

Submission in response to the

**Productivity Commission
Childcare and Early Childhood
Learning Draft Report, July 2014**

September 2014



Parenting Research Centre
raising children well

About the Parenting Research Centre

Established in 1997, the Parenting Research Centre (PRC) is an Australian independent, non-profit research and development organisation with a focus on families and parenting. Our mission is to help parents raise happy healthy children. Our work is premised on strong scientific evidence that outcomes for children can be improved by effectively supporting families in their parenting role. We focus our efforts on supporting the work of governments, systems, organisations and practitioners to design and effectively implement evidence-informed policy, programs and practices in parenting and family support.

Our specialisations include:

- Undertaking research to inform a contemporary understanding of parenting and how best to support people in their parenting roles.
- Synthesising, translating and applying evidence to improve policy, systems, service delivery and practice.
- Designing and/or supporting the implementation of innovation in programs and practice in close collaboration with providers.
- Supporting the alignment of service and governance structures to improve system design and service delivery.

The Raising Children Network is one of PRC's largest projects. Established in 2006, in partnership with Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and The Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health, the [Raising Children Network](#) is the complete Australian resource for parenting newborns to teens. It provides a comprehensive range of evidence-informed information on pregnancy, child health, learning, development and behaviour from pregnancy and infancy to the middle teens. In 2013 the Raising Children Network website received 5.1 million visits and 11.7 million page views. Also widely used by government and non-government child and family services, it is fast becoming an effective, universal information delivery system for Australian parents. Raising Children Network is primarily funded through the Department of Social Services Family Support Program.

In 2013 the PRC had an annual turnover of \$14.5 million with over 90% of income sourced from State and Federal government grants. We employ 70 staff and are involved in over 30 projects nationally. The PRC is an incorporated association and our Annual Reports can be viewed at [our website](#).

Authorised by:
Warren Cann, Chief Executive Officer

Parenting Research Centre
Melbourne
Level 5, 232 Victoria Parade
East Melbourne VIC 3002
www.parentingrc.org.au

Sydney
Level 3, Suite 38
8-24 Kippax Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010

For inquiries contact:
Annette Michaux, Director Social Policy & Strategy

Response to the Childcare and Early Childhood Learning Draft Report July 2014

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Productivity Commission Childcare and Early Childhood Learning Draft Report.

In our submission to the public Inquiry in February 2014 we called for the enrichment of early childhood education and care services to improve the home learning environment, particularly for vulnerable children. Our recommendations included:

- Building ECEC workforce capacity to model the behaviours that are known to promote child development, and to coach parents in applying those behaviours at home.
- Developing high levels of staff competence in parent engagement, and strong service-parent relationships, to mitigate some of the family stress that can negatively impact child wellbeing.

We welcome the Report's recognition of the positive development outcomes that can come from taking part in ECEC and preschool programs, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, we are concerned that the Report does not make any recommendations to enhance early intervention support or parenting support as part of ECEC services.

We disagree with the Commission's view that programs that focus on building parenting skills should lie outside the formal ECEC service system. We believe that there is a strong case for ECEC services to incorporate parenting support into their work, and for better integration between ECEC services and parenting support programs.

Our recent Early Home Learning Study supported existing early childhood services to engage parents of developmentally vulnerable children and support parents in creating a more stimulating early home learning environment. The randomised controlled trial involving 2,000 families found that enriched early childhood services can enhance parenting practices associated with optimal child development. This supports extensive research showing that disadvantaged children can gain significant benefit from high quality pre-school experiences, with one important marker of quality being that services *'help parents to support their children's learning at home'* (Melhuish, 2013¹).

While the importance of involving families in early childhood education and care is widely recognised, the focus is generally on seeking parental contribution to services rather than supporting parents in their parenting role. We believe that early childhood services could play a crucial role in supporting the development of strong parent-child relationships and positive parent-child interaction.

We are concerned that with the Report recommendations as they stand, Australia will miss the opportunity to develop an ECEC sector that optimises children's early learning and development, particularly for those children who are vulnerable to poor developmental outcomes.

We reiterate our strong recommendation that the Commission consider the enhancement of ECEC services to become more effective in supporting the development of strong parent-child relationships and positive

¹ Melhuish, E. (2013). Early Childhood Education and Care: Long term Effects. Presentation to Den Haag.

parent-child interaction; and enhancing parenting coping and reducing negative stress on family relationships.