

Australian Council of Trade Unions calls for free child care [AU] ^[1]

Author: Potter, David

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

A radical proposal calling for federal and state governments to commit to 15 hours of free child care a week by 2010, for workers earning less than \$100,000, is being proposed by the peak union group.

The draft policy, which will be debated at next month's Australian Council of Trade Unions congress, caps costs at 15 per cent of the weekly wage beyond the 15-hour threshold.

The scheme would be based on a standard childcare fee of \$50 a day indexed in line with the cost of living.

ACTU president Sharan Burrow said "woeful" government funding was jeopardising childcare quality, with Australia ranked 26th out of 28 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries.

Bureau of Statistics data showed an estimated 174,500 Australian children missed out on childcare placements last year.

"The funding hole is filled by 'for profit' childcare services," Ms Burrow said.

"How can we be sure that quality of care is not being compromised in the pursuit of profit?"

The Federal Government has consigned to the 'too hard basket' the maternity leave issue being pushed by unions and Sex Discrimination Commissioner Pru Goward, but the ACTU believes a raft of measures, including the new childcare proposal, is necessary to recalibrate work and family life in Australia.

Ms Burrow said the importance of child care was emphasised by many women who when they reached the end of maternity leave & usually unpaid & were forced to return fulltime to their previous jobs or quit.

The most recent statistics reveal 70 per cent of women of child-bearing age work, 62 per cent of couples with children work, 50 per cent of all single mothers are in the workforce, 54 per cent of mothers return to work before their child's second birthday and 36 per cent of mothers return to work before their child is 12 months old.

Casual and part-time jobs are mostly taken by women and 40 per cent of working mothers have no leave entitlements.

ABS figures for last year showed childcare costs for families increased by 17 per cent with an average CPI increase of 3.4 per cent.

It has been estimated a family with two parents working fulltime with one child in care faces a net childcare cost of \$182 a week.

"Stringent and enforceable accountability of childcare services is important," Ms Burrow said.

"Parents must be assured that quality childcare services will be provided irrespective of whether centres are required to produce a profit for shareholders or not.

"The main factor in the quality of child care is staff.

"Well-qualified and well-paid staff are capable of providing high-quality child care and education opportunities but extremely poor pay is driving qualified workers out of the sector."

-Reprinted from The Herald Sun

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[2]

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