

Child care fees soar - if you can find it ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The cost of child care is increasing at five times the rate of inflation as the demand for places grows.

And more parents are putting their children into care for longer hours, says a Federal Government survey released yesterday.

While the number of places is growing, demand still outstrips supply, particularly in inner-city areas where parents routinely wait for two or three years before finding a place.

People are also being pushed into using privately run centres rather than community centres, with the number of private long-day-care centres increasing at a much higher rate than community ones.

Parents are paying more, with the average weekly fee paid by those using private long-day-care centres now \$208, up from \$184 just two years ago.

People using community-run centres have also been hit with price rises - the average weekly cost jumping from \$188 to \$211.

Although the Government has boosted funding for care, demand far outstrips the number of places. Waiting lists of two or three years are common in areas of greatest demand, such as Sydney's eastern and inner western suburbs.

The Opposition spokeswoman on child care, Tanya Plibersek, said the Government needed to release data showing where shortages were most acute.

"With the increasing casualisation of the workforce, and the Government forcing sole parents into paid work at any hour of the day or night, there are likely to be many parents who don't have child care when they need it," she said.

The Minister for Family Services, Kay Patterson, said the figures showed there were more places available and more qualified staff.

- reprinted from the Sydney Morning Herald

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