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## MID NORTH COAST

# Childcare on the Mid North Coast

## Survey Response Summary

October 2023

### Introduction

As part of the Regional Investment Framework (RIF), there is an increased focus on services in our region. During September 2023, Regional Development Australia Mid North Coast (RDAMNC) conducted two childcare survey's across the region. One being for childcare providers and one being for parents. Outlined below is a summary of the key data (qualitative and quantitative) from both of these surveys.

### Audience

Audience	No.
Childcare providers invited to complete the survey	183
Number of childcare provider responses	48
Response rate	26%
Parental survey responses	90

### Key Statistics

The following table highlights some key statistics from the results of both the provider and parental surveys.

Description	Data
<b>Childcare Providers</b>	
% of providers that accept babies under 1	52.08%
% of providers that accept 1 year olds	58.33%
% of providers that accept 2 year olds	79.17%
% of providers that accept 3-4 year olds	93.75%
No. of providers that have a waitlist	42
No. of providers that provided waitlist numbers	36
Total no. on waitlists for 36 providers*	3694
Average no. of families on 36 waitlists(s)*	102.61
% of providers operating UNDER approved limit due to staff shortages	25%
% of providers with positions vacant	56.25%
% of providers that have had positions vacant for more than 12 months	33.33%
% of providers willing (or are currently) offering traineeships	68.09%

\* this figure includes numbers of families that may be on multiple waiting lists.

Description	Data
<b>Family statistics</b>	
% with children 2 years and under requiring care	92.22%
% not able to get any childcare	52.22%
% on one or more waitlists	91.11%
Average number of waitlist registrations	4.7
% working less hours than would like to due to inability to get childcare	85.39%

## Feedback from providers (a snapshot)

“We need to recruit at least 10 Family Day Care Educators to provide the daily care requirements for the 40 children on our waiting list. Family Day Care Educators must have their Certificate III in Childcare and be willing to work in their own home as Independent Contractors.”

“Staffing is a huge issue in the area, we have had to reduce numbers this year and will have to further reduce numbers next year to ensure that we can create a stable environment with staffing. This means not being able to completely meet the care needs of existing families and not accepting any new families from the waitlist.”

“There is a constant staffing shortage across the sector and we are always looking for educators with certificate 3, Diploma and bachelor degrees to fill vacancies both permanently and casually for leave replacements. This is difficult.”

“It appears to be the 0-3yrs in highest demand or unable to get positions. This is probably due to the fact that centres don't take that many due to the high ratio of staff required.”

“We have been capped due to the staffing crisis for over 12 months now. During this time we have recruited people but also lost people to other career ambitions or personal reasons. This makes it difficult as there is a large number of centre's within the region who face similar circumstances and we are all pulling from the same recruitment pool. Which results in our centre continuing to be capped. The more family tours we do and conversations we have in the community we come to the idea that there is a real supply and demand issue going on as we see more people move to regional areas like the Coffs coast with families and children needing care however the supply of educators does not exist. The drive and commitment for people to want to teach, educate and care for children under 5 has shifted and people want to be paid more and be valued more to ensure they are securing their own future with the increase cost of living. Early Childhood education and care relies on well-educated and consistent people who are trained and upskilled to support the demands of the laws and regulations that surround early childhood education sector.”

“We have had to close groups because we cannot get staff. Things need to change with regards to the qualification requirements under the regulation, especially for university trained, when after 12+ years there is still not enough to go around- see waiver numbers. There are nowhere near enough 0-3yo places. The government through the regulation sets the ratios and the individual CCS per dollar per child thresholds. It funds each child exactly the same regardless of ratio requirements meaning 0-3yo are funded 2.5 times LESS than 3+yo. The government is not in the business of childcare, leaving it to predominately private providers who will not enter into business arrangements that are not financially viable; a poignant point especially in these times of chronic staff shortages with no end in sight.”

“Demand exceeds supply. Many families are accessing multiple services though and the preschool funding model only allows enrolment for 2-3 days. Most families want more. Sadly we seem to have forgotten that there is also value in early education FOR children, rather than simply for workplace productivity.”

“We are licenced for 48 although operating on 38 due to staffing.”

