

Call for childcare industry shakeup [AU] ^[1]

Author: Bitá, Natasha

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

Childcare benefits for parents should be abolished and the money given instead to centres with the highest standards, the nation's commissioners for children have said in an attack on profit-driven daycare operations.

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The commissioners - government watchdogs responsible for children's rights and guardianship from NSW, Queensland, Tasmania, Western Australia and the ACT - are calling for a shakeup of the childcare sector.

"Current policy on early childhood education and care does not go far enough to place children at the core of services," their submission to the Senate inquiry states.

"Providing subsidies directly to parents has not contributed to an increase in standards and has possibly caused a lack of balance between private and community providers. Direct grants to providers could link to staff ratios and qualification levels, giving providers a financial incentive to increase quality levels."

The commissioners criticise the profit-based industry model that fuelled the growth of corporate childcare chains such as ABC Learning, which collapsed into receivership last year. And they note that 70 per cent of childcare centres are privately owned.

"The complexity and relationship-based nature of early childhood care and education services means these cannot be managed in the same market-based way as other commercial industries," the submission says.

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The submission calls on the Rudd Government to introduce paid parental leave to make it easier for mothers to care for their babies at home until their first birthday.

For infants in care, it says, the ideal ratio of staff to children is one carer for every two children younger than two, "but at least 1-3".

However, the ratio for under-twos is one carer for every five infants in NSW, South Australia, the ACT, Victoria and the Northern Territory.

Victoria and NSW have announced plans to switch to the 1-4 ratio used in Queensland, in a change that federal Parliamentary Secretary for Childcare Maxine McKew has calculated will cost \$1 a day per child.

The Senate inquiry into childcare - pushed through by the Greens following the collapse of ABC Learning - coincides with a national review of childcare standards by the federal, state and territory governments.

The submission says all staff working with children should have formal training, with university-qualified early childhood teachers hired to oversee children's programs.

Risk-taking in adolescence, mid-life health problems and adult brainpower all have their roots in early childhood experiences, the submission states.

"Solid investment in the early years is likely to have the most beneficial impact on the wellbeing of Australia's population and productivity in the future."

- reprinted from The Australian

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[2]

Tags: quality ^[3]

privatization ^[4]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/09/02/call-childcare-industry-shakeup-au> [2]
<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/australia-and-new-zealand> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/quality> [4]
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