



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY BASED CHILDREN'S SERVICES

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MEDIA RELEASE

COSTELLO ONCE AGAIN ABANDONS CHILD CARE TO THE MARKET

The 2006 Federal Budget repeats the mistakes of the past.

Instead of taking responsibility for the care of Australia's children the Federal Government has simply removed itself altogether, handing the task of providing children's services over to the market. The National Association of Community Based Children's Services (NACBCS) is angry that the Federal Government has failed, yet again, to grow the part of the children's services sector that thousands of parents are demanding – community-based long day care centres.

- Uncapping Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) and Family Day Care (FDC) places:
 - Uncapping the number of places is irresponsible when there are no regulations in the largest states so unscrupulous operators can put children in potentially dangerous environments
 - Uncapping has not been successful in centre-based long day care where there are still long waiting lists despite years of uncapped CCB places. Why will it work for OSHC and FDC?
 - Commercial child care providers can now be expected to expand into new areas of service provision bringing the same concerns about quality, access and location while making even more profits out of Government funds
 - FDC and OSH support will do nothing to ease long waiting lists for centre-based long day care
- Improving compliance and quality
 - Increasing spot checks on services is great but don't just check Child Care Benefit (CCB) compliance – check Quality Assurance compliance too; Government should be ensuring that taxpayer dollars are being used to deliver high quality, safe and developmentally appropriate services for our young children
 - Commitment to supporting Quality Assurance in Long Day Care is good but it is meaningless without unannounced spot checks and much strengthened standards
- Increased JET payments to cover the gap between fees and CCB for women retraining

- This is important, but many women will not be able to take up this initiative due to a critical shortage of child care places in centre-based long day care
- Child Care Management System
 - The reformed Child Care Access Hotline will not help families on community based child care centre waiting lists it is simply a way of filling vacancies in less popular commercial services – this should be scrapped in favour of real solutions that give parents what they want more choice of community based not for profit centres. Capital investment in the not-for-profit sector is needed.

Scrap the rebate, waiting two years for fee relief does nothing for middle and low income families. The money allocated for the 30% rebate should be rolled over into improving the Child Care Benefit (CCB) - CCB is the most effective way to improve the affordability of children's services for all Australians on an equitable basis¹

Rather than shifting responsibility to the market, the Federal Government should invest some of its huge surplus into growing a sustainable and high quality not-for-profit children's services system and enable families on waiting lists for community owned long day care centres to get the service they want for their children.

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¹ see Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report (*Trends in the Affordability of Child Care Services* 2006) which shows that the introduction of CCB improved affordability of child care when it was introduced in 2000 but its value has slowly eroded - www.aihw.gov.au