



Childcare Inquiry Roundtable Summary

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)

Friday 11 August 2023

This document is not a verbatim record of the roundtable, but a summary of the issues raised by roundtable attendees. The views and opinions expressed are those of the attendees and do not reflect the ACCC's views or position on the issues summarised here.

Acknowledgement of country

The ACCC acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to the land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures; and to their Elders past, present and future.

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
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Introduction

On 28 October 2022 the Treasurer, the Hon. Jim Chalmers MP, directed the ACCC to conduct a price inquiry into the market for the supply of childcare services (the Inquiry).

The ACCC carried out a wide range of outreach and information gathering activities for the Inquiry. These activities included roundtables with invited stakeholders representing the following groups: Educators, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, Providers, Parents and Guardians, First Nations and In Home Care.

This document provides a summary of the issues discussed and raised during the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Roundtable, held virtually on Friday 11 August 2023.

Approximately 17 interested parties attended, comprising peak bodies, community service groups, multicultural representative groups and childcare providers that work with CALD communities.

ACCC Commissioner Peter Crone chaired the roundtable, supported by Sarah Proudfoot, Executive General Manager, Infrastructure Division, and other ACCC staff.

This summary does not identify individual participants or organisations. The views and opinions expressed are those of the attendees and do not reflect the ACCC's views or position on the issues summarised here.

Summary of Issues

Attendees discussed the following topics during the roundtable:

Topic 1 – Costs and Pricing and the Child Care Subsidy (CCS)

Many stakeholders raised concerns regarding the difficulty in accessing the CCS and limitations to Visa holders. Discussion and issues raised included:

- People seeking asylum in Australia are not generally eligible for the CCS.
- Some visa restrictions prohibit people from accessing permanent work, which impacts their ability to afford childcare.
- Childcare costs for some asylum seekers and refugees are subsidised by charities and childcare services in order to support them to work or study.
- The current Activity Test creates a barrier for families to be able to access affordable childcare. There is no other aspect of education in Australia where a child's right to take part in education is contingent on their parents' activity.
- Navigating government portals (e.g. myGov) and submitting paperwork to support applications for the Activity Test is difficult and time consuming.
- Supporting the CALD community is crucial to enable CALD families to successfully access childcare services. This includes support with the CCS and working through the Activity Test.
- Cost and accessibility pressures are resulting in CALD families accessing informal childcare services. While these arrangements can be positive from a community perspective, these services are unregulated and can pose a risk for CALD families and children.

Topic 2 – Accessibility

The general view was that early childhood care should be about creating and supporting services that are inclusive for all families and creating a culture of welcome. In particular:

- To be inclusive there needs to be an understanding of what quality looks like for different communities and families. There are many perspectives on what quality looks like.
- There are many barriers to CALD families accessing childcare, including access to transport, language barriers, access to technology and working shifts or casual hours, which may make childcare inaccessible or difficult to maintain.
- Many CALD families do not have a concept of childcare in their culture, and paid childcare is not something they are familiar with. Relationships with other families within the same culture that use formal childcare services are key to helping CALD families understand the Australian childcare framework, options for care and how to get assistance.
- Building a sense of trust with CALD families is important to help with successful integration into formal childcare services. Building trust takes time. CALD families want to feel that they and their culture are being respected by childcare services and educators.

- There needs to be more guidelines and flexibility around what childcare providers can do to help CALD families access and connect with childcare services.
- Childcare services and support services dedicate time and resources to help CALD families navigate through the requirements to submit the necessary forms and paperwork to comply with the Activity Test. It can take up to 5 sessions to work with a family to help them apply for assistance. This means parents often need to take time off work to undertake this process.
- There is a need to upskill staff providing childcare services to be culturally responsive and support CALD families and children. Communities are very diverse, and each community has different cultural elements, including language and customs. This diversity presents additional challenges.
- Mapping where there are other services/agencies in a community where childcare services can refer families is useful. It provides better connection pathways to support CALD families access and continue with formal childcare services.
- Allowable absences from childcare services are often used by CALD families when travelling overseas. This results in CALD families having to pay for childcare services even if their child cannot attend.
- The notion of inclusion is very complex when considering multilingual and newly arrived children. It is important to think beyond the different languages that people are speaking and work to establish meaningful relationships with families.
- Outreach programs are raising community awareness of childcare services in migrant communities. Services are partnering with community leaders to raise awareness of childcare services. This helps childcare services understand the different cultural communities in the area.

Topic 3 – Culturally appropriate childcare services

Participants advised that childcare services should be designed to support all families and that diversity in the community should be reflected in childcare services to support CALD families and children. This includes:

- Services should actively consider and assess barriers that may impact on CALD families successfully accessing and engaging with childcare services.
- Program and service offerings should be assessed so that there is a culture of welcome and play-based learning, and the environment reflects a range of cultures and languages, not just the dominant culture or language. CALD families understand the importance of play-based learning and seeing their children's curiosity being encouraged. They want their children to be engaged and participate in all aspects of the childcare program at the centre.
- Awareness raising strategies need to be implemented in the sector. A lot of childcare services would be unaware they are being exclusionary and that they have barriers to CALD families using the service. Every child has a right to participate, not just turn up.
- Diversity should be included at all levels of childcare services including through stories, books, multicultural music and the 'look and feel' of the general environment.
- Word of mouth has a significant impact on the CALD community's preferences for childcare services. Waiting lists are long for well-regarded childcare services. CALD families choose childcare services (for example, centre-based day care) because other families in the same cultural community do so.

- CALD families will withdraw their children from these childcare services if they do not meet their needs from a cultural perspective.
- CALD families will often access Family Day Care childcare services where their family and children can form a strong relationship with one educator.
- The National Quality Framework is valuable, but consideration should be given to extending the framework to include other factors such as culturally responsive pedagogy, establishing positive relationships with families and reflecting cultural differences.
- CALD families should not be regarded as a homogenous group. There are differences between cultures and between families and children's lived experiences that need to be considered.
- Some CALD families are concerned their children will lose their first language if they attend childcare centres where there are no cultural and community integration programs.

Topic 4 – CALD educators

Many attendees advised that educators play a fundamental role in assisting CALD communities, families and children to successfully integrate and thrive in a childcare setting. In particular:

- CALD families acknowledge the benefit of having multicultural educators for their children in childcare settings.
- The way educators communicate with children and families is important to ensure CALD families feel welcome in childcare services.
- Childcare educators should be provided with cultural awareness training as well as training on bias and unconscious bias.
- Even established services are facing a workforce shortage.
- Government and providers should create environments that educators want to work and stay in and create diversity in the programs offered at childcare services to meet the needs of all families.
- It is important that CALD educators are provided with both coaching and mentoring opportunities.
- Support offered by TAFE services could be improved to accommodate childcare students who have English as their second language.
- The childcare sector needs a skilled work force that is trained in trauma-informed practice, as there is a growing need to support children and families that have experienced trauma.
- Increasing migration may be a way to increase the number of CALD childcare educators working in a childcare setting. Consideration should be given to how this might work and what positive outcomes might benefit the sector.
- Childcare qualifications from overseas are not recognised in Australia. There can also be challenges, as systems from overseas can be quite different to those in Australia. The implementation of a bridging course, with a focus on core components of the curriculum, may be helpful in eliminating barriers to overseas qualified educators working in Australia.