



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

## ACCS IN ACTION! August 2017

### NATIONAL CONVENOR'S UPDATE: ACCS Looks Ahead

Prue Warrilow, National Convenor

ACCS held its annual face-to-face meeting of state and territory delegates in Canberra in June. The meeting enabled us to develop some solid policy positions to put the Government and Opposition, as well as conduct a number of advocacy meetings with politicians and their advisors in all major parties and some of the minor parties. See elsewhere in this edition for further details.

We also held our AGM at which we reviewed our impact over last financial year. At a national level we continue to deliver extremely well for a small voluntary-based organisation. This participation has included:

- Early Childhood Ministerial Advisory Council. The Council has provided an opportunity to have an ACCS voice directly informing the Jobs for Families Package
- Australian Industry Skills Committee with Brian Newman and Kim Bertino bringing their expertise to proactively represent ACCS views in these important forums
- ACECQA - stakeholder forums and individual organisational consultation
- Families Australia that I Chair as ACCS nominee ensuring that the children's services voice is heard in the wider child and family services arena
- Early Learning Everyone Benefits where ACCS was asked to be a participant in the reference group

- responding to a number of ECEC reviews

We developed a strong advocacy platform for the Federal election that headlined the following issues.

- Build a skilled and professional early childhood workforce – no HECS, free TAFE
- No children and their families in detention in Australia or off-shore
- Increase maximum hours of subsidised early childhood education and care (ECEC) for children of non-working parents to 2 days per week or 18 hours per week
- Increase the fee subsidy to 90 per cent of the full costs of ECEC for low income families and 100 per cent of the full costs for children who are at risk or vulnerable

while ensuring that our second order issues were also highlighted as powder vow election platform. These other issues follow.

- Maintain current Priority of Access criteria to ensure access for families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage
- Continue full implementation of National Quality Framework
- Invest in availability – capital grants, low/no interest loans to not-for-profit providers; investment in flexible services (mobiles, occasional care, Aboriginal services);

investment in planning for early and middle years services

- Government paid parental leave

ACCS has a number of key challenges to consider moving forward.

- It is an increasingly competitive advocacy and lobbying market with more paid professionals in this space. How do we make sure that ACCS has a strong voice?
- ACCS needs to be very clear about its point of difference as the only state/territory and national group that represents not-for-profit ECEC services across all service types; no one else represents this service delivery model
- We need to think strategically and cleverly about how we maximise our reach and input to key politicians and bureaucrats
- It is important that we continue to obtain information from the grassroots, from our members and their families and children they work with who are directly impacted by government policies
- We need to work with the Australian Government to help with the successful implementation of the Child Care Package. This Package is a significant change and we want to make sure that it works for services, and children and families

ACCS is so much stronger with the support, assistance and direct input of our members into all the advocacy and lobbying work we do. I thank you all for the hard work and dedication of the state/territory representatives and members who advocate on a daily basis through their work for children to have the right to access high quality, affordable, not-for-profit children's services throughout Australia.

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## **TRENDS IN COMMUNITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES SURVEY – COMING SOON!**

The 4<sup>th</sup> Wave of ACCS *Trends in Community Children's Services Survey (TICCSS)* will be distributed shortly.

Since the introduction of the National Quality Framework in 2012, ACCS has conducted 3 previous waves of TICCSS researching how the community sector have engaged with and implemented the NQF. Previous waves have provided invaluable data which has been used to support ACCS advocacy work on state and national levels for a range of purposes including the review of the National Quality Framework and our responses to the various iterations of the Jobs

for Families Package. The National Reports on previous waves are available on the ACCS website [here](#)

ACCS is pleased to have received funding from the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council to conduct another three waves of TICCSS, from 2017 to 2020. We are also glad to have QUT (Queensland Institute of Technology) on board as a critical friend for TICCSS, for these next waves. Community Child Care Association, the Victorian Branch of ACCS, has been contracted to do this research, with Prue Warrilow from Families At Work, leading the analysis and report writing phases.

Your views and experiences are a vital ingredient for effective advocacy for community children's services around Australia. In this 4<sup>th</sup> wave we would like to hear about your service's experiences with the National Quality Framework, recruitment and retention of staff, ratios, waiting lists, fees and fee increases, and vulnerabilities in your community.

