

Childcare vacancies increase in Australia's richest suburbs ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Parents in some of Australia's richest suburbs are benefiting from a spike in the number of childcare vacancies, with centre places growing at twice rate of the population of newborns to four-year-olds.

But mums and dads living in the country's poorer pockets are unlikely to see much relief from the childcare availability crisis, with coveted new places now two-and-a-half times more likely to be created in well-heeled suburbs.

The problem is most pronounced in NSW where more than 40 per cent of childcare spots created since July 1 are clustered in areas where the top 20 per cent of income earners live, while just 11 per cent have opened in the most socially disadvantaged parts of the state.

The problem is equally stark in the Northern Territory where 130 of the 157 new childcare places created since July 1 are located in areas where the top 20 per cent of income earners live.

Yet Queensland is bucking this national trend with 25 per cent of the childcare places created since July 1, opening in the most socially disadvantaged areas, compared with just 18 per cent of new spots being created in suburbs where the top 20 per cent of income earners live.

In South Australia, almost 70 per cent of the childcare places created since July are located in middle and lower income areas.

In Tasmania more than 70 per cent of new childcare spots opening in the most socially disadvantaged areas of the state.

In contrast, in Victoria 25 per cent of new childcare spots created since July 1 last year are in suburbs where the top 20 per cent of income earners live, with just 8 per cent of new places opening in the most socially disadvantaged parts of the state.

Since July 1, 324 new childcare centres have opened across the country, creating an additional 20,108 spots for children. This represents a growth in childcare places of about 4 per cent, more than double the current population growth figures for newborns to four year olds.

But more than a third of all centres which have open up across the country in the year to date have been in the richest suburbs, prompting Australia's largest childcare provider to call on the government to invest more in childcare in areas where the market is failing mums and dads.

Goodstart Early Learning chief executive Julia Davison said there was, "an urgent need for increased public investment to ensure families in low income and disadvantaged communities are able to access quality, affordable care".

"We need more centres and better quality programs opened in the right places to support the families that need it," Ms Davison said.

Australian Childcare Alliance president Gwynn Bridge agreed there was a problem with the lack of planning and monitoring of where new child care spots were being established.

"It is incredulous that such a vital sector dealing with the future of Australia's children is permitted to grow on a developer-determined basis," Ms Bridge said.

"This often means that new services are constructed where land is less expensive and readily available and where there may already be oversupply."

Federal Assistant Minister for Education Sussan Ley said programs already exist to encourage new childcare centres to open in areas where they might not otherwise be viable, and in disadvantaged, regional, remote or rural communities.

But she said the issue would be further explored by the Productivity Commission.

"This is not so much about new centres being built in wealthy areas at the expense of other communities, but ensuring all communities get high quality access to affordable and flexible care, and that's exactly what this Productivity Commission Inquiry is doing," Ms Ley said.

"We know demand is high in inner-city suburbs because many people who work in our cities look for child care close to where they work, rather than where they live," she said.

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Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[2]

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