



In response to your report, I would like to point out that a number of factors which I believe have been overlooked and which are of great concern to me:

Firstly the relationship between childcare and Paid Parental Leave (PPL) does not seem to have been adequately considered in your Report for two reasons: PPL, at a competitive level with childcare subsidies, would have a dramatic impact on the demand-side of childcare policy. Furthermore, ignoring PPL distorts your conclusions on international comparisons. The Report needs to be augmented with consideration of the financial support to family's to care for their own children versus provision of care by services.

I believe that there would be an enormously reduced demand for childcare, especially for babies and toddlers, if parents had an effective choice in providing care to their children, or, placing them in childcare. In Sweden for example where there is much better parental financial support, there are very few children under aged one in childcare.

It is my view that childcare must be considered as part of an 'ecology' of provision of care for children under three years of age. Many parents of young children would prefer not to use childcare but instead have adequate resources (such as PPL) and public policies which did not disadvantage women's workforce participation over the long-term (such as entitlement and shared expectation of male engagement with childcare such as in Sweden.

Ignoring the impact of decent PPL has implications for your international comparisons. Childcare particularly for or children under one is expensive and therefore, as it is provided extensively in Australia, will distort the figures that you have provided on the OECD.

I am not aware of any financial modelling on the comparison of increased PPL and subsidies of childcare costs for under three year olds, but I believe that this should be part of your inquiry. Care for babies is expensive and very difficult to access (I was amused to find that at one centre where my grandchild was seeking a place, all the baby places were taken by babies of staff members). I believe that, given the current staffing problems in childcare centres and the increasing costs of childcare, you should compare the costs of giving parents the options better paid PPL for three years.

Secondly, I see the Report as taking a very narrow and short-term view of childcare and its impact and does not consider many important social costs in the debate on the cost of care.

Your report does not address the question of defining the consumers of childcare- not just parents but also children! Where is your consideration of the impact of childcare on children's long-term psychological and economic wellbeing and thus on the Australian economy over the next fifty years.

Childcare disrupts parent child attachment and has significant implications especially for babies left for a long time with shift working strangers. This may not be of

consequence to a policy based on womens' workforce participation, but definitely on the wider environment. Many parents of young children and experts are silenced by the current ideology of childcare access and the demand by the industry for growth. .

Your report does not acknowledge the lost productivity in the workforce because of the level of infectious illness in childcare centres (individual paediatricians have expressed similar views on the short-term and medium term impacts of chronic infections)

I write, as a mother and grandmother who has actively participated in the workforce and supported my children's' families and careers. As a mother I was actively involved in the 1970s and 80s with development of community based OOSH, Family Day care and centre-based care- to see it ruined and taken over by the for-profit sector. However, in relation to childcare for children under three years of age, it is my view that parents should be given Paid Parental Leave (PPL), to enable a family to support itself. I believe that women's workforce participation has become the dominant policy motivator, at the expense of child emotional and physical wellbeing. Paid Parental Leave should be set to allow parents to remain with their children under three, and this load should be spread, wherever possible between men and women. To prevent women's financial disadvantage, policy should ensure that fathers of children should take, at least, half of this leave. Where parents decide to return to the workforce for lifestyle and career reasons they should bear the full cost of childcare.