Please keep an eye out for the survey. Completing it and encouraging others to do the same is an easy way you can contribute to advocacy for our sector. Thank you for your ongoing support, we look forward to sharing the results with you later in the year.

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## **ACCS OPPOSES MERGER OF LARGE OSHC PROVIDERS**

ACCS has provided direct comment to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission inquiry into the anti-competitive impact of a proposed merger between Camp Australia and Junior Adventures Group.

We are pleased to see that the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has put out a media release voicing concerns about the proposed merger. They are continuing to investigate this issue so it is not too late to action.

- You can sign the NOSHSA petition opposing the merger [here](#) (the ACCC reference that 1000 people have signed the petition in their statement - let's double that quickly!)
- Visit the ACCC [website](#) to read the Statement of Issues which invites submissions / feedback from interested parties before 25 August
- Follow [NOSHSA](#) and [CCC](#) on Facebook for updates on this issue

## **ACCS NEEDS YOUR IDEAS ON FUNDING FOR UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO EARLY LEARNING IN THE YEAR BEFORE SCHOOL**

ACCS will be seeking the advice of our members on what you believe would be a sustainable model for federal policy to support access to early learning in the year before school.

The Federal Education Minister is seeking our advice on this important question and the ACCS National Executive is working on a survey to collect your good ideas.

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### **EARLY LEARNING EVERYONE BENEFITS**

ACCS is a supporter of the Early Learning Everyone Benefits campaign. The campaign parent survey is open until Friday 18 August – could you all please put out another reminder including the hyperlink to the survey: <https://eca8.typeform.com/to/nRAF9q>

In order to achieve our goals of building public awareness and understanding of the benefits of investing in early learning for Australia's future prosperity, and securing political commitment to increase access to quality programs that amplify children's development, we need to build a strong support base with educators and parents.

The priority this year is to increase the number of supporters signed up to our campaign, and following our Facebook page. Everyone who signs up will receive regular email updates (monthly), and liking the Facebook page means they see our helpful posts in their feed, and hopefully they will 'like', comment on or share them.

The most practical way to support the campaign is for your organisation to PROMOTE IT REGULARLY through your internal channels, to your staff, stakeholders and parents.

ECA has created a regular space for campaign content on its fortnightly Webwatch E-newsletter, which you can to [subscribe](#) to, if you don't already.

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### **ACCS GUIDES VOCATIONAL TRAINING**

ACCS is pleased to announce that our nominee to the Australian Industry and Skills Committee Children's Education and Care Industry Reference Committee (IRC) was successful. Once again Brian Newman will ably represent the interests of

the community children's services sector in this important consultative body.

Below is Brian's first report from the new IRC.

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

As part of the revision of the Training Package, the IRC is establishing Technical Advisory Committees (TAC) to bring professional knowledge to the task. It is expected that the group will meet several times over the next six months, sometimes by telephone conference. There is still room for more people to join the TAC.

The skills needed are a good knowledge of the current training package, an understanding of the early and middle childhood children's services sector, and ideas to contribute to strengthening the quality of the training and education provided for our workforce.

If you would like to contribute to this important job, or have any questions, please contact either Brian Newman ([b.newman@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:b.newman@unimelb.edu.au)) or Melinda Brown ([melinda.brown@skillsiq.com.au](mailto:melinda.brown@skillsiq.com.au)) in the first instance. Ideally it would be great to have enough people to establish a separate Out of School Hours TAC to ensure that we address issues specific to that part of the sector.

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### **Ministerial Advisory Council for Child Care and Early Learning 15 June 2017 Communique**

On 15 June 2017, the Ministerial Advisory Council for Child Care and Early Learning (the Council) held its tenth and final meeting in Canberra. The Council Co-Chair Dr Jeff Harmer welcomed Council members to the meeting on behalf of the Minister.

The focus of the meeting was the implementation of, and transition to, the Australian Government's new child care arrangements, which will commence in full from 2 July 2018.

