



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

ACCS IN ACTION! March 2018

NATIONAL CONVENOR'S UPDATE

COMMUNITY OWNED CHILDREN'S SERVICES ADVOCATE FOR THE BEST FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Prue Warrilow, National Convenor

This is the first edition of our newsletter *ACCS In Action!* for six months; but ACCS has not been idle during this time. In fact we have been busy at state/territory and national level, bringing the voice of the community early childhood education and care sector into key policy debates.

Inside this edition you will see a summary of the direct contacts we have maintained with key politicians in the federal parliament - government, opposition and minor parties. We also outline the ACCS input to departmental planning to implement the new Child Care Support package in mid 2018.

Also included in this edition is an invitation to members to contribute to planning for the ACCS policy platform for the next federal election.

We are pleased to announce the imminent launch of the latest report on our ground breaking longitudinal study of how the community sector is embracing the national quality reforms – the *Trends in Community Children's Services* survey.

We continue catch up six monthly with ACECQA, which this allows us to exchange feedback directly with the ACECQA CEO and executive team. We recently wrote to ACECQA about the second early childhood degree qualified teacher stating that the early childhood degree qualified teacher requirement must remain for the second position; it was not appropriate for alternate qualifications to be considered. Would this question be asked to those working in primary or secondary school systems?

TICCSS IS COMING

A special edition of *ACCS In Action!* will come out soon with the results of the fourth wave of the ACCS longitudinal study of how the community children's services sector is responding to the National Quality Reforms.

The *Trends in Community Children's Services Survey* fourth wave report will demonstrate that

community children's services continue to lead the way in:

- ✓ providing quality education and care services for children and families
- ✓ demonstrating a commitment to continuous quality improvement
- ✓ providing wages and conditions above award
- ✓ demonstrating strong support for the National Quality Framework

Thank you to all members who participated in the latest survey. This research gives ACCS a strong base of evidence to support the vital messages we give to policy makers.

ACCS TALKING WITH FEDERAL POLICY MAKERS

ACCS has been very active in the last 6 months corresponding with federal politicians and the Department of Education as your voice in federal policy.

We followed up our face-to-face meeting with the Federal Education Minister last year with letters alerting him to the impact of the cap on Child Care Rebate in the final months of the current child care subsidy system and with our suggestions for how the new data collection system could collect data on the impact of the new Child Care Support package on vulnerable families. This letter and a recent edition of ACCS In Action! including the article outlining our unique contribution was also sent to all the other MPs we met with in the middle of last year.

ACCS wrote to the outgoing Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education and Development thanking her for her leadership you showed in developing and consulting on the Labor Early Childhood Education and Care Future Directions for Australia.

We responded to a letter from the new Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education and Development which acknowledged our contribution to the Labor Future Directions In Early Childhood policy consultation. We complimented her on the insights she has gained in the short time as the Shadow Minister. The list of threads and themes she has gleaned from the consultations to date augers well for a comprehensive and effective Federal Labor policy for the next Federal Election.

We offered our ongoing support for the policy process.

ACCS alerted several MPs to our concerns about the resource implications for small community services in the proposal for provision of detailed sign in and out times in the new Child Care Support package.

The SA branch followed up last year's meeting with the Greens with a meeting with Senator Sarah Hanson-Young in her SA electoral office.

Last but not least, ACCS has made contact with a co-Convenor of the Parliamentary Friends of Early Childhood Group and provided a briefing and information on our Trends in Community Children's Services research. We hope to meet with her soon to discuss making a formal presentation on the latest TICCSS findings to the whole Group later this year.

ACECQA listens to ACCS on qualified Early Childhood Teachers

ACCS responded to the request for feedback from ACECQA on the question of what 'equivalent qualifications' should be accepted for the second qualified Early Childhood Teacher position which becomes mandatory for larger services in 2020. ACECQA responded very positively to the evidence we presented from our members on the importance of this position being filled by Early Childhood Teaching degree qualified educators.

'In particular, I would like to thank you for canvassing the views of your members about their experiences of successfully integrating complimentary, interdisciplinary perspectives into their services, noting that these services retain a large number of degree qualified early childhood educator on staff...'

Gabrielle Sinclair, CEO, ACECQA

ACCC Review Stops Merger Of Big OSHC Providers

ACCS is proud to have contributed evidence to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission inquiry into the proposed merger between Camp Australia and Junior Adventures Group, which would have created a major

domination of the outside school hours services sector.

