

Early childhood flexibility practices and patterns: Report 2014^[1]

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Source: Early Childhood Australia

Format: Report

Publication Date: 16 Dec 2014

AVAILABILITY

Full report in PDF^[2]

Executive summary:

The Early childhood flexibility practices and patterns report highlights recommendations and future directions for early childhood education and care (ECEC) services in providing flexible arrangements for families and local communities.

The Report was informed through sector surveys, interviews with early childhood services and a Reference Group of sector leaders. Children's interests are a paramount consideration when considering flexible practice. The stability, quality, and intensity of early childhood services are all relevant when considering children's interests, as well as children's wishes. Children may also benefit from flexibility in some circumstances. Putting children's interests into practice may include considering children's rights and identifying and treating risks associated with flexible approaches.

Flexibility in early childhood services also should be placed in the context of family flexibility and workplace flexibility which also contribute to parents' workforce participation. In this Report, the approach to flexibility in early childhood services has been broad, and includes both workforce participation objectives as well as the broader needs of the family. Models of flexible practice include not only extended operating hours but flexible location, flexible sessions and enrolment patterns as well as early childhood services offering a broader set of family support services and partnerships.

There are links between flexible practices and the National Quality Standard (NQS), including Collaborative partnerships with families and communities (NQS Area 6), Relationships with children (NQS Area 5) and Leadership and service management (NQS Area 7). These links provide cause for services to reflect on flexibility in the context of quality improvement of their services.

The attributes of flexible services may help to support flexible practice. The stability and consistency of attendance of families, and flexibility in early childhood programming, are important enablers of flexible early childhood practices reported by services. Some service types may show inherent flexibility, like in home care and family day care, particularly in providing care after hours. Technology use may also support services to implement flexible practice.

Early childhood services may encounter barriers to flexible practice. Lack of demand, workforce issues and related costs were particular challenges. Local government regulations, as well as leadership and management capabilities were also barriers to flexible practices.

Some early childhood services provide extended hours of care, especially in family day care and in-home care, with some educators offering 24 hours care. Long day care services and outside school hours care services were less flexible in terms of their opening hours, with few services open past 6.30 pm. Removal of local government restrictions on opening hours may help to improve flexibility in this area.

Flexible sessions were also offered by some services, utilising the existing provisions under Family Assistance Law. Changes to enrolment were also offered by early childhood services. With the exception of outside school hours care and in-home care, most services were not flexible in relation to changes to bookings at short notice. High levels of utilisation may make it difficult for services to offer flexible sessions and enrolment.

Related link: Costs, planning laws hamper parents child care needs^[3]

Region: Australia and New Zealand^[4]

Tags: affordability^[5]

accessibility^[6]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/14/12/early-childhood-flexibility-practices-and-patterns-report> [2] http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/FPP-Final-Report_screen.pdf [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/12/costs-planning-laws-hamper-parents-childcare-needs> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/australia-and-new-zealand> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/affordability> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/accessibility>