

**Productivity Commission Education and Training: Early Childhood Development  
Workforce Study : Phase 2 Draft Report**

**Comments from the Disability Services Commission  
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Western Australia**

The Draft Report's general recommendations for the early childhood care and education workforce are supported. A strong high quality regulated early childhood care and education sector is in the best interests of children with additional needs.

The Commission welcomes recognition of the additional needs of children with disability, (Chapter 8 and the media statement of 30 June 2011) and strongly supports:

1. The statement "...priority needs to be given to children with additional needs in the implementation of the COAG ECEC reforms" **second key point (Chapter 8).**
2. Recognition that inclusion in mainstream services supported by a skilled early childhood workforce and specialist early childhood intervention professionals is acknowledged as the preferred strategy in overcoming the opportunity gap for children with additional needs.
3. Improved processes for applying for funding and contracting inclusion support which are less onerous for families and services **Recommendation 8.1.**
4. Full funding for training inclusion support workers **Recommendation 8.2.**
5. Sufficient funding to recruit early intervention and allied health professionals and ensure professional development **Recommendation 8.3.**
6. Professional development programs to increase the capacity of mainstream services to provide high quality early childhood programs for all children **Recommendation 8.3.**
7. Further examination of the size, composition and employment practices required to enable child health, family support programs and specialist professional personnel to effectively support children with additional needs, their families and universal early childhood services **Recommendations 13 1-4.**
8. Meeting the challenge to the early years' sector to redress the finding that the most vulnerable families are the least likely to access services. **Ninth key point Chapter 2.**

Increased rates of Child Care Benefit for disadvantaged families which include families with a child a disability should be considered. Children in rural and remote locations with disability are particularly disadvantaged for example if the only service is occasional child care not eligible for inclusion support, children with additional needs may not be able to participate.

9. Attention to the child health nurse workforce which has a key role in early identification of vulnerable children and families. The size of the workforce is a key factor in their capacity to support families **Recommendation 12.1**.
10. Further examination of the benefits and characteristics of integrated services. There is increasing interest in integrated services as providing better access and support particularly for families with complex needs. Strong leadership and commitment are required to bring together the myriad of government and community services with which families need to engage **Recommendation 15.1**.

### **Request for Information**

The Commission notes the information request for more data about the characteristics of the diverse workforce supporting children with additional needs to inform future planning and would be pleased to contribute to further studies.

### **Child and Family Support and the National Agenda**

Workforce deployment and planning for services providing child and family support is made much more difficult with policy direction, funding and contracts coming from several sources mainly different Australian and State Departments with unilateral release of new programs.

The National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood and Care has made significant reforms to early childhood education and care: common legislation, standards, regulations, child staff ratios, accreditation, ratings and a national guiding body. The same rigour is needed to address the diverse and fragmented child and family support services.