



Advocating nationally for the right of Australia's children to access quality, not for profit, community owned children's services

ACCS IN ACTION! September 2016

NATIONAL CONVENOR'S UPDATE

ACCS Brings Community Sector Views Into Government Policy Debates

Prue Warrilow, National Convenor

This edition of ACCS In Action! is coming out just in time to bring to the ECA national conference in Darwin so we can showcase our role in bringing the voice of the community sector into the development of government policy for Australia's children.

ACCS is proud of its record of nearly 40 years of advocating for communities, with many highlights including:

- Advising ACECQA to release data comparing quality of community not for profit services with other management types
- Supporting Tasmanian members to oppose the reduction in school starting age
- Supporting WA members to maintain community children's services through the withdrawal of state government support
- Advising the Federal Minister for Education on the devastating impact on vulnerable children of limiting hours of subsidised ECEC in the new Jobs For Families Package
- Conducting the first ever longitudinal survey in Australia on the implementation of significant ECEC reform in the community services sector

We do this through campaigning nationally, at state and territory level and at the grassroots. And

we are active in policy advice at the highest levels. See elsewhere in this newsletter for details of the various groups in which ACCS is active:

- the Ministerial Advisory Council for Childcare and Early Learning, which advises the Federal Minister for Education
- the Senate Inquiry into the Jobs for Families Child Care Package Bill
- the Children's Education and Care Industry Reference Group, which advises the vocational education system on industry needs for skilled educators
- ACECQA stakeholder group
- *Early Learning, Everyone Benefits* campaign committee
- Support for the SNAICC campaign to retain and enhance budget based funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's services

We also showcase the work of ACCS state and territory branches in advocating for good policies at that level. ACCS national executive is actively supporting our branches in maintaining WA Government support for community children's services and opposing the Tasmanian Government's attempts to lower the school starting age in order to get children into formal learning at a younger age.

ACCS AT THE ECA NATIONAL CONFERENCE

ACCS will have a high profile role at the upcoming national conference in Darwin. Our stall in the exhibitors' room will invite delegates to respond to a survey on the damaging impact on vulnerable families of the proposed Jobs for Families Child Care Package; the opportunity to enter the draw for a \$100 voucher from Educational Experience to attract people who may not otherwise have visited our stall.

The stall will be staffed by a roster of volunteers from most states and territories who will be answering questions from delegates, signing up new members on the spot and inviting people to come to a national forum during the lunch break on the Friday.

The national forum will act as a combined national meeting of ACCS members and a public forum for other conference delegates to participate in a lively debate about how the Jobs for Families Package will affect vulnerable families in their services.

ACCS NATIONAL CONVENOR REPRESENTS THE COMMUNITY SECTOR ON THE MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR CHILD CARE AND EARLY LEARNING

Prue Warrilow, ACCS National Convenor

I attended an Early Childhood Ministerial Advisory Council meeting on 13 Sept 2016. As you know Council members have signed confidentiality agreements and cannot talk about the content of the meeting. At the last meeting it was proposed that we issue a communique that could be provided to our constituents with a high level overview on the Council meeting. Please see below.

Significant progress has also been made in the area of FDC compliance. The department provided Members with links to compliance videos produced by Family Day Care NSW and Family Day Care Australia and links to the 7.30 reports:

- [Family Day Care NSW Compliance programme](#)
- [Family Day Care Australia education and support – Compliance](#)
- [7.30 Report 15 August 2016](#) - (Man charged with alleged childcare fraud had been arrested for shopping centre threat)
- [7.30 Report 12 August 2016](#) - (Two men charged with childcare fraud in multi-million-

Also changes to the child care payments made through the determinations below were scheduled

to be tabled in both Houses of Parliament on 14 September 2016:

- *Child Care Benefit (Children in respect of whom no-one is eligible) Amendment Determination 2016* ([F2016L01425](#))
- *Child Care Benefit (Eligibility of Child Care Services for Approval and Continued Approval) Amendment Determination 2016* ([F2016L01426](#))
- *Child Care Benefit (Session of Care) Determination 2016*. ([F2016L01427](#))

Just to give you an indication of the growth of FDC and the potential compliance concerns – in Victoria, in the period from 2011 to now there has been a 303% increase in the number of FDC providers to 391. 87% of these new FDCs are private. This growth has resulted in a 19% increase in compliance monitoring.

89% of all ECEC services in Victoria have been rated with 66% of these improving when they had a second R&A visit. There are only 9 ECEC services that have a Significant Improvement Required and all 9 are FDC. However many FDC services have children as their primary focus and this is evidenced in Victoria with 15% of FDC services having an Exceeding rating - many long standing FDC services are faring very well under NQF as evidenced by high ratings.

Ministerial Advisory Council for Child Care and Early Learning 13 September 2016 Communique

On 13 September 2016, the Ministerial Advisory Council for Child Care and Early Learning held its seventh meeting in Canberra. The Council Co-Chair, Dr Jeff Harmer, welcomed Council members to the meeting on behalf of the Minister.

