



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

# **ACCS IN ACTION!**

## **September 2021**

### **NATIONAL CONVENOR'S UPDATE**

#### **Another Year of Unusual Things**

Prue Warrilow, National Convenor

Since last edition of this newsletter in March this year it has become clear that the disruption of 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic was just the beginning.

Children's services around the country have learnt how to open and close during lockdowns with minimal pain for children, families and staff. We all now know what a 'deep clean' is and those of us who work behind the scenes have learnt to work from home, meet via electronic means and to maintain our profile in policy debates.

ACCS is proud of completing the final TICCS survey and publishing the report in time to provide evidence for our policy platform for the upcoming federal election. ACCS is working on a further report that sets the six TICCSS reports in the context of the policy debates that occurred during the phased roll out of the National Quality Framework.

The National Executive is planning for a national celebration of the remarkable achievements of the TICCSS project, with a travelling roadshow if restrictions allow. Watch out for details of how you can participate.

We have finalised the policy platform for the federal election well before the date of the election is called and are working with other like minded organisations to find common ground and ways to strengthen each others voices. See inside for details of the ACCS policy asks.

In the meantime the ACCS National Council is planning for the future of national operations to ensure that the voice of the community children's services sector continues to be heard in public policy debates.

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#### **TRENDS IN COMMUNITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES SURVEYS COMPLETED!**

ACCS is proud to have completed the eight year longitudinal study of how the community children's services sector participated in the phased roll out of the National Quality Framework.

Thanks to funding from the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council this unique

longitudinal study of the significant reform agenda has provided evidence that improved quality standards are feasible and that the community sector continues to lead.

All of the research reports are accessible on the ACCS website [here](#).



**MEDIA RELEASE 08/09/21**

### **Not-for-profit early learning rates better for children**

As the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to devastate the early education and care sector, not-for-profit (NfP), community-owned services have reported outstanding results in recent national quality benchmarks.

Released this week, the sixth *Trends in Community Children's Services Survey* (TICCSS) of early education and care services reported that 42 per cent of NfP, community-owned services rated as "high quality" compared with just 18 per cent of private providers against the National Quality Framework.

Prue Warrilow, the National Convenor of Australian Community Children's Services (ACCS), says that the survey confirms that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, NfPs have continued to provide "high quality programs for children and families in the face of unprecedented change".

"The operating environment for services has been severely challenged in a range of ways. The biggest impacts were families withdrawing their children due to pandemic anxiety, services' need to waive fees to keep children enrolled and families engaged. Combine these with the debilitating effects on workforce where, during the pandemic peak, more than one-third of service respondents were forced to reduce staff hours and ten per cent had to put staff off," she said.

Over half (54%) worried about children at their service because of the experiences they had in the events of 2020. Most (79%) were worried about children expressing heightened anxiety or stress, half (50%) were worried about children transitioning to school and 44 per cent were worried about children with developmental delays or regression.

TICCSS has reported on the circumstances of NfP

services over the past nine years. This year, the survey also asked about the impacts of COVID-19.

Other key findings showed:

- Not-for-profit services have maintained or improved on their already high quality ratings.
- Not-for-profit services have higher numbers of educators and teachers than legally required. Low ratios and small groups mean every child gets the attention they need, which enhances their safety, development and learning.
- Not-for-profit educators are highly engaged in study to improve their qualifications. Better qualified educators translates to better quality teaching, which boosts children's learning and development, right now and into their school years.

"Overwhelmingly, respondents noted that their top highlight over the past year was that their service had responded to COVID-19 while continuing to meet the needs of children and families," added Ms Warrilow.

"Definitionally, high quality services offer safe, warm, responsive and nurturing environments in which all children can explore and learn. Now, when times are tough, is when we need them the most."

[Read the full report.](#)

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## **ENGAGEMENT WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

### **Correspondence with the Minister**

ACCS wrote to Education Minister Tudge offering support for his stated priority of increasing the participation in early childhood education and care of children experiencing vulnerability. We provided him with evidence from our TICCSS research.

The Minister responded with a welcome statement that the federal Budget for universal access to preschool included funds to enable all children to benefit regardless of preschool setting, a policy that ACCS has long advocated for.

