

100,000 vulnerable at risk of losing childcare spots ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Almost 100,000 youngsters from low-income families could be forced out of childcare if their eligibility for federal government subsidies is restricted under recommendations put forward by the Productivity Commission's inquiry into the early childhood sector.

Non-profit childcare giant Goodstart Early Learning has raised concerns that a significant number of disadvantaged families might have to remove their children from care as will not meet tightened work, study or training activity requirements which allow them to claim a subsidy.

The federal government's Education Budget Portfolio statement for 2014-15 shows that 97,000 families claim the child care benefit only, with the majority of them not working or on low incomes.

In a submission to the first NSW public hearings into the Productivity Commission's draft report into childcare, the director of Goodstart Early Learning in Taree, Margaret Brien, expressed grave worry for disadvantaged children under the recommendations.

"Most of the children at my centre are starting out life facing some particular challenges or vulnerabilities," she said at a public hearing in Port Macquarie on Monday.

"My worry is if your recommendations proceed as you have recommended, it will become harder not easier to given them and their families the support that they need."

Ms Brien told the hearing that some children in her centre's care suffered generational poverty and came from traumatic backgrounds.

Case workers from the Department of Family and Community Services have told her that some "children are only ever safe when they are with us".

"I feel passionate about providing quality education and care to all children, and fear that the changes that you are proposing will greatly disadvantage the most vulnerable people in our community - children," she said.

About 27,000 families receive the Special Child Care Benefit, including 13,700 for reasons of financial hardship. The Productivity Commission's draft report recommends the financial hardship category be removed.

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