



# COMMUNITY CHILD CARE CO-OPERATIVE LTD. (NSW)

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Smarter, Stronger, Healthier, Safer  
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Please find below Community Child Care Co-operative's written submission on the NSW Liberals & Nationals Social Policy Framework *Smarter • Stronger • Healthier • Safer*.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the framework in relation to children's services in NSW.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lymbery".

Carol Lymbery  
CEO  
Community Child Care Co-operative

Community Child Care Co-operative (NSW) is a 30 year old not-for-profit organisation that promotes, supports and advocates for quality children's services, meeting the needs of children, their families and the community. We are a peak organisation in NSW representing over 1300 children's services, families and individuals. We have consulted our members widely in preparing this submission.

We endeavour to:

- provide leadership which empowers the decision makers within children's services.
- identify service provision gaps and needs, and proactively target resources to these areas.
- support and collaborate with other children's services providers who reflect similar philosophical beliefs.
- embrace the value of difference and debate.
- be efficient and sustainable in the use of resources.
- be a role model for best practice in corporate governance and organisational operation.
- be a respected organisational citizen and a positive force in the community.

Although Community Child Care Co-operative represents services in all areas of the children's services sector, our members are predominantly community based **long day care services** and community based **preschools**.

Our submission thus predominantly reflects the views and interests of these two groups.

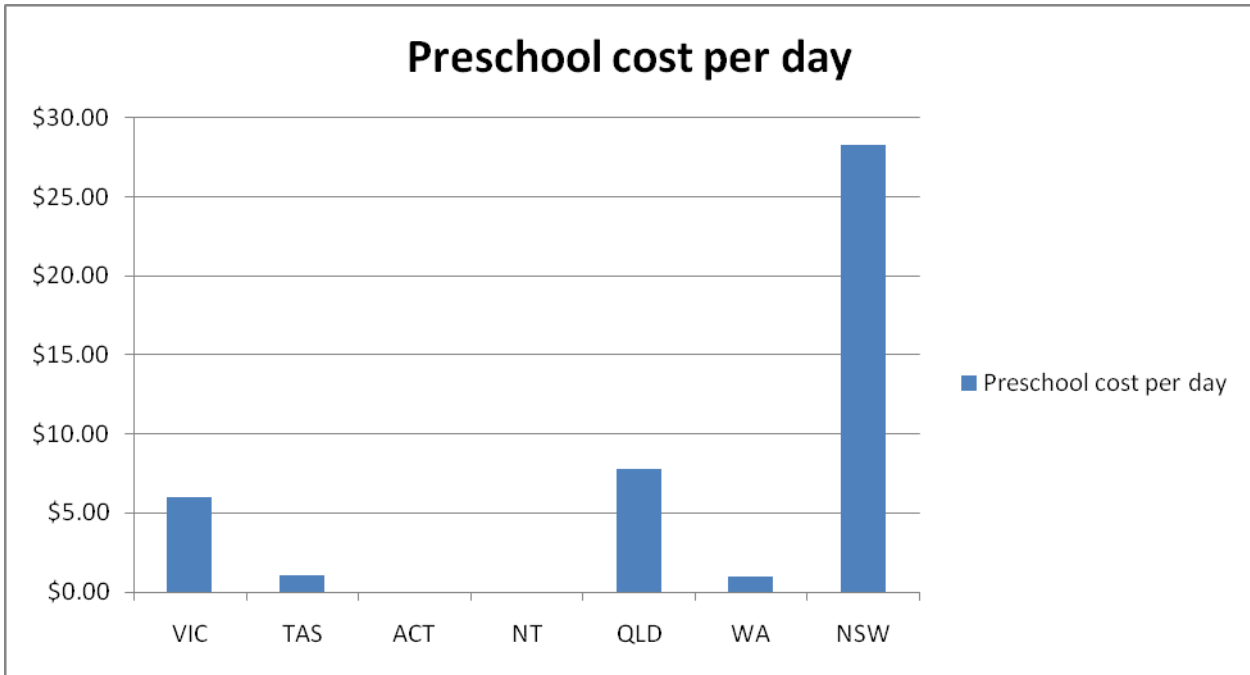
Community Child Care Co-op is pleased that the NSW Liberals & Nationals have recognised the importance of early childhood education and has recognised the underfunding of children's services by the current NSW Government and the effect this has had on preschool participation in NSW.