ACCC advised: *'The ACCS relies on the information provided by industry participants, in addition to information provided by the parties to the transaction, to determine whether acquisitions are likely to substantially lessen competition. We thank you for your time and your willingness to provide us with information that assisted with our review.'*

TICCSS Findings Counter Claims Of 'Excessive Red Tape'

ACCS has responded to the Senate Inquiry into the impact of red tape on childcare, arguing that the community sector is managing the so called burden of the National Quality Framework well.

The latest survey of the sector shows that familiarity with and streamlining of the NQF seems to be having a positive impact on use of time. The survey shows a continuing trend for a decrease in the number of community early childhood education and care services reporting that they have insufficient time to deal with increased paperwork in the administration of the NQF.

ACCS also argues that any costs whether hours or monetary linked to compliance with high quality outcomes are ultimately an investment in the quality of a service in the short term and investment in increased economic and social output in the longer term.

Visit the ACCS [website](#) for details of this and other policy submissions.

Departmental Working Group On Implementation Of Child Care Support Package

Linda Davison, ACCS Deputy National Convenor

ACCS has represented the community ECEC sector on the Department of Education and Training's Implementation and Transition Working Group. This group has met four times since August 2017 to consult with the Department, and provide practical feedback, on a range of issues that relate to sector-wide transition to the new Child Care Subsidy (CCS) package in July 2018.

ACCS has been vocal on a number of issues including the Minister's determination that services

will provide exact attendance data, including sign in and out times for all children every day. ACCS and others on the Working Group raised concerns about this and ACCS wrote to the Minister [[hotlink to letter on ACCS website](#)], DET and other MPs putting the case for additional resources for services that don't currently have kiosk-style sign-in capabilities.

ACCS has also advocated for the new Child Care Subsidy System (which will replace the CCMS from July 2018) to include functionality that will enable the collection of real time data on the actual impact of this new policy, including changes in families' workforce participation and who is missing out as a result of the new activity test.

Currently we have been explaining to DET the practical impact of applying 10% withholding on the new Child Care Subsidy. Currently, 15% of Child Care Rebate is withheld (until the end of financial year reconciliation) from those families who also receive Child Care Benefit. Withholding has been designed to help families minimise unintended debt when their income fluctuates but the effect on families will be much greater under the new Child Care Subsidy, even at the reduced percentage, because withholding will apply to the whole of their subsidy entitlement. The impact will be particularly harsh on low-income families who are receiving the highest level of CCS and whose annual income is less likely to increase sufficiently to have a significant impact on their CCS entitlement. While the amount withheld will ultimately be paid to families after reconciliation, these families are more likely to be budgeting from week to week and less able to absorb increased out-of-pocket costs. Initial calculations suggest that the impact of withholding 10% from families receiving the highest level of CCS will be to increase their weekly fees by more than 55%. DET recognises that this may present a significant impost for some families and so will provide the option to request a withholding amount of less than 10% through the MyGov website. Service providers should be aware that this option is available and be ready to inform families where appropriate. In some cases, families may need support to submit a request for a reduced withholding amount.

Third party software providers have been working closely with DET to ensure that their IT systems will have the required functionality to be fully certified for CCS by the end of May 2018. While the majority of software providers are progressing well towards certification, each provider is

approaching the task differently and some children's services may need to change software providers before the end of June in order to be compliant with the new system. All children's services should be checking with their software providers to find out if they will be ready to implement the new CCS from 2 July. Questions you might ask will be about timelines, functionality, training and ongoing support.

Children's services will receive a parcel post transition package in the coming weeks which will confirm the service details currently held by DET and contain specific information/directions to support timely transition to CCS.

Priority of Access and the New Child Care Package

The Australian Government Priority of Access guidelines are changing under the new Child Care Package that will be effective from 2 July 2018.

As vacancies in a service arise, providers will be asked to prioritise children who are:

- at risk of serious abuse or neglect
- a child of a sole parent who satisfies, or parents who both satisfy, the activity test through paid employment

Services will no longer be asked to give priority to children

- in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- in families which include a person with disability
- families which include an individual whose adjusted taxable income does not exceed the lower income threshold or who are on income support
- in families with a non-English speaking background
- in socially isolated families
- children of single parents.

ACCS has consistently voiced concern about the potential impact of this omission on children and families facing structural disadvantage. Within the two priorities set by the Australian Government services can adopt a local policy that enshrines the rights of these families.

**** Action you can take now ****

Members are urged to review your local service priority of access policy to make sure that it protects the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander families and families experiencing disadvantage, who are no longer assured of priority in the proposed new national guidelines.

