

Western Sydney's childcare 'desert' locks women out of the workforce. Universal childcare could be a game-changer ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

Excerpts

Momentum is growing for the Australian government to provide universal early childhood education and care – free or very-low-cost childcare for all families.

Access to quality, affordable childcare can help parents join or remain in the workforce – particularly women, who still perform the majority of unpaid household work.

Our recent report examined women's labour force participation in Western Sydney, Australia's third-largest economy.

A lack of accessible and affordable early childhood education and care services makes most of the region a childcare "desert" and contributes to lower labour force participation rates for women – 65% in Western Sydney compared to 76% in the rest of the city.

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Our research shows a deep spatial divide across Sydney in employment patterns, unpaid care responsibilities and income levels, despite women in the city's west gaining tertiary qualifications at rapid rates.

Full-time working women in Western Sydney earn about A\$20,000 less per year than those in other parts of the city.

The prevalence of relatively low-paying, feminised jobs in Western Sydney, compared to higher-paying professional roles in central and eastern Sydney, plays a significant role in this gap.

There is also a significant gender pay gap within Western Sydney itself. Women earn around \$12,670 less annually than men in the same region, and have lower participation rates. This is partly due to a gender divide across work types and industries, and gender differences in career progression.

But women also bear the brunt of unpaid care responsibilities, such as childcare, caring for elders and household management. This unpaid, and often undervalued, care work is crucial for society, but it only adds to the pay gaps across geography and gender.

Western Sydney's childcare 'desert'

Where families live can have a huge impact on their access to quality employment and childcare.

Most of Western Sydney is considered a childcare "desert" – an area where there are more than three children aged four and under for each place available in childcare.

In economically marginalised areas, the privatised system of childcare isn't meeting families' needs. Research has found the care systems currently on offer do not match the realities of work and family life in Western Sydney.

Our research has found that on average, women in Western Sydney take on more unpaid childcare responsibilities than women in the rest of Sydney, regardless of whether or not they are also employed.

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Related link: Lack of licensed care creates daycare 'deserts' across Canada ^[3]

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[4]

Tags: access ^[5]

care work ^[6]

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Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/24/07/western-sydney%E2%80%99s-childcare-%E2%80%98desert%E2%80%99-locks-women-out> [2] <https://theconversation.com/western-sydneys-childcare-desert-locks-women-out-of-the-workforce-universal-childcare-could-be-a-game-changer-233446> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/18/06/lack-licensed-care-creates-daycare-deserts-across-canada> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/australia-and-new-zealand> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/access> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9065> [7] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/gender-equality>