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Mr Ben McLean
Early Childhood Development Workforce Study
Productivity Commission
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Dear Mr McLean

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT WORKFORCE STUDY

My name is Jan McEwan and I have practised as a maternal and child health (MCH) nurse in Victoria for 26 years. I have worked in rural locations throughout the Mallee and have been employed by Swan Hill Rural City Council since 1995. For ten years I was the MCH Team Leader and am currently Manager of Family Youth and Children's Services which includes the MCH Service.

I am writing to express my concern in relation to the Productivity Commission – Early Childhood Development (ECD) Workforce Study – Draft Report and the draft recommendations relating to the “Child Health Workforce”.

The draft recommendations of particular concern include:

“Draft Recommendation 12.3

- In order to reduce unnecessary obstacles to attracting new child health nurses, state and territory governments should not require child health nurses to have qualifications in midwifery in addition to their qualification in nursing and in child health(and)

Draft Recommendation 12.2

- Scholarships for postgraduate study in child health nursing may encourage a small number of additional nurses to obtain qualifications in child health or to practice in areas of high demand. The cost effectiveness of scholarships as a method of achieving this goal should be assessed by governments before any expansion of scholarship program.”

The Victorian MCH Program is recognised as being an international leader in maternal and child health. The MCH service Key Ages and Stages activities use an evidence based, developmental and family centred screening tool and evidence based secondary developmental screening tool, provides consistent written evidence based information for families, includes health promotion and prevention activities, emphasises early identification, support and referral of mothers with emotional, physical and social wellbeing concerns and continuation of child physical examinations. These activities are based on the strongest evidence available to improve outcomes for children and families.

Victorian MCH nurses have a comprehensive educational preparation that enables them to provide optimal MCH nursing to Victorian families. Qualifications and experience in general and midwifery nursing prior to undertaking studies in MCH is of paramount importance to the MCH nurse as it is the foundation of MCH practice and constantly informs our practice.

During this period of major reform across all early years programs where there is a strong emphasis on increasing the qualifications of early years professionals it is bizarre that these draft recommendations serve to diminish the existing MCH qualifications requirements.

The draft recommendations devalue the MCH service and serve to undermine and dismiss the significant role of the MCH Nurse across Victoria. If adopted these draft recommendations will have a devastating impact on rural areas such as ours where the MCH nurse is very often the only health professional accessible to families in our isolated communities.

The MCH scholarships have been invaluable to nurses in our area who have been scholarship recipients. Swan Hill Rural City Council has a full complement of MCH nurses currently employed as a result of the scholarships that have been made available. I strongly support the ongoing provision of scholarships for the post graduate programs of study.

It is of serious concern that there appears to have been very little consultation undertaken by the Productivity Commission with Victorian MCH nurses and not held Public Sittings. It is vital that the Commission reconsiders and undertakes appropriate consultation on these matters. I strongly urge the Commission to consider these concerns.

Yours sincerely

Jan McEwan
Family Youth & Children Services Manager