

# Productivity Commission childcare hearings likely to pit nanny against centre <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Browne, Rachel & Miletic, Daniella

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## EXCERPTS:

A proposal to provide government rebates for families who employ nannies would drive up the cost of childcare and cause greater disruption in a sector already beset by high staff turnover.

As the Productivity Commission prepares to hold public hearings and take submissions as part of a year-long inquiry into childcare, experts have responded cautiously to the suggestion that Australia should follow New Zealand's lead in providing a government subsidy for nannies.

In Australia, only families who live in remote areas, have children with disabilities or multiple pre-school aged children can apply for a nanny rebate, for which only 7000 families qualify.

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The Australian Nanny Association is pushing for an extension of the nanny rebate. President Danielle Robertson said it would mean many parents could return to work.

"There is a demand for flexibility," she said. "People are working longer shifts. Not everyone starts work at 9am and finishes at 5pm.

"The lack of childcare options is excluding a large group of people from the workforce and that is affecting the economy and productivity."

According to figures from the Coalition, more than 110,000 Australian parents say they cannot pursue employment opportunities because they cannot find suitable or affordable childcare.

Childcare Alliance Australia president Gwynn Bridge said applying a rebate to nannies was not the answer to affordable care.

"In-home care is the most expensive form of government-subsidised care," she said.

"We are worried about potential to extend such an expensive care model. Where is the additional funding coming from? It's the same bucket of government funding. Our concern would be that families would have to foot the bill through higher fees. We know that families are already struggling."

She also questioned the qualifications of private nannies, saying many did not have the same level of training as those working in centre-based care or family daycare.

"We cannot endorse another sector which requires fewer qualifications and less experience with children than what is expected by the formal sector," she said. "We can't water down what is offered to children now."

The Australian Nanny Association supports the introduction of a formal accreditation system for nannies to recognise the increasing professionalism of the industry.

United Voice national secretary Louise Tarrant said a nanny rebate might make it hard for centres to recruit and retain staff.

"It is desperately difficult to hold on to qualified staff in the long daycare and out of hours school care sectors," she said.

With no family in Sydney and a husband who travels for work, British-born personal trainer Francesca Marigonda had no choice but to employ nannies to help her with her two children, aged 15 months and 2½.

The Clovelly mother said her work hours were "not child-friendly".

She employs a nanny for four half-days a week and would welcome a rebate.

"It does sound like a bit of a luxury but, to be honest, we don't really have much choice," she said.

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