

Child-care workers warn Labor, Coalition on wages ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

A consortium of more than 130 child-care providers has warned Kevin Rudd and Tony Abbott that child-care prices will rise and the quality of services suffer unless more government funding is made available to boost the wages of child-care workers.

A letter to the two leaders - signed by peak bodies, major child-care chains and small child-care centres - says the low wages are impeding the sector.

Some qualified educators are being paid the same wage as fast-food workers and, as a result, about 180 workers are leaving the sector each week.

"This continued disruption does not create the continuity of care children need to thrive and learn," the letter says.

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"There are already one million Australian children in early learning services. They deserve better."

The letter calls on both major parties to provide more details on their plans for child care before next week's election.

The government recently introduced a \$300 million "Early Years Quality Fund" to increase wages in the sector but it will only benefit about 40 per cent of child-care workers and it ends in mid-2015. Neither party has committed to extending this fund.

The letter from child-care providers says federal support for the wages of child-care workers "needs to go further" or consumers will pay more.

United Voice, the trade union representing child-care workers, has lodged an application with the Fair Work Commission to raise the wages of many child-care workers.

"Without a commitment from the Federal Government, parents - the people least able to bear this burden - will have to pay the increased costs of professional wages once the decision is handed down," the letter says.

The opposition spokeswoman on child care, Sussan Ley, said the Coalition supported the Fair Work Commission making a decision on what the salary for child-care workers should be.

"We look forward to the outcome of the current case before the Fair Work Commission on child-care worker wages," she said.

United Voice has criticised the Coalition for not supporting the \$300 million Early Years Quality Fund and refusing to promise any extension to it.

"There is a very real risk that child-care quality and affordability for parents could be casualties of the 2013 election," said the national president of United Voice, Michael Crosby.

-reprinted from the Brisbane Times

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