PREPARING AN ACCS POLICY PLATFORM FOR THE 2018 FEDERAL ELECTION

The ACCS National Executive is planning for a strategic input to the policy debates in the lead up to the federal election due this year. As a first step the Executive invites members and branches to identify the issues of most importance to the community ECEC sector and what policy proposals that ACCS can put forward to all of the major parties.

ACCS has started to develop our position on the current push for universal access to ECEC for three year olds, which could form part of an election platform. The Executive invites members to read the research report which supports this and other policy proposals:

["Lifting Our Game Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools through early childhood interventions"](#).

Other issues identified so far include:

- What next for the National Quality Framework national partnerships when they end in 2020
- Pay equity for educators

Here is a reminder about the ACCS policy platform for the 2016 election – are these still the key issues in 2018? See the detailed evidence of the social and economic benefits of these proposals [here](#).

HEADLINE ISSUES

1. Increase the fee subsidy to 90 per cent of the full costs of early childhood education and care (ECEC) for low income families and 100 per cent of the full costs for children who are experiencing vulnerability or are at risk
2. All children, including those of non-working parents, are eligible for subsidised ECEC for at least 2 days per week – from a minimum of 18 hours up to 24 hours per week reflecting the operating hours of the service
3. Build a skilled and professional early childhood workforce – no HECS, free TAFE
4. No children and their families in detention in Australia or off shore

ACCS also advocates for:

- Maintenance of the current Priority of Access criteria to ensure access for families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage
- Continuation of the full implementation of National Quality Framework
- Investment in availability – capital grants, low/no interest loans to not-for-profit providers; investment in flexible services (mobiles, occasional care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services); investment in planning for early and middle years services
- Government paid parental leave

ACCS is a partner in the Early Learning Everyone Benefits campaign. Our election issues reflect our commitment to the goals of this campaign. These are:

- To have all Australian children benefit from participating in early learning, particularly vulnerable children who will gain the most
- To have political parties commit to policies that will support 100 per cent of four year olds and 90 per cent of three year olds to attend early learning for at least two days per week, and for younger children to be able to attend as needed by their families
- To change the national conversation on the value of early learning that supporting attendance in early learning today will increase the future prosperity for all of us

Keep an eye out for opportunities to contribute to the ACCS federal election policy platform and advocacy activities as they emerge.

THE QUEST FOR QUALITY GAME

ACECQA has developed a fun resource for services. The Quest for Quality is a trivia-style game developed for educators in education and care services. The game explores the seven quality areas in the revised National Quality Standard (NQS) through sector specific knowledge. The Quest for Quality also facilitates the development of relationships through team building activities and discussion starters. The Quest for Quality was designed as a capacity building tool for educators. It provides educators an opportunity to integrate an element of fun into their professional discussions and critical reflection. It can be adapted for use in a variety of contexts, or to meet the unique needs of your setting. Just like children, adults do not all learn in the same way. The Quest for Quality has been designed to cater for a range of learning styles, and to allow educators at any stage of their education and care career to contribute their wealth of knowledge and experience.

Head to the ACECQA [website](#) for more information about purchasing a full set or to download the free game and instructions. Extension packs will soon be available and will focus on specific areas. These packs can be added to the full set of Quest for Quality knowledge cards. The extension packs focus on: outside school hours care, family day care, environmental sustainability, inclusion and the newly released 24 hour movement guidelines. Keep an eye out for these as they will be available shortly on the ACECQA website to download or purchase.



ACCS NATIONAL MEETING

The ACCS National Council is made up of delegates from all state and territory branches; it meets 2-3 times per year, remotely or face to face. An online meeting was held in November 2017.

The major items of discussion included following up on the visits to federal MPs and Senators in mid 2017, with a new formal planning process in place to ensure the voice of the community sector is heard by key political leaders.

There was an update on the major ACCS research program, Trends In Community Children's Services.

ACCS representatives reported on their advocacy in key forums including:

- ACECQA Qualifications Workforce Forum
- *Early Learning Everyone Benefits* campaign
- Australian Industry and Skills Committee - Children's Education and Care Industry Reference Committee
- Department of Education & Training Working Groups – Child Care Support program Implementation & Transition and Minister's Rules

State and Territory branches gave updates on their activities including the recent forum to forum a Queensland sub-branch of CCC Vic.

The Council planning some activities for 2018, including preparations for the Federal election and development of an ACCS response to the current campaign to extend Universal Access to Early Childhood Education to 3 year olds.

Finally there was a commitment to investigate options to build the capacity of the national operations of ACCS through sustainable resourcing. An options paper will be discussed at the up coming AGM in early 2018.

Contact ACCS

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