

As a parent, I have personally experienced the struggle of finding suitable childcare for my child. Despite our best efforts, we were unable to secure a place in any childcare facility due to the lack of available spots for children aged 0-2 years. This is not an isolated issue; it's a systemic failure that affects countless families across our nation.

My husband had to give up his job with an annual income of above \$120K to become her full-time carer. This has a significant negative impact on his mental health; as he was no longer working but forced to be a mum and both parents are exhausted each and every day. As the sole earner left in the family, I found myself constantly travelling and working with little time left to spend with my daughter.

My personal journey as a parent has led me to understand the profound impact that lack of access to childcare can have on a child. Since returning to work, she has shown signs of distress which were absent before. She has now been diagnosed with autism, significant social delays and speech regression.

There is no factual evidence in Early Childhood Education and Care reports that suggests parents are choosing not to send their children to childcare. My family had no choice but to have a parent stay home to take care of our daughter. The absence of empirical data on this subject suggests that many parents may be facing similar challenges as we are - forced into home-based care due to the lack of available spaces in professional facilities.

**Recommendation 1:** The Productivity Commission commissions an Early Childhood survey to parents to empirically ascertain the reasons children are not in childcare.

As parents, we understand the importance of early childhood development. All children across our country deserve equal opportunities for growth and development from an early age. However, many families are struggling due to inadequate access to childcare services due to a low number of places available, especially for children aged 0-2 years (due to child to staff ratios)

No parent should have forced into making such difficult choices between their career and their child's care due simply because they cannot find childcare.

**Recommendation 2:** The Productivity Commission addresses childcare ratio for 0-2 years old to ensure child safety and universal access to places for this age group.

Every parent deserves the chance at maintaining both a career and parenthood. Childcare should not be a privilege for a specific class; it should be accessible to all regardless of their economic status. Deeply troubled by the proposed 100 per cent reimbursement of families earning up to \$80,000. The proposal is universally divisive and economically immoral. The proposed system disproportionately favours lower income families obtaining childcare places, leaving those with higher income without adequate support. Are they expected to be able to afford private nannies and au-pair's?

To be clear earning above \$80,000 is not rich. The proposed system creates an imbalance that fuels social division and economic immorality. By fully funding lower-income families, we are inadvertently creating barriers for others who also need support but do not qualify due to their income level.

We must strive for a balanced approach that ensures everyone has equal access to quality childcare services irrespective of their financial standing. We need policies that provide universal access, ensuring every child gets the care they deserve while supporting working parents across all income levels.

**Recommendation 3:** Every child deserves equal opportunities right from the start regardless of their family's financial status. The Productivity Commission should either raise the maximum rate of CCS to cover 100% of hourly rate cap for all families or the current gaps should remain.

The Productivity Commission must ensure universal access to affordable childcare services for all families, irrespective of their class or financial status.

I am a firm believer that Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services should be inclusive of all children, regardless of their abilities or cultural backgrounds. Unfortunately, the current government supports fail to reach many neurodiverse children who require them. The Australian Government's Inclusion Support Program is designed to assist ECEC services to include children with additional needs alongside their peers. However, the funding and requirements of this program are not sufficient to ensure its broad reach.

**Recommendation 4:** The Australian Government not only significantly increase funding for the Inclusion Support Program for neurodiversity. All child care centre workers should undergo Early Intervention Support and Neurodiversity training so they can provide appropriate care for all children.

As a Torres Strait Islander, I have witnessed firsthand the struggles that our aboriginal communities face when it comes to childcare. In remote communities like Warburton WA, it is not uncommon to see six young children cramped in the boot of a station wagon with six male adults riding in the seats during daylight hours. This is their idea of childcare. Our report does nothing to recognise and address substandard aboriginal parenting practices or their failure to send their kids to childcare.

**Recommendation 5:** Urge the Productivity Committee to re-evaluate the proposals and work towards creating more inclusive policies for childcare services - because every child matters, regardless of their family's financial status.