



MEDIA RELEASE

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No childcare means no work for young families: national survey

A national shortage of childcare places is causing widespread problems among working families with 44% of parents responding that they are prevented from working according to a survey conducted by the ACTU and childcare unions.

Releasing the initial survey results today ACTU President Sharan Burrow said:

"A National Childcare Phone In conducted over the past three weeks has received more than 720 calls from parents and childcare workers detailing widespread problems in the industry.

The survey has found that childcare is a major barrier to parents taking on work and is adding severely to the financial pressure on working families as well as harming the economy by reducing workforce participation. Key survey results include:

- A lack of childcare places or extra hours of care is a major problem for parents with 44% of respondents stating the shortage prevents them from working more hours.
- This is particularly a problem for parents working part time with 52% of respondents indicating a lack of childcare is limiting the number of hours they can work.
- The childcare shortage is also a major problem for mothers with 29% unable to return to work after maternity leave.

Other initial findings of the survey include:

- **Affordability is a major problem** for parents with 62% indicating childcare is not affordable. Of these 34% said childcare was not affordable but the alternative would be to lose their job and a 12% said it was not affordable by were unwilling to give up their childcare place.
- **Childcare waiting lists of more than 12 months** are common with 44% of people on waiting lists unable to get a childcare place within 12 months.
- **Childcare is an important election issue** with 85% of respondents indicating that the childcare policies of the political parties will influence their vote, including 62% saying it will have a major influence on their voting behaviour at the coming election.

All survey findings are yet to be fully analysed, however other obvious trends in the results are a strong awareness among parents that childcare staff are poorly paid and deserve a pay rise. Also, many childcare workers stating it is impossible to deliver the quality of care children need due to inadequate staffing, an increase in special needs children, and insufficient investment in facilities."

Helen Creed, National President of childcare union LHMU said: "High staff turnover is a direct result of the low wages for childcare workers and a lack of coherent planning by the federal government."

Greg McLean, Assistant National Secretary of childcare union ASU said: "These results highlight the need for a national rescue plan that applies to all sections of the childcare industry, including full and part time childcare centres, occasional care, family day care, and before and after school care. The plan should be developed with the full cooperation and involvement of all childcare workers and include more Government investment in childcare infrastructure and decent wages for child care workers to ensure all Australian families and communities get a fair share of quality childcare services."

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National Childcare Phone In

Background

The ACTU and childcare unions LHMU and ASU launched a national Phone-In to highlight Australia's childcare crisis on Monday 6 September.

The unions were acting in response to reports from childcare workers as well as working parents that there are significant and growing problems with childcare in Australia:

The Phone In is also aimed to help put more affordable, accessible, quality childcare on the election agenda.

Profile of callers - nationally

1. Most callers are mothers, however a large number of callers are fathers. We are also receiving calls from grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren because parents cannot find or afford suitable formal childcare elsewhere.
2. A lot of parents are well aware that childcare staff are poorly paid and are very supportive of a pay rise.
3. Many childcare workers calling have been in the industry more than five years and include people who are past or present directors of childcare centres.
4. Most of the Child Care workers calling are extremely distressed as they are unable to offer the level of quality care needed due to staffing levels, it is difficult to attract new staff due to low wages.
5. Many childcare workers are also expressing concern over the direction that the industry has taken in recent years — with the large growth in private child care centres and the closure of many non-profit centres.

Summary of issues raised

Childcare workers and centre directors

- High turn over in staff
- Many childcare workers are tired, stressed and are working high levels of unpaid overtime
- Many felt that they lacked recognition for their jobs despite the fact they are caring for a majority of children who are experiencing their most important developmental years.
- Majority of childcare workers felt that it was impossible to deliver the quality of care needed for children due to:
 - The high numbers of children they were responsible for
 - inadequate staffing levels
 - a lack in the number of staff with adequate qualifications,

- an increase in the numbers of children with special needs with which they don't have the facilities or the staff to cope with
- Childcare centre's facilities are run down and aren't being replaced in some cases facilities are a danger to the workers and the children
- Many directors have reported that it is difficult to find qualified staff due to the conditions they work under in many cases this has led to a sacrifice in the quality of care.
- Majority of the childcare workers thought privatisation of the system was bad as these centres worked under a system of making profits and cut corners on offering quality childcare.