“We are licences to cater for 44 children however we only can cater for 38 as we cannot find another Diploma to fill the role. We also are looking for another ECT which we have now advertised for over 12 months.”

“We are finding it very difficult to find educators to fill our Diploma level vacancy. Most times we advertise, and we get no applicants.”

“We have children on our waitlist that never make it into our centre because they reach school age before there is a vacancy. Our waitlist has never been as extensive as it is. We receive phone calls and email enquiries weekly multiple times and it is rather uncomfortable to break the news to these parents that it is unlikely we will be able to fit their child in.”

“We have reduced our numbers to 39 per day (instead of our licenced 41), as we have been unsuccessful in finding a second ECT each day - this then in turn reduces the children we can enrol from our waiting list.”

## Feedback from families (a snapshot)

"The days that I do have care for my child, I sometimes receive requests to keep my child home as staff are unwell and the centre is unable to meet staff to child ratio requirements."

"I have been on 2 waitlists since I was 20 weeks pregnant. My son is now 9 months. I pushed back my return to work by 4 months to Feb 2024 (rather than November 2023) as there was more chance of getting a spot in a new year. There are limited centres that take children under 2 years old. This is extremely difficult when we don't have family support in the area to mind our son and I need to return to work to assist with the household given the continuing rise in expenses and everyday living."

"Been on 8 centre waitlists for over a year. I put my son on waitlists when he was 2 months old for him to start when he was 12 months old. He is now 16 months and still no spots available for only 2 days a week. Family daycare places are also all booked out. Some have told me until 2025."

"How are we expected to keep up with the cost of living when we can't find childcare. Who knew having a baby would be so stressful. We need to do much better."

"We are only on the list for two centres as child turned 3 on Saturday. There are limited options for children 2 and under. We are waitlisted for a community preschool, to start in 2024 but limited to two days per week. These days are not adaptable to employment as they are based on school hours and not extendable for traditional work hours."

"Rooms at services are being closed due to staff shortages, something needs to be done higher pay and ratios so our children are safe in care."

"Work as GP servicing community - practice struggling to give patients appointments as I'm only able to work 2 days per week due to lack of childcare options & no family nearby - income has dropped significantly as unable to work more days, struggling to get mortgage loan as result - on 15+ waitlists and family daycare waitlists also, several centres have told me 'no chance' until 2025 with 120+ kids in front of mine on the list."

"My son has been on the waitlist since he was 4 months old in mid-2022, and straight from that time we were advised we probably weren't able to get him in until 2025. And it's been the same story every time we try to follow up to see whereabouts we stand. It's crazy that the list is that long. I'm lucky I'm able to currently juggle care between myself, my partner and both grandparents, but if we weren't in that fortunate position we would majorly be in trouble without me being able to return to work. And I'm sure there are a lot of people in this position."

"It's frustrating seeing people who don't work get care before people who do."

"I work in a management role and I feel like my work has to be incredibly flexible to allow me to work at all. I've exhausted my parental leave and my partner has three months. At the end of our parental leave, one of us is going to have to either give up work or reduce hours. The frustrating thing is, we can afford to pay for daycare unsubsidised and want to work but can't if we have no one to care for our child. It's also frustrating that we have to take what we can get which means we might get crappy care. At the moment we have to wait to get care in Feb and we've been on wait lists since I was 1 month pregnant and we have a 6 month old. We can also only get 2 days and need to drive 30mins out of the way to get the care. It's completely untenable."

"It was so hard to get 2 days care in family daycare. I couldn't believe it. Everyone has huge lists & I put baby on the list early. It's hard in a cost of living crisis when you have to work -but can't get care - adds a lot of pressure"

"Going back to work after a baby is stressful enough without adding lack of childcare. The shuffling and having to rely on family takes its toll. The childcare issue needs to be resolved, working mums deserve better."

"I have been on waiting lists for 6 months and no signs of anything coming anytime soon! I am a midwife at the hospital and at this rate I will never get back!"

"I have been on the waitlist for daycare since I was 14 weeks pregnant! This is crazy. This is going to result in me not being able to go back to work which will result in us lose a fortnightly income of \$1900. Families are struggling and mums are being forced to stay home because they have no care options."