The Council was briefed on the nationwide information sessions on the new child care system that took place between 25 May and 13 June 2017. These information sessions were aimed at executives and directors of early learning and care services and provided attendees with information on the key changes to the child care system from July 2018. Overall, the sessions were very popular and well received.

Members were advised that the sessions also included information on the Community Child Care Fund (CCCF) Draft Program Guidelines, which were open for public comment throughout the consultation period. The draft guidelines describe how the program will operate, including eligibility, application and assessment processes. Along with the nationwide information sessions, the department ran consultation forums in June 2017 on the draft CCCF restricted non-competitive grant opportunity program guidelines. Members were updated on the feedback that was received as part of this process, as well as next steps for the CCCF.

Council members were briefed on departmental plans to establish an Implementation and Transition Reference Group, and a number of Implementation and Transition Working Groups, to ensure that key stakeholders can continue to provide input on the transition process as well as work with the department to finalise a number of key components of the new child care system.

The Council received an update on communication activities for the new child care system, in particular that there will be wide ranging communication as the Government and the department will be taking a multi-faceted approach. Members were advised that there will be a formal communications campaign designed to provide families and child care providers with key high level information about the new system and to prepare people for implementation.

Members were also briefed on planned communications activities to ensure families and service providers are engaged throughout transition, and have the information they need when they need it, to enable decision making that will assist with a smooth transition to the new arrangements. Members of the Council provided advice to the department on communication channels to reach families and service providers.

The Council received a briefing on the preliminary findings of the evaluation of the Nanny Pilot Programme and review of In Home Care currently being undertaken by the University of Queensland as well as future policy options for care in the family home.

Council members were given an update on the Community Support Program (CSP), which will cease on 30 June 2018. The department has recently issued letters of offer and new funding agreements to eligible services for the 2017-18 financial year. The department has also written to all CSP services to remind them of the cessation

of the program and encouraged them to participate and provide feedback on the CCCF Draft Program Guidelines.

The Council was briefed on the progress of the transition of Budget Based Funded (BBF) services. Members were advised that in May 2017 the Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, wrote to BBF services outlining the key elements of the new child care system, concentrating on the non-competitive grant opportunity that will be available through the CCCF.

Members were also briefed on the progress of the BBF transition consultancies, and were advised that all final baseline reports and transition plans have been provided to services by Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) and PwC Indigenous Consulting. The consultants will also provide support to services to help them manage their transition to the new child care system based on these reports.

The Council was given an update on the new integrated Child Care IT system that will support the implementation of the new child care system from July 2018. Building of the new IT system commenced in January 2017 and it will provide a simpler user interface for services and families, streamline and automate the administration of child care payments and programs, and ensure more effective compliance and minimise fraudulent use of taxpayer funds. The new system will include a Families Portal for families to access public information about the new Child Care Subsidy and assess their eligibility for assistance.

Members were informed that registered third party software will still be needed to access the new IT system and that the department is currently working closely with third party software providers. Members were also informed that the new IT system will include a Provider Portal to access information or apply for approval to operate as a provider under family assistance law. The Provider Portal will not provide the additional functionality that registered third party software includes, such as rostering or financial tools, and is likely to be accessed only by a small number of child care providers.

This Council meeting was the final one before the Council lapses. Deputy Secretary Jackie Wilson thanked Council members and the Co-Chair for the advice and expertise they have contributed to the Council during their tenure and for their ongoing commitment to early learning and child care.

## ACCS BRANCH UPDATES

### South Australia:

The SA Government is reintroducing a planning model. Universal Access funding is available in LDC and preschool. Advisory and reference groups no longer exist or meet infrequently.

The SA ACCS branch has a new committee member and a more diverse membership. We are planning meetings with SA politicians, especially around the Jobs for Families Child Care package and the over-supply of LDC places.

### Western Australia:

There is no Universal Access funding for Long day care centres. Places for 3 to 5 year olds are under utilised and fees are increasing.

With the change of state government to the ALP we were hoping that the decision to withdraw support for services would be reversed; however it appears there is no intention to do this and action will go ahead as previously planned under the Liberal Government.

