

Child care crisis [AU] ^[1]

Author: McNerney, Paul

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

ILLAWARRA working couples are being warned to register at child-care centres before they attempt to conceive a baby or risk missing out on a long day care place.

Some, like the Western Suburbs Child care Centre at Cordeaux Heights with 200 names already on its waiting list, have stopped taking names because staff didn't want to falsely raise expectations of desperate parents. Waiting periods of up to two years are not uncommon with some mothers delaying a return to the workplace or being forced to quit and stay home.

"This is a crisis of major proportions that is having a dramatic effect on parents and their extended families," Illawarra Children Service general manager Mohan Gunasekara said yesterday.

ICS, a non-profit community organisation, operates 10 child-care centres between Helensburgh and Kiama.

Yesterday, Labor's federal spokeswoman on children and youth Senator Jacinta Collins visited Wollongong to discuss the crisis with parents, industry operators and child care experts.

Sen Collins said the \$16.3million extra funding allocated by the Government in its May Budget would do nothing to alleviate the problems associated with long day care.

"They have funded additional child care places but they are all outside normal school hours. It is difficult to quantify just how many ... places are needed nationally, but the last waiting lists have doubled since the last census," Sen Collins said.

- reprinted from Illawarra Mercury

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