The recent bilateral agreements on Universal Access to preschool education signed by State Governments and the Commonwealth Government has shown us just how behind NSW is in preschool education compared to other states.

The Commonwealth Government released the bilateral agreements on achieving Universal Access to early childhood education a few weeks ago. These agreements outline what the funding given from the Commonwealth Government to the State and Territory Governments to facilitate them achieving universal access is to be spent on. Universal Access to early childhood education is an Australian Government commitment to provide access to a quality early childhood education program for all children by 2013, delivered by a university trained early childhood teacher, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year, in the year before formal schooling. The Universal Access initiative aims to improve participation in quality early childhood education for all Australian children.

Baseline data for every state revealed in these bilateral agreements show the average cost of a preschool education in each state right now. In Victoria the average fee per day is \$6.02, for Tasmania \$1.03 per day. In the ACT and Northern Territory preschool programs are free, in Qld 63 per cent of families pay less than \$7.80 per day, in Western Australia families pay \$1 per day. In NSW our average fee is \$28.30 per day (and this is only brought down this low by calculating the average fee of Department of Education preschools which are more or less free and community-based ones).

Obviously children in NSW are not travelling as well as children in other states, at least in terms of access to affordable preschool.



Consequently, Community Child Care applauds your potential policy direction of

- Increasing Preschool Participation.

However, this policy direction needs to be accompanied with a detailed strategy of how you will do this. Community Child Care Co-op would like to make a suggestion as to why the preschool participation rates in NSW are so parlous and how they can be increased:

- Participation rates are low, because fees are so high, because funding by the state government is so low. It is no surprise that participation rates across Australia directly correlate with the cost of preschools to families, which once again directly correlates with the funding preschools receive. **Increase funding and fees will go down and participation rates will increase.**

Community Child Care is uncertain about your potential policy direction of

- Shifting the responsibility of preschool education to the Department of Education and Training (DET).

Early education and care happens at all children's services; preschools and childcare centres. If preschools were to move to DET, so should other children's services such as long day care centres, which also offer preschool programs for children in their years before school. There must be consideration given to ensure that the 750 community-based preschools can charge the same fees and receive the same funding as the 100 delivered directly by DET.

- Which department preschool funding and policy is administered by, is not the problem or the solution. The chronic underfunding of preschools compared to other states is the problem and the solution to the preschool issue is in increasing the funding, and ensuring there is a preschool in every community.

Community Child Care would like to see additional policy directions around other early education and care issues. Currently, state governments are responsible for regulating and licensing all children's services, not just preschools.

A large body of research tells us what should happen at child care centres and long day care centres to ensure that children, the most vulnerable citizens of NSW, receive the best early education and care possible.

We need our children to be at children's services that have great staff to child ratios, and have highly qualified staff. You can make this a reality by pledging to change the Regulation that governs children's services to demand:

- a 1 staff member to 3 babies ratio for babies under two years old in child care centres; and
- that all staff caring and educating our children be qualified and that every child care service and preschool employ a university educated teacher.

If you made these changes to the Regulation you could be assured that NSW children were getting the best early education and care possible. And isn't this a truly great policy direction to go in, given that as you acknowledge in your social policy framework that "every \$1 spent in the early years of a child's development saves the community \$7 in other social services"?

Community Child Care would be proud to support a potential government that promised:

- increased funding to preschools
- tightened regulation of early education and care services to demand better ratios for babies and the employment of higher qualified staff in early education and care services.