

ACCS ELECTION DEMANDS 2010

Australian Community Children's Services (ACCS) asks the next Australian Government to commit to quality for early and middle childhood services in a manner which acknowledges and respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the right of all Australian children and families to access quality children's services - by:

1. FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK

The National Quality Framework (NQF) agreed by COAG in December 2009 (details attached) will provide better quality for children attending Australia's children's services by:

- improving the child:staff ratios;
- improving the qualifications of all staff that work with children; and
- increasing the number of qualified early childhood staff for the children's services workforce.

2. AFFORDABILITY

All families, regardless of circumstance, need to be able to afford the cost of attending quality children's services. This can be improved by:

- rolling the Child Care Rebate into the Child Care Benefit as recommended by the Henry Tax Review (details attached)
- increasing Child Care Benefit to meet 90% of child care costs for low income families and 100% for at risk or vulnerable children and families so that these families can afford to access quality children's services
- establishing a nationally consistent system for state and federal subsidies for all children's services which fall under the NQF (including preschools and kindergartens) to ensure affordability for families

3. ADEQUATE SUPPLY

Families, regardless of location, should have access to children's services that meet the community's local needs. This can be done by:

- committing funds to establish or extend a diverse range of community owned not for profit children's services designed to meet local need

4. SOCIAL INCLUSION

Some Australian families are excluded from easy access to the benefits of high quality children's services for a variety of reasons (key high needs groups are outlined in the attachment). This can be changed by:

- providing adequate funds and resources directly to children's services that are both actively working with and reaching out to vulnerable and at risk families;
- allocating and administering this funding through the Child Care Management System

5. WORKFORCE CONDITIONS AND RATE OF PAY

The successful implementation of all these strategies is based on having skilled and qualified people available to work in children's services. Government can assist by:

- supporting improved rates of pay and conditions that recognise the importance of this work

ATTACHMENT

1. The National Quality Framework as agreed by COAG in December 2009

In December 2009 COAG endorsed a wide-ranging package of reforms for early childhood. Below are the details regarding Educator to Child ratios and Educator qualification requirements as outlined in the National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care available on the DEEWR website.

Age group	Educator-to-child ratio	Timeframe for compliance
Birth to 24 months	1:4	1 January 2012
25 to 35 months	1:5	1 January 2016
36 months to school age	1:11	1 January 2016
Mixed age groups	Proportional formula based on the above ratios	1 January 2012

Number of children in attendance (at any one time)	Qualified educator requirements	Timeframe for compliance
Less than 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •50% of educators have (or are actively working towards) a Diploma level ECEC qualification or above (the teacher may be included) * •Other educators have (or are actively working towards) a Certificate III level ECEC qualification (or equivalent) •An early childhood teacher is in attendance for some of the time that the service is being provided to children. 	1 January 2014
25 to 59 children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •50% of educators have (or are actively working towards) a Diploma level ECEC qualification or above (the teacher may be included) * •Other educators have (or are actively working towards) a Certificate III level ECEC qualification (or equivalent) • An early childhood teacher is in attendance at the service whenever the service is being provided to 25 children or more. 	1 January 2014
60 to 80 children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% of educators have (or are actively working towards) a Diploma level ECEC qualification or above (the teacher may be included) * • Other educators have (or are actively working towards) a 	1 January 2014

	<p>Certificate III level ECEC qualification (or equivalent)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An early childhood teacher is in attendance at the service whenever the service is being provided to 25 children or more. • A second early childhood teacher or another suitably qualified leader is in attendance at the service for at least half the time the service is being provided to 60 children or more. 	<p>1 January 2014</p> <p>1 January 2014</p> <p>1 January 2020</p>
over 80 children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% of educators have (or are actively working towards) a Diploma level ECEC qualification or above (the teacher may be included)* • Other educators have (or are actively working towards) a Certificate III level ECEC qualification (or equivalent) • An early childhood teacher is in attendance at the service whenever the service is being provided to 26 children or more. • A second early childhood teacher or another suitably qualified leader is in attendance at the service for at least half the time the service is being provided to 60 to 80 children, and once there are more than 80 children, the teacher needs to be there whenever the service is being provided. 	<p>1 January 2014</p> <p>1 January 2014</p> <p>1 January 2014</p> <p>1 January 2020</p>

2. Henry Tax Review 2010

Recommendation 99: Child Care Benefit and Child Care rebate should be combined into a single payment to parents (or to child care centres) in respect of each child based on a percentage of child care costs. The payment should have the following features:

- a) A high rate of subsidy for low income families that covers most of the costs of child care (up to 90%). This would involve a small co payment for low income families;
- b) A base rate of assistance for all families that use child care to facilitate parental engagement in the workforce. The base rate of assistance should be set as a proportion of child care costs, with reference to the marginal tax rate faced by the majority of taxpayers. (Based on the indicative personal income tax rates scale in Part Two Section A1, this would indicate a rate of assistance of 35%)
- c) Access to the base rate of assistance subject to a requirement that parents participate in work, education or training. Where parents are not participating, the maximum rate of assistance should only be available for a limited number of hours. The number of hours subsidised without a participation requirement should be the same as the number of hours of universal access to pre-school (15 hours by 2013); and

- d) Coverage of the full costs of child care for at-risk children and children facing multiple disadvantages, without participation requirements on parents.

4. Social inclusion

When ACCS refers to vulnerable and at risk families we include;

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- geographically isolated families
- children from culturally diverse backgrounds including refugees
- children known to the child protection system
- children with disabilities and children from families affected by disability and/or chronic illness
- families living in poverty
- children with grandparents as the primary carers

Research¹ shows that the essential factors for engaging these families are:

- good relationships between the parent and the service provider
- shared decision-making
- cultural sensitivity
- non-stigmatising interventions and settings
- minimising the practical or structural barriers to participation (such as cost, transport, availability, awareness of the existence of the service)
- providing crisis help prior to other interventions
- assertive outreach and support to families not yet connected with other families or services
- a mix of 'soft' and 'hard' entry points to the service system
- strong reciprocal links with other relevant services
- a comfortable non-stigmatising and conveniently located venue

All of these factors require an investment of resources; to genuinely engage vulnerable families children's services need to train staff in relationship-based practices, provide outreach to vulnerable families and maintain strong links with other services that these families need.

¹ see Centre for Community Child Health Policy Brief No.18 2010 *Engaging Marginalised and Vulnerable Families*