

Child care cost, availability hurting economy as mothers forego work; Government acknowledges crisis ahead of key report [AU]

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EXCERPTS

The Federal Government is considering changes to the sector, which could include subsidising alternatives to childcare centres, such as nannies.

In the meantime, families who need two incomes to get by are relying on a patchwork of temporary solutions.

Shae Clavaerie used to work as a bookkeeper. Now, instead of wrestling with figures, she wrangles children.

"When I had my third child it was pointless for me to go to work and pay three childcare fees, so I had to think outside the square," she told 7.30 in her house full of pre-schoolers.

She now runs a family day care centre on Sydney's northern beaches, looking after four kids at once - just one of them hers.

She is one of 25,000 Australians who run family day care centres from their homes.

"I think family day care's just a lot more personal and for the children that are so young it's still a home environment," she said.

"There's only a few of them, it's not a million kids and it just builds them up with confidence before they hit the child care, kindies, or long day cares, wherever they decide to go.

"So I think it's a nice stepping stone for them. I really believe in family day care and I really believe in child care full stop."

Sector in 'crisis' amid \$5.5bn cost to economy

For many parents, believing in child care is easier than finding it, something Assistant Minister for Education Sussan Ley acknowledges.

"Families tell me there's a crisis," she said. "Centre directors tell me there's a crisis."

The crisis is that there are too few child care places and the child care that is available suits only part-time workers.

So the Government commissioned a mammoth review of child care by the Productivity Commission, which will deliver its final report next month.

One of the Government's aims is to get more women back into the workforce.

"While we miss out on women's participation in workforce we miss out on their talent, their ingenuity, the contribution they make, the investment we in this country made in training," Ms Ley said.

"For every year they stay out [of the workforce], the economy loses billions for that group not participating."

It has been estimated that \$5.5 billion is lost to the economy each year because parents who want to work cannot.

Professor of employment relations at the University of Sydney Marian Baird said without a better childcare system, the economy is missing out on some of its best workers: highly educated women in their early 30s.

"All our research indicates those women turn out to be very good mothers but also highly committed workers," Professor Baird said.

"The hardest years are the pre-school years. That's where tension is and that's why we need to support the childcare system."

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Region: Australia and New Zealand [3]

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/10/child-care-cost-availability-hurting-economy-mothers-forego-work> [2]
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-09-30/childcare-costing-economy-as-mothers-forego-work/5751524> [3]
<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/australia-and-new-zealand> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8142>