

Poorer families 'miss out' on childcare [AU] ^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

Low income parents may miss out on much-needed childcare places as providers chase profits in high-income areas, welfare advocates are warning.

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In a move Labor has labelled a con, [the government] will allow anyone wanting to run these services to set up anywhere they like, removing the government's control over where places are allocated and when.

But if providers take up the offer they are likely to follow the "map of profitability", leaving poor communities without services, the Catholic welfare agency says.

"We don't want the placements to follow the profitability map," Catholic Social Services Australia executive director Frank Quinlan said.

"We think that's a significant risk."

...

Parents have weathered a five per cent hike in childcare fees in the first three months of 2006 alone - more than five times the inflation rate for most other goods and services.

Labor says the 25,000 places the government hopes to create with its budget announcement will never be delivered and ignores the 100,000 places in outside-school hours and family day care that already exist, but sit unused.

...

Prime Minister John Howard, dogged by complaints over childcare even from within his own party, has defended the government's measures.

"What we have done is create a situation where childcare now becomes demand-driven," he told ABC radio.

"There is no limit to (the number of) places that we will fund."

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) says the government should urgently establish a national demand model to map areas of high demand and short supply.

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The government acknowledges there are "hot spots of under-supply" and plans to establish a childcare management system and expand the childcare access hotline.

From July, parents will be able to ring the hotline to find out where vacancies exist in their local area.

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- reprinted from The Age

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[2]

Tags: privatization ^[3]

demand ^[4]

availability ^[5]

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/06/05/poorer-families-miss-out-childcare-au> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/australia-and-new-zealand> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/privatization> [4]