### **Alerts to the Greens**

The Greens continue to ask for ideas from ACCS on questions they can ask in Senate Estimates to improve the transparency and accountability of government decision makers. ACCS has again provided questions probing key unanswered questions about delays in removing the \$10,560 cap for CCS recipients and why the focus of

government policy is on workforce participation with no apparent regard on the benefits to, or the rights of children.

### **Submission to the Review of the National Quality Standards**

ACCS responded to the Review of the NQS with an expression of our strong support for the alignment of the National Quality Framework with the National Child Safe Principles.

ACCS believes that extending the reach of child safe organisation culture as outlined in the National Principles will help amplify the prevention, identification and response to abuse, neglect and/or harm for children as well as amplify and promote the voice and rights of children within our communities.

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### **ACCS FEDERAL ELECTION POLICY PLATFORM**

The ACCS National Council has documented the headline issues it will advocate for in the upcoming federal election:

1. Building a skilled and professional early and middle childhood workforce – pay equity for educators; subsidised fees for upskilling to diploma and degree early childhood qualifications; stronger controls for early childhood courses and quality assurance of providers
2. Confirm on-going commitment to the National Quality Framework to continue building quality standards beyond 2020
3. All children, including those of non-working parents, are eligible for subsidised high quality early childhood education and care for at least 2 days per week
4. Children and families experiencing vulnerability, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, are eligible for at least two days of fully subsidised access per week without going through the Additional Child Care Subsidy processes

ACCS also advocates for:

- All government policy to recognise that learning starts at birth, particularly noting the first 1,000 days from conception to 2 years of age as the most important period of child development
- Funded Universal Access to Early Childhood Education and Care for all 3 and 4 year old children (15 hours per week) in all settings (long day care, family day care, preschool/kindergarten)

- Universal Access funding to continue to be provided under 3 year agreements
- No children and their families in detention in Australia or off-shore
- Policy on Priority of Access to children's services to reflect all national policy frameworks including Closing the Gap, National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children and the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children
- National planning frameworks to be established to regulate growth of Early Childhood Education and Care services in light of changes to Child Care Subsidy in 2021 and expansion of Universal Access funding to all service types

You can raise your voice on behalf of the community children's services sector by distributing the link to the ACCS Election Policy Platform on the website [here](#).

### **Liaison with Thrive By Five Campaign**

ACCS National Executive is aware of the potential for this high profile, well funded campaign to influence the early childhood policies of the next Australian Government.

ACCS is in dialogue with the Campaign and will meet shortly with its key spokesman Jay Weatherill.

In preparation for this meeting ACCS reviewed its policy on free childcare and the advice from our member branches is that we maintain our position that families should contribute within their means to the cost of early childhood education and care and government should ensure that fee subsidies support affordability.

The meeting will focus on the ACCS election policies and this position on free childcare.

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### **ACCS GUIDES VOCATIONAL TRAINING**

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

Following the approval of the new Children's Education and Care Training Package, the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) has extended the transition period until January 2023. This provides additional time for students to complete their qualifications that may have been hindered by the impact of Covid-19 restrictions.

In other exciting developments, Queensland Children's Activities Network (QCAN) has received

approval for a brand new Certificate III in Outside School Hours Care. This supersedes the old Certificate IV which has few enrolments and creates parallel qualifications with Early Childhood Education and Care. Congratulations to QCAN for driving this process and for their commitment to ensure high quality education and training for the important OSHC sector.

The federal government (through the Department of Education, Skills and Employment) is once again restructuring how industry is involved in training package development. The 67 Industry Reference Committees (IRCs) are to be replaced with a smaller number of 'industry clusters', and it is not yet clear where Children's Education and Care will be placed in this new system. It is also unclear as to who will be part of these clusters, with suggestions that they will be government employees rather than broadly representative of sectors.

A Transition Advisory Group has been established to plan transition to the new arrangements, and its membership has finally been made public. Worryingly, it includes AIG, ACCI, Business Council, and the Council of Small Business – all national business lobbies - but only a single representative from the trade union movement. One of the strengths of the current system of IRCs is their members' direct connection with their sectors, and it seems that government is looking only to the business sector for advice, which may not be good for already marginalised sectors like Children's Education and Care. Transition to the new arrangements will be completed next year, and much remains unknown so watch this space!