The Council received an update on the progress of key elements of the *Jobs for Families* Child Care Package, including the reintroduction of the Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (*Jobs for Families* Child Care Package) Bill 2016, into the Australian Parliament on 1 September 2016. This legislation underpins the Package, providing the legislative authority to fully implement the Government's reforms, including the centrepiece of the Package, the new Child Care Subsidy.

An overview was provided of the subordinate legislation (Minister's and Secretary's Rules) that underpins the Bill. These Rules will specify some of the details of how the provisions of the primary legislation will work in practice. Council was

pleased that consultations occurred with the sector in April 2016 on an initial set of eight Rules relating to the Activity Test, Additional Child Care Subsidy definitions and provider approval requirements specifically in relation to Budget Based Funded services, and that Rules have been drafted to reflect feedback received. Discussion occurred about the next set of draft Rules to be consulted on, with the Council providing feedback that this consultation process continues to reflect engagement and collaboration on the development of Rules with the early learning and child care sector.

The Council noted the significant collaboration undertaken through joint effort between the department, the Australian Federal Police and jurisdictions to address compliance and fraud. Strengthening compliance has been a high priority for the Government in 2015-16 and remains a clear focus. The Council acknowledged that the new rules introduced last year to eliminate the abuse of payments through 'child swapping' in the family day care sector is saving taxpayers around \$8 million a week. Overall, the estimated impact of departmental compliance activity in 2015-16 means up to \$421 million was not paid because of action taken against non-compliant services.

Members discussed the Early Learning Engagement Workshops occurring across Australia to assist the development of tangible strategies for mainstream services and non-Indigenous educators to improve the outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in early learning.

Ms Karen Curtis, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) provided an overview of ACECQA in guiding and monitoring the implementation of the National Quality Framework to ensure consistency across all states and territories.

The Council discussed the work being done by Price Waterhouse Coopers and Price Waterhouse Coopers Indigenous Consulting to assist Budget Based Funded (BBF) services to plan for the introduction of the *Jobs for Families* Child Care Package. Members encouraged the Department to focus on more work with mobile BBF services and in-home care services. They provided comments on some of the finer policy design and implementation issues being considered by the Department. Members noted that while grants under the Community Child Care Fund (CCCF) are time-limited, the fund would be ongoing.

The Minister joined the Council for part of the meeting. Members discussed several key issues with the Minister including, the long-term challenges in the early childhood education and care sector; future directions for preschool arrangements in Australia; the passage of the childcare legislation currently before the Parliament; and workforce pressures in respect of recruiting early childhood teachers.

Minister Birmingham responded to questions from Council members and engaged in an open discussion, including ways for Government and the sector to continue their collaborative engagement in providing quality early learning and child care for all Australian children. He thanked members for their advice and honest discussion.

ACCS SUPPORTS SNAICC CAMPAIGN

ACCS wrote to key politicians in the Australian Government to fully support the concerns put forward by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community about the unintended consequences of the *Jobs for Families Child Care Package*.

The *Job For Families Child Care Package* will have a devastating impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children if it is not amended to accommodate the unique funding requirements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led early years services. We called on the Australian Government to act immediately to amend the Package to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children maintain and increase their access to high quality, culturally supportive early childhood education and care (ECEC) services.

Our specific recommendations were:

- An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific program to be incorporated within the Child Care Safety Net to provide recurring three year grants to top up the income to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services to enable them to continue flexible service provision to the most disadvantaged children within their communities
- Provision of at least two full days (24 hours) of subsidised quality early learning to all children to support their development, regardless of their parents' activities
- The Australian Government guarantee that playgroups, mobiles and other unique services supported within the current BBF program, such as youth programs, continue to be funded either through the Community Child Care Fund or another program

ACCS BRANCH UPDATES

ACCS CALLS ON THE SENATE TO INSIST THE JOBS FOR FAMILIES CHILD CARE PACKAGE IS CHANGED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF VULNERABLE CHILDREN

ACCS has called on the Senate to vote against the Jobs for Families Child Care Package Bill in its current form. ACCS recommends to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee to apply the first principle of children's best interests to its review of the Bill.

The full submission can be viewed here:

<http://ausccs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/20160923-Sub.pdf>

ACCS GUIDES VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Brian Newman (ACCS Vic), Chair, Children's Education and Care Industry Reference Committee

I represent Australian Community Children's Services (ACCS) on the committee which is responsible for providing advice on the development and review of VET training packages across the Children's Education and Care sector as well as for Education Support roles in schools. It is important for ACCS to be strongly represented on this body as it means we have a voice in decisions about the content and quality of VET training for our sector.