Parents/users

- Long waiting lists and lack of places that prevent parents from returning to work or taking on a job
- Many parents have had to put their names on waiting lists before their children are born
- Lack of support and places for children with special needs
- Rising fees and high cost in comparison to salary — one parent cited losing 75% of her weekly income on childcare fees
- Inflexibility of childcare centres — parents are charged fees even when centres are closed for public holidays. This makes it very hard for casual workers who do not receive any pay for public holidays.
- Poor quality of facilities with a number of parents being unhappy that the lack of available places forced them to put their children into second rate centres.
- Some positive stories where people are very happy with their childcare arrangements.

Calls Received			
Childcare Users	518	67%	
Childcare Workers	253	33%	
Total	771	100%	
Calls Received by State			
State	CC Users	CC Workers	Total
ACT	34	13	47
NSW	158	37	195
NT	4	1	5
QLD	60	28	88
SA	46	39	85
TAS	8	5	13
VIC	127	70	197
WA	53	50	103
Not Specified	28	10	38
Total	518	253	771

Child in Care or On Waiting List		
In Care	334	64%
On Waiting List	77	15%
Before/After School Care	28	5%
All of the Above	32	6%
NA/Declined	47	9%
Total	518	100%
Type of Care		
Family Day Care	42	9%
Child Care Centre	305	65%
Before/After School Care	35	7%
All of the Above	16	3%
NA/Declined	73	15%
Total	471	100%
Type of Centre		
Private	122	40%
Council	57	19%
Non-Profit	103	34%
Unsure	17	6%
NA/Declined	6	2%
Total	305	100%
Are you prevented from working more hours because of lack of childcare places or additional hours?		
Yes	165	44%
No	203	54%
Unsure	8	2%
Declined	2	1%
Total	378	100%
Affordability		
Yes	121	39%
No	49	16%
No but unwilling to give up place	38	12%
No but the alternative would be loss of job	106	34%
NA/Declined	0	0%
Total	314	100%

Waiting Lists

How long have you been on a waiting list?

Up to 3 months	21	17%
4 to 6 months	21	17%
7 to 12 months	26	21%
More than 12 months	53	44%
Total	121	100%

How is lack of childcare affecting you in relation to work?

Unable to seek work	8	7%
Partner unable to seek work	1	1%
Unable to return to work after maternity leave	35	29%
Limits the number of hours I can work	63	52%
Not affected	15	12%
Total	122	100%

Voting

To what extent will a partys policy on childcare affect your vote?

Will affect my vote	321	62%
Might affect my vote	118	23%
Won't affect my vote	49	9%
Declined	30	6%
Total	518	100%

Comment	State
I've been here 12 months, and I'm advertising for my third staff member leaving. They move into different industries where the pay is better.	ACT
Who wants to work three hours a day for \$12 an hour	NSW
I honestly thought it wouldn't impact us, but 3 staff members are on leave at the moment and we can't get any quality staff - either qualified or unqualified, and I think it's just going to get worse. It really affects the quality of care we can offer. One staff member has come to work today with a migraine because she knows we're on a skeleton staff at the moment, and I'd love to send her home, but I really can't afford to. I had a complaint from a parent after witnessing an interaction between a child and a worker which really displayed her lack of skills and experience. If we continue like this I'll probably quit, and I've been doing this job for 20 years.	SA
Why would people come into childcare after two years study and get such poor pay - no reward - no respect for the profession.	SA
Trying to find relief staff was a disaster. Here in our local TAFE they have an intake of 21 students a year yet only be about 7 or 8 that actually graduate - they realise that it's not all fun and games - that it is low pay and you get no recognition.	VIC
Over the 20 years that I've been in the industry it is as bad as it has ever been and can only see that it is going to get worse now that all the private centres are coming in.	VIC
Because of stress levels, the limited time, plus we have no cooling in summer, childcare workers don't get health considerations we pay for our own immunisation, and I've only just stopped being casual after 4 years	VIC
It concerns me that the huge centres like ABC/Peppercorn are monopolising the industry. The pay's the biggest issue.	VIC
I'm trying to get a qualified staff person now but I'm having real trouble, I want people who are dedicated. The govt is now offering funding to some particular places that is allowing people to do training via a traineeship, but that really undervalues this profession, we've been fighting to turn it into a degree course, and they're going to allow people to do it via sort of correspondence, it's just another way of govt withdrawing funds from education, it just seems like any person, any man and his job can get a cert 3. I feel sorry that the quality of student has dropped as well, it's stripping away a little bit at a time	VIC
Work on my own, cover all the costs myself. I get paid \$4 per child and must cover all the running costs myself. I have I pay my own superannuation.	VIC
With recruitment we've tried to employ someone from overseas and were going to sponsor them but childcare workers are not considered skilled occupation as far as immigration is concerned which is clearly ludicrous and deeply insulting.	WA
I'm lucky enough to be able to run a centre where we have good conditions but they could be under threat if Peppercorn would take over.	WA

Actual quotes from parents¹

John: When my son first started going to childcare we had trouble finding suitable care. For example we had him in a centre that charged extra money for food but later found out that the children were not being fed anything – not morning tea or lunch as we were charged for – when we picked up our child he was always extremely hungry.