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## ACCS BRANCH UPDATES

### Carewest Influencing WA Government Decisions on Community Child Care

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

Carewest has had a busy few months. In July Carewest was represented at the Skills Summit hosted by Hon Mark McGowan Premier WA and Hon Sue Ellery Minister for Education and Training to address the workforce skills shortage. Representatives across all sectors including disability services, ECEC, hospitality, health, construction and unions participated in the discussions on these key questions:

- What practical action could be taken to address the WA skills needs over the coming months? and
- What actions could be taken now to avoid future skills shortage?

The entire WA Labor cabinet attended and approximately 150 sector representatives, robust conversations took place with a number of suggestions for action.

As we know the main issue for the broader care sectors are of course pay and working conditions. Unfortunately even prior to COVID the ECEC workforce has been diminishing as demonstrated by the data gathered by ACECQA in the recent consultation of the Workforce Strategy. Unfortunately until pay and working conditions are addressed it is unlikely any incentives will fix the issue.

On August 20<sup>th</sup> Carewest hosted an event with Danny Ford from Kambarang Services. Danny taught us much about the history and culture of Aboriginal people and most importantly how to challenge the stereotypes and the importance of speaking and teaching the truth. Feedback from members was very positive.

Carewest now meets quarterly due to the difficulties for Directors in leave services because of the workforce shortages. Our last meeting was in August and we welcomed Tonia Fahey Senior School Psychologist from the [Triple P](#). Tonia presented Fearless which is an excellent workshop with many strategies to support parents and educators with children experiencing anxiety. This is highly recommended for educator teams and/or families. The Triple P offer a number of 2 and 3 hour workshops which are free and certainly worth exploring.

Carewest will host the next meeting in November with the AGM scheduled for Monday 15<sup>th</sup>.

### ACCS SA Branch Report

Carrie Johnson, Convenor

The year of 2020 - 2021 has continued the learning curve for me as the sector navigated the complexities of a pandemic and the support required for the sector. I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the support, guidance, and advice that I have received from the existing members.

The Executive Committee had 3 long term members stand down as their commitments changed and 3 new members were elected to the executive. The mix of existing and new members

are passionate and dedicated to the sector and bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the discussions.

The key moments for this year have included:

- Invitations to:
  - Participating in meetings with the Department for Education (SA) during the state's lockdowns to raise concerns impacting the Early Childhood Education and Care sector
  - Nominating a candidate for the Teachers Registration Board (TRB); whilst unsuccessful in the application, it is the first time the opportunity has occurred.
  - Participating in meetings with Jay Weatherill, Thrive By Five and subsequent briefing to the ACCS National Executive.
- Provided evidence for:
  - ACCS National for its submission on the Impact of new government transition support package for Early Childhood Education and Care services in the pandemic.
  - ACECQA Stakeholder Reference Group for the development of a Children's Education and Care National Workforce Strategy.
  - "Should ACCS change its policy on free child care?"
- Encouraged ACCS SA members to participate in:
  - TICCS Wave 6 survey
  - National Workforce Strategy survey

I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge each member's knowledge, experience and unique skillsets that are brought and shared openly at the table for the betterment of the Early Childhood Education and Care sector in South Australia.

### CCC (ACCS Vic branch) update

Daniela Kavoukas

The focus in Victoria has been to support services and directors to continue to navigate through the ongoing pandemic. With Victoria hitting over 200 days of lockdown and currently in an extended period with curfews we know services are exhausted and that mental health and the wellbeing of our educators and children is an important topic. Recently we held a webinar for our members that related to children's wellbeing.

We are in weekly (and sometimes more frequent) meetings with both the state and commonwealth to ensure that supports can be put in place for services around financial strains and also best practice to guides through these uncertain times.

From January next year all kindergarten programs will be able to offer 5 hours of funded kindergarten for our 3 year old children. This is the next stage in the roll out across Victoria that has taken place over the last few years. Over the coming years up until 2029 services will increase their kindergarten offering for 3 year olds to up to 15 hours per week. To support families in understanding that kindergarten can take place in a variety of service types, DET have released a 'Kinder Tick' initiative earlier this year that enables families to see from outside the service those which are offering kindergarten.



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