Our IRC has been charged to respond to the recommendations of the ASQA Review into training for the early childhood workforce. The first part of this project is to find out how well the current training package is working through talking to employers, training providers and VET students. From this work, plans will emerge to strengthen various aspects of the package, including content areas and the assessment requirements. There is particular concern about the duration of training courses offered by some VET providers and we will examine how to provide stronger guidance on nominal length of courses.

Please look out for opportunities to participate in this research as it will help in efforts to ensure that VET training meets the needs of our sector, now and into the future.

Please feel free to contact me at b.newman@unimelb.edu.au if you have any comments or questions about how to improve the quality of training for our sector.

Carewest Influencing WA Government Decisions on Community Child Care

Sally Griffith, Carewest member (ACCS WA branch);
ACCS National Treasurer

In the 2016-2017 state budget the WA Liberal Government announced its withdrawal of maintenance support for 33 non-profit community based early childhood services, to take effect from June 2018. This action has left many community based early childhood services with uncertain futures as they are forced to renegotiate leases with land and building owners.

Concerned by the lack of support from the Dept for Local Government and Communities, (DLGC) Carewest (WA branch of ACCS) members have banded together to negotiate and explore opportunities for resolution.

ACCS delegates met with Honourable Minister Tony Simpson to discuss the issue, he informed Carewest that; child care was not the DLGC core business and it was a conflict of interest for the him to technically be landlord and regulator, the proposal being that the building/land would be vested to the local councils with whom they are currently negotiating transferring the role of landlord.

Moving forward, supported by Carewest, services are involved in negotiation with both the DLGC, local council and building/land owners to find a positive solution for all. In addition a subcommittee has been formed to research and strategise, actively engaging the support of the shadow ministry to challenge the decision and advocate for the rights of children and families to access non-profit community based services.

Campaign To Prevent Lowering Of School Entry Age In Tasmania

Advocacy from ACCS members and others has resulted in a softening of the Tasmanian Government's plans to lower the school entry age.

Tasmanian Government ditches plan to lower compulsory school starting age

By Rosemary Bolger ABC News website 19.8.16

The Tasmanian Government has backed down from a plan to lower the compulsory school starting age by six months.

The plan to lower the age to four-and-a-half years had been criticised by the childcare sector which had predicted dozens of services would close and hundreds of jobs would be lost.

It had also attracted widespread opposition from parents and teachers.

Education Minister Jeremy Rockliff said under draft legislation to be tabled next month, parents would have a choice.

"The compulsory starting age will remain at five years so our children will be required to start school in the prep year at five years old, just as they currently are," Mr Rockliff said.

"But if parents feel their child is ready, they can start six months early at four-and-a-half."

Parents will also have the choice of sending children to kindergarten from the age of three-and-a-half.

Mr Rockliff also revealed that when the change comes into effect in 2020, up to \$4.9 million a year will be spent on extra teacher assistants.

"While I acknowledge that prep year in many schools is predominantly play-based, it can be difficult to enable a play-based curriculum in a classroom with over 18 or 20 students with a single teacher," he said.

'Possibility for three-year age gap in classrooms'

Labor's education spokeswoman Michelle O'Byrne said the move would be confusing for parents and make it more difficult for teachers.

"There are occasions when we have kinder preps, so there's possibly going to be a three-year age difference in one classroom that's not sustainable and it's not what's best for children," she said.

Greens spokeswoman Andrea Dawkins supported giving parents more choice as long as schools were properly

resourced to give the youngest students the attention they needed.

"As a mother, I know that both of my children were ready for school at different times and I think all parents would say that," she said.

Incentive to save on child care by sending kids to kinder

The Early Childcare Association's Lyn Moran said the childcare sector would still lose out even though the younger starting age would no longer be compulsory.

"The information from our members is that 54 centres are at risk of closing because of this," she said.

Ms Moran said parents would be swayed by the sums - it costs about \$5,000 a year for child care compared to \$200 for kindergarten.

"And despite the fact that lots of parents would like their children to stay in an early childhood setting for longer, unfortunately the pressure will be to send them to kinder," she said.

"Our concern is that decision is being made based on cost rather than what is best for children."

Disability needs require attention

Kristen Desmond from the Tasmanian Disability Education Reform Lobby said any changes to the school starting age must cater for students with disabilities.

"It means having more speech therapists, more occupational therapists, more school psychologists in place, as they move through, because your early years are really critical," she said.

"Because if you have a good experience that means you are engaged in learning moving forward."



ACCS NATIONAL MEETING

The annual face-to-face ACCS meeting is scheduled to be held during the ECA National Conference in Darwin in October. The Executive will plan an agenda to enable members to discuss a key policy issue facing the early childhood sector in the wake of the result of the current federal election.

Date: Friday 7 October

Time: lunch break in the ECA national conference program

Venue: Room 4 at the Darwin Convention Centre

If you are attending the conference, come along to participate in the ACCS national policy discussion. Bring a friend – all are welcome.



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