Martin: We have been waiting 17 months to get our little one into the one centre. Currently our son is in two centres. This is impacting on our decision to have a third child. We had an incident where my son had a head injury and we were not contacted. He had a fracture but they did not treat it as an important issue, it was brushed off. We planned legal action as the doctors suggested it, but we chose not to because we did not know if we could get him in anywhere else.

Cathy: I have been looking after my grandchild every day because there are not enough places. You also have to pay two weeks in advance, you still have to pay when they are sick... It is a real crisis at the moment and I think the government has to do something about it.

Susan: There is not enough places and it is too expensive. Need more affordable childcare centres.

Michelle: The childcare centre my daughter goes to is excellent. They observe her and give us feedback. They have brought medical stuff to our attention which has prevented an operation. They have supported me as a parent, giving me ideas, giving me confidence. The staff are well organised, they make sure all the kids are properly dressed and well fed... I am really happy with the staff and wanted to share that because I do not think they get enough recognition.

Kate: Both our children are in a childcare centre and it has been really good. But there are so many kids the workload of staff is a concern. Five screaming kids is pretty stressful. My husband is the primary carer, he gets offered blocks of work for say three weeks at a time. Childcare cannot accommodate the flexibility of casual employment.

Sarah: There is a lack of extra days and high staff turnover we our child is but the care is great. We are now on a waiting list for five centres and rung about ten centres where the waiting lists had been closed. There is no indication of how long we might be waiting for a place.

Angela: We cannot get any childcare in school holiday time. There is a three month waiting list. The Government won't allow them the places. It has been that way for four years. It is treated more as a babysitting service rather than developing the children.

Maria: I am dissatisfied with the present childcare centre our child is at. There is a high staff turnover, especially in the babies room. There are health and safety issues with power cords and no air-conditioning... There is no flexibility — I [still have to pay and] am penalised if I choose to keep my child at home with me on an RDO.

Ian: I was on a waiting list for close to a year. Quality of care is terrible. I rang to find out the guidelines are for running a centre as hygiene issues like reheating the baby's bottle was appalling.

Karen: I have two pre-school age kids both in the same centre. It is fantastic. I've moved from a community-based centre where the staff were too young and there was a very high turnover to a private centre where the staff have been there long-term and they have job security.

¹ Names changed to protect anonymity.

Nadia: If only they were stricter on how they treat the children. My son was coming home with bruises on his legs, finger marks and not getting fed. They were sharing the same bowl and spoon with all the kids. They were not giving him his water and they don't change him often enough. One day they only changed him twice and another day he was soaked through his clothes when I picked him up.

Gina: Maximum charge of \$10 a day and then with two weeks notice it went up to \$40 a day. There is no kitchen, no cook and it is still \$40 a day. We can't afford it. No time to make other arrangements. Now we have untrained childcare at home. There is a freeze on family day care in our area so we would have to travel an extra 2 hours a day to get a trained provider. Our school has no before and after school care. In the afternoon our daughter is alone for an hour and a half. Five families in our area are in the same position.

Actual quotes for Childcare Workers²

Kim: The shortage of childcare workers, I think, is due to the poor wages in childcare...I'd like to see conditions improve in order to keep students enrolled in diplomas...The quality of the staff is paramount to the quality of service.

Jasmine: Wages for childcare workers and funding for community centres is too low and private child care centres are taking over the market, which leads to poorer quality service... lack of funding for community childcare is disgusting given private chains are making big profits while their workers make approximately \$13 an hour is appalling.

Michelle: Private centres have much less levels of care than other centres; childcare should not be money-making exercise.

Donna: The drop in quality of care is cause by stress in working in the private sector... Our centre was sold to a big private company 18 months ago and there is so much pressure to take on more children but the number of staff aren't increasing... There are too many children and our centre is very old and unsafe.

² Names Changed to protect anonymity