and support. I am not alone in appreciating just how critical the role of Maternal Child and Health Nurse is to our community. I know that I am one of the many women who had an incredibly satisfying experience as a new mother, however I had moments of great distress and depression like any mother...and I was in the company of many women who did unfortunately experience post natal depression and feelings of inadequacy. Our Maternal Child and Health Nurses threw us life lines in times of need, when families were unable to assist, or specific care and professional skills were required. I worry for my own daughter's future as a mother if we were to remove or alter such a vital role – will we in 30 years be looking at reinstating what we take away?*

*Maternal and Child Health Nurses provide a sense of 'completing the circle' in a community for so many mothers and their children. There is a continuity of care, service and assistance; a sense of connection made with the wider family and an understanding of the background of each case....These all made over a sustained period time through check-up appointments and with keen observational skills that assist a Maternal and Child Health Nurse in alerting and guiding those in need towards relevant support bases and providers.*

*I find it incredibly frustrating that in an era when local and national governments are appointing Community Connection Officers or Community Renew Officers, are spending thousands of dollars on mental health programs and community connection incentives...that a vital role as the Maternal Child and Health Nurse is even under scrutiny. To remove this role in its current form, to replace it with nurses with a lack of midwifery or child health experience or limited experience in community connectivity is an incredible distressing concept to many.*

*These nurses come with a wealth of experience and knowledge...and an understanding and practical application of support services and early childhood*

*education / nurturing services in the wider community. These Maternal Child and Health Nurses also bring their own experience, a network of other esteemed colleagues and a place in the community that sees us connect with them on a continual basis – supermarket shopping, community events, school and pre-school forums etc – they play a vital role in connecting the community.*

*Please do not break this vital and valued link in the chain – as in doing so you will break the hearts of many in the community – and the long term health of our society. Maternal Child and Health Nurses are good for our health!*

*Regards*

*Andrea Rowe*