It is expected that most services will have the building vested to them which means they will be responsible for all maintenance and insurances moving forward. Many of the services are over 30 years old which means there is a high level of upkeep required as well as some considerable outstanding work already; many need approximately \$200,000 spending on them to bring them up to standard. Services in affluent areas which were managed have a healthy utilisation and budget will likely be able to sustain this expense. However we expect there will be some who do not fall into this bracket.

Carewest is currently applying for funding to explore options for a more sustainable community based model to support service sustainability moving forward e.g community hub/administration hub/ cluster management perhaps.

WA is behind in Assessment & Rating assessments and there are issues with consistency and experience.

### Tasmania:

The Education Bill 2016 passed through parliament last year but it included clauses 8 & 9 that called for a review into the social and economic impact of lowering of the school starting age. The proposal is that children can start prep – full time school – at 4 years 6 months and in turn

start Kindergarten (which is part of the school system in Tasmania) at 3 years 6 months.

The Secretary to the Department of Education will present her report to Parliament in September with the results of the review. KPMG won the tender and their review included a survey sent out to all services, including FDC and OSHC state-wide and visits to 52 Centres across the state picked in a random sample. Focus group forums facilitated by Michael White, of MW Consulting to ascertain possible solutions to support the sector should clause 8 & 9 go ahead. (Michael White was formerly Deputy Secretary of Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria. He also held the positions of Director of School Education in Victoria and in the ACT, and Chief Executive Officer of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority.)

The Labor Opposition has stated that lowering the school starting age will not only have a social and economic impact, it will negatively impact the health and well being of the majority of children and if the reason behind the lowering of the school starting age is to give those children experiencing disadvantage a better start the money proposed to support the lowering of the school starting age could be better spend on child and family centres, launching into learning and early intervention programs.

The Green Leaves group is a new private operator with 9 centres open in Australia and 19 in the pipeline, especially in regional areas.

### Victoria:

The Victorian Government is increasing its investment in ECEC under the new Early Childhood Reform Plan. Overall expenditure of \$202.1m includes:

- \$55.3m 'school readiness' funding – needs-based model; will commence in 2019
- \$4.6m for 'quality improvement'
- \$10m for new ECEC services on school sites plus \$60m for 'early years infrastructure'
- \$81.1m for increased MCH and parenting support
- \$5.4m for Koori community support
- \$7.2m for transition to the NDIS

CCC is engaging with the ACCC examination of the impact on competition of the proposed merger of Camp Australia and Junior Adventures Group by owner, private equity firm Bain Capital.

### New South Wales:

The State budget included \$217mill investment for Universal Access including in LDC centres.

NSW Government Child Care Services Planning Paper is addressing over and under supply, and planning mechanisms. NSW Government is also looking at strategies to improve the proportion of children services that are rated at meeting or exceeding NQF.

ACCS NSW Branch is holding policy forums for members and guests; the first one focussed on the Mitchell Institute Report *Quality Early Education for All: Fostering creative, entrepreneurial, resilient and capable learners*.

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## **ACCS Delegates Meet In Canberra June 2017**

Delegates from five state branches met in Canberra in June for a meeting of the ACCS National Council. Over two days, delegates heard from guest speakers from Families Australia and Early Childhood Australia, discussing the role of social policy in advocacy and lobbying work, the National Framework on Child Safety and Wellbeing, positive and negative aspects of the Jobs for Families package and the importance of measuring outcomes including unintended

outcomes, as well as an update on the Early Learning Everyone Benefits campaign.

Delegates prepared discussion points for meetings with Politicians and Advisors at Parliament House and with the Commonwealth Department of Education, especially around the Jobs for Families Child Care Package. The ACCS response to the ALP vision for early childhood education and care was also crafted by the meeting.

On day two, after meetings at Parliament House, the ACCS delegates planned follow up communications to everyone we met with, to focus on what is best for children and provide an overview of our TICCSS research.

## **ACCS AGM**

The 2017 Annual General Meeting was held in Canberra. The reappointed of the National Executive for another year was unanimously approved:

National Convenor: Prue Warrilow (NSW branch)

Deputy National Convenor: Linda Davison (Vic branch)

National Secretary: Kim Bertino (NSW branch)

National Treasurer: Sally Griffiths (WA branch)



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