

SUBMISSION ON **PROVISION OF CHILDCARE**

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TO:

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and Workplace Relations Committee**

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PART 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 About this submission

This Submission examines the place of childcare, in particular daycare, in our society in the context of all other care options used by parents.

Part 2 Policies for children's care support examines the effects on children and society of the Government's policies on the provision of childcare, starting with how childcare services relate to the overall policy for government support of children's care. It also shows how this policy unfairly discriminates against home-caring parents. **Part 3 Marketing the daycare experiment** discusses how daycare is held up as 'quality early childhood education', yet it is a massive social experiment whose harms are only partly understood. It argues that government must therefore be accountable by investigating and publicly reporting on its risks. International studies which, as will be shown, demonstrate significant daycare-associated harm risks are examined in **Part 4 How daycare hams children** and **Part 6 Wider Daycare Harms**. In considering *why* daycare harms children, it is argued that its risks can be reduced but not overcome by improving the 'quality' of daycare, because there of certain fundamentals of the daycare environment which cannot be altered, **Part 5 Why even 'quality' daycare harms children**.

Part 7 Executive Summary includes a list of conclusions reached and how they tie in with the **Recommendations** at the end of this Submission, which address the **Inquiry's Terms of Reference**.

1.2 Inquiry's Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for the "Provision of Childcare" Inquiry are –

- (a) the financial, social and industry impact of the ABC Learning collapse on the provision of child care in Australia;
- (b) alternative options and models for the provision of child care;
- (c) the role of governments at all levels in:
 - i. funding for community, not-for-profit and independent service providers,
 - ii. consistent regulatory frameworks for child care across the country,
 - iii. licensing requirements to operate child care centres,
 - iv. nationally-consistent training and qualification requirements for child care workers, and
 - v. the collection, evaluation and publishing of reliable, up-to-date data on casual and permanent child care vacancies;
- (d) the feasibility for establishing a national authority to oversee the child care industry in Australia; and
- (e) other related matters.

1.3 Definitions

In this Submission, unless otherwise stated –

- (a) underlining and bold lettering have been added to original text, for emphasis;
- (b) "**childcare**" refers to non-parental care options receiving government funding, including daycare centres, family day care, before and after school care, vacation care, some occasional care and some in home care;
- (c) "**daycare**" refers to daycare centres offering long hours care to children from 6 weeks to school age;
- (d) longitudinal studies referred to –
 - i. "**Growing Up in Australia**" is the longitudinal study of Australian children. Data are being collected over seven years from two cohorts every two years. The first cohort of 5000 children aged less than 12 months in 2003/4 will be followed until they reach 6 to 7 years of age, and the second cohort comprising 5000 children aged 4 years in 2003/4 will be followed until they reach 10 or 11 years of age. Study informants include the child (when of an appropriate age) and their parents, carers and teachers.
 - ii. "**NICHD Study**" refers to the U.S. study of Early Child Care and Youth Development, tracking over 1300 children from 10 diverse communities in a longitudinal study since birth in 1991. Phase IV which is currently being conducted will follow over 1000 of the original families through age 15. The NICHD research team, located at universities across the U.S. offers multiple perspectives on and interests in childcare research;
- (e) "**slammers**" and "**sliders**" are expressions coined by Australian psychologist Steve Biddulph to describe daycare usage patterns, with the former parents preferring full-time daycare from 6 weeks of age and the latter easing their children into daycare at a later stage and gradually increasing hours over time.

PART 2 POLICIES FOR CHILDREN'S CARE SUPPORT

2.1 Policy framework

Over the past decade institutionalised care for babies and toddlers (eg. family day care, daycare centres) has burgeoned, with many new centres being financially supported by western governments eager to get mothers back to full-time work, in return for significant tax revenue, votes and the support of big business employing mothers. Since childcare subsidies were first introduced by the Hawke government in 1991, taxpayer funding for this form of care has grown exponentially, including under the Howard government (1996-2007), with a now massive \$2.4 billion committed to early childhood education and care. A major component of this is being spent on the daycare centres including¹ –

- (a) **building 260 long daycare centres:** across Australia by 2014, the first 38 centres costed at \$114.5 million in the 2008 Budget;
- (b) **staff:** training in the early childhood education and care and encouraging teachers to work in long daycare centres, at a cost of \$126.6 million over four years;
- (c) **child care accreditation standards:** improved and implemented at a cost of \$22 million over four years by developing national “quality” standards for child care, and introducing a quality rating system for services;
- (d) **Child Care Rebate:** to parents for out-of-pocket childcare costs increased from 30% to 50% capped at \$7,500 per annum, costed in the 2008 Budget at \$1.6 billion over 4 years; and
- (e) **Child Care Benefit:** a sliding-scale fee subsidy paid by government direct to the child care provider.

Maximum benefits go to parents receiving welfare payments in the form of income support, who are eligible for –

- i. 100% of the Child Care Benefit (\$3.47 per hour towards approved childcare fees) for –
 - up to 24 hours per week without satisfying the Work/Training/Study Test;
 - up to 50 hours per week by working for at least 15 hours per week; and
- ii. the 50% Child Care Rebate if they satisfy the Work/Training/Study Test for any period during a week (no minimum required).

ABC Learning has also cost taxpayers dearly. In November 2008, at the time of the taxpayer-subsidised giant's collapse owing around \$1.5 billion, ABC owned some 1040 centres (used by 120,000 children) out of a total of 4700 daycare centres Australia-wide. The government's partial bail-out cost \$22m to kept centres open until the end of 2008 and a further \$34m to prop up 241 non-viable centres until March 2009.

2.2 Unfair discrimination against home-caring parents

- (a) **How current policies discriminate:** Home-caring parents of children aged under five years provide all the benefits of personal loving care to their children at home. However, government policies (ie. funding daycare centres via building and accreditation costs, training daycare staff and subsidisation of fees), unfairly DISCRIMINATE AGAINST HOME-CARING PARENTS because -
 - (a) **billions in taxpayer's funds** exclusively benefit daycare parents, but not home-caring parents;
 - (b) **no taxpayer funds** exclusively benefit home-caring parents because other funds available for children's care, though means-tested, are also available to daycare parents and stay-home parents, including i) the Baby Bonus; ii) Family Tax Benefit A; iii) Family Tax Benefit B; and iv) the Parenting Payment.
- (b) **How the paid parental leave proposal seeks to discriminate in order to 'normalise' a mother's return to paid work:** The Productivity Commission (PC) draft 30/9/08 *Paid Parental Leave – Support for Parents with Newborn Children*² calls on the federal government to discriminate further against stay-home mothers. It recommends paying workforce mothers four months maternity leave with taxpayers' money – nearly \$13,000 replacing the baby bonus – while stay-home mothers would receive just the baby bonus of \$5,000. The PC claims that working mothers deserve this money because they struggle without their pre-baby income. Yet this argument applies even more to stay-home mothers who sacrifice their salary for years to provide personal loving care for their children.

¹ Outlined in Speech by The Hon Maxine McKew MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Child Care, 16 October, 2008 Speech to the National Early Childhood Stakeholder Roundtable.

² Australian Government Productivity Commission, *Paid Parental Leave: Support for Parents with Newborn Children*, