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Child Australia calls for a re-think about accessibility to childcare and greater recognition of sector workforce post COVID-19

Child Australia is calling on the Federal Government to consider amendments to childcare accessibility to help support families in genuine need, as Australians face ongoing economic hardship in the wake of COVID-19.

The Federal Government announced yesterday that the Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package will end on 12 July 2020. This means the end of free childcare and a return to the fee-incurring Child Care Subsidy. Transition changes includes a relaxed activity test that will benefit families who have been impacted by COVID-19 by unemployment or reduced income. This is however only a temporary measure until October 2020.

Child Australia's CEO Ms Tina Holtom said, "Essentially this applies to those who have lost hours of work or employment since COVID-19 and we are concerned that these time-limited transition measures are not sufficient. There are no guarantees that these families will be able to pay fees from October and we think this timeframe should be extended for at least 12 months."

For families that have had ongoing hardship, irrespective of COVID-19, the story around accessing childcare is even more complex. The only path available to families in need is the Additional Child Care Subsidy, and no changes to it were announced yesterday by the government.

"Again, we believe this is a missed opportunity to help support families in genuine need. This is a difficult system to navigate and some relaxing of rules around the Additional Child Care Subsidy would have encouraged more families to keep their child connected to their early learning setting. While the focus from Federal Government has been on using the childcare sector as a foundation for economic recovery, we are more concerned with having children engaged in supported, high quality learning environments that are safe, nurturing and free from some of the stressors they could be experiencing at home." Detailed information about the Subsidy [here](#).

Ms Holtom believes that the lack of changes does not preclude the sector from advancing conversations around the need for broader change – for universal access to high quality early learning experiences for all children. Especially for children from vulnerable, disadvantaged backgrounds who arguably need it most.

"The sector has taken a hit in many different ways and we now need to consolidate and move forward. One of the key areas of concern we face in coming months will be in providing a high quality workforce as many educators have become disenchanted and left the sector in the last few months. Educators were literally "left holding the baby", in the face of a pandemic with very little acknowledgement of their own fears, concerns and anxieties around COVID-19". Across the country, childcare providers are concerned with workforce issues, highlighting that critical shortages of qualified staff are imminent.

"We need to change the narrative around our sector professionals from that of 'babysitting' to one that highlights the critical importance of the role. These professionals are responsible for a child's wellbeing, learning and development and we must invest in our Educators to ensure a highly skilled workforce.

"While it will take time to convince Government that we need a new, equitable childcare funding system, we can certainly start with recognising and investing in our professionals. There are numerous research reports linking the quality of educators to improved outcomes for children. Our focus should be on the benefits to children, not just ensuring we have a holding space while other 'more professional' professionals go off to work, Ms Holtom said.
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Established in 1987 Child Australia is a not for profit organisation and a leading provider of professional development and support for the education sector in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Child Australia's purpose is to develop the capacity of professionals working with children, families, and the community to support children's wellbeing, learning and development. More information at www.childaustralia.org.au

enriching children's lives

Details about the Relief package changes: <https://www.dese.gov.au/covid-19/childcare/childcare-faq>

Research Reports:

Educator Quality linked to outcomes for children

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/LiftingOurGame.PDF>

The relationship between teacher qualification and the quality of the early childhood education and care environment

<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-02/ECG-Manning-Teacher-qualifications.pdf>

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