

Productivity Commission Submission

All current research shows that the early years are a critical time in the lives of our children and our society recognises this by the importance placed on providing quality educational supported settings. All children require equal access to these settings with families having choice over the ECEC that suit their families individual needs. Once this is addressed the flow on will allow parents to return to work successfully. The educators in these setting require ongoing assistance that supports them to include all children successfully regardless of ability.

We recognise there are impacts of providing quality programs that meet the needs of all children and families and feel strongly that the children's needs should be paramount and that ECEC's require a support system to continue to support families to access these services.

IPSP

We feel the IPSP is a successful contributor to ECEC services and families; however this program while having numerous successes requires additional recommendations to include more children who fall outside of the eligibility criteria.

Educators are identifying support needs for children with the following:

- **Traumatised children with Social and Emotional support needs.**
- **Children with severe behavioural concerns which could include Mental Health and wellbeing.**
- **Children that are at Risk, including those in the child protection system**
- **Children with developmental delays not diagnosed as specific disabilities.**

There are other areas of the IPSP that we have identified from our day to day contact with ECEC's as needing to be reviewed with possible amendments.

- Simplifying the process of accessing the inclusion support subsidy for services. Services are struggling to complete the numerous processes required for applications.
- Educators don't get time release to meet with ISF's outside of their normal day to day duties. *Example meetings taking place in educational rooms while educators are still the principle supervisor to the group of children.*
- Increase in the demand for support across all ECEC sectors,
- Funding levels and issues for the services in finding the gap between the actual cost and the ISS subsidy, ISF's are seeing ECEC passing this gap onto the families.
- ECEC services limiting access to the families to the hours of funding support approved in a day, this is impacting on parent's ability to return to the workforce.
- IS Approvals for support for fewer than 5 hours impacting on ECEC's ability to employ educators to fill these positions.

IPSP Guidelines

- Guidelines need to be amended every 12 months to include all updates.
- Services currently signing agreements on IS Cases agreeing to these outdated guidelines. Accountability issues.
- Eligibility to include children with Mental Health or wellbeing or at risk.
- Services that do not meet their individual needs.

SWEP

- Access for all, current issues with school aged children/families needing a Therapist to support the application. These children not currently funded to access therapist services after 6 years of age. This diminishes their ability to access the equipment needed for inclusion.

Inclusion Support Grants

- Not Practical
- Time frames will be problematic
- The proposed amount will not address multiple needs identified by educators.
- Training could miss addressing all needs identified.
- High turnover of educators results in diminishing of skill levels and educator capacity moving away from the service.

Regulations Licensing

- Maintain Qualifications in 0-36 months.
- Maintain educator ratios as current regulations.
- Regulations should be consistent across all state and Territories, recognising exceptions for Rural / remote only.
- Single educator models should be scrapped.
- Facilities and issuing of licenses should be guided by inclusion readiness of the building and grounds.

Professional Training

- ISF Professional Development training, specific qualifications supporting all current ISF's to increase skills level.
- RTO's (*quick fix*) qualifications to meet regulations requirements, resulting in Educators within work places with poor skill levels supporting children and families with complex additional inclusion needs. ISFs are spending significant time, increasing the educators and ECEC services capacity to include children, complete documentation, liaise with families, and engage in Professional conversations with support services, make changes to Programs to meet inclusion needs of children.
- ISF finding increasing numbers of OSHC educators not recognising or acknowledging their key responsibilities when caring for additional needs children. Adolescents in OSHC who requires nappy changes and appropriate access to relevant programs and chronological peers.
- Qualifications maintained this is backed by research
- Educators with access to PD will increase their ability to provide programs that support all children with language development. This will directly address issues with children's literacy as identified by schools.
- Role of Tertiary education in increasing educator capacity to include all children regardless of ability. Competencies addressed in the curriculum.
- Mandatory annual PD system for all Educators similar to Education department protocols.
- Exploration of a wage recognition system to increase incentives for educators to continue to improve their skills and capacity.
- Supporting Tertiary and vocational training providers to ensure the course content is addressing the needs of children of all abilities and Educators are prepared to support all children and families in their local communities.

IS Funding

- **SECL Subsidy**
- Labelling families and children.
- Monitoring how the money will be spent, open to reporting by service providers.
- Will the money be used correctly to meet the educator needs for inclusion?
- How will the educator needs be taken into account?
- Increased Capacity building of educators is not addressed.

ISA

- ISA's have experienced significant growth in the number of eligible ECEC services in their regions with no increase in funding thus our resources are being stretched.
- The cpi increases in ISA funding since 2006 have not kept pace with the increase in staff and travel costs in particular. Award wage increases average 4%

ISF Role

- The role of the ISF has changed, thus increasing the required skill levels and professional expertise of ISFs. This then requires more professional development and recognition of skill levels through increases in remuneration.

OSHC specific Barriers Identified

- Barriers to inclusion in OSHC services are often associated with: service management support to the program and educators and the impacts of school restrictions around uses of the school site, both these issues would be address with the ownership back to schools.
- Schools taking ownership of OSHC services would increase the support offered to educators.
- Support for secondary school aged children and children from SDS, who are increasingly attending OSHC with peers outside their chronological age.

National Quality Framework and National Quality Standards

- This system should be maintained.
- More meaningful sanctions are required for ECEC that continuously have unacceptable practices.
- To continue to promote and recognise the ECEC workforce as a profession rather than an industry.
- This will increase the communities understanding and perception of the Profession and the flow on will be attracting quality applicants to take up Qualifications in this recognised Profession.

Workforce Participation

- ECEC services limiting access to the families to the hours of funding support approved in a day, this is impacting on parent's ability to return to the workforce.
- IS Approvals for support for fewer than 5 hours impacting on ECEC's ability to employ educators to fill these positions.
- We believe it is important recognise equally the needs of the children when recognising the need for parents to return to work. Children's rights must be central to any future decision making and the needs of the working parents do not overshadow the needs of the children.

This collective of ISF's: looked at the following organisations submissions. *Gowrie, Victorian Inclusion Support Managers Network, Inclusion Support agency Alliance, Noahs Ark and have included similar submissions and are in agreement with these organisations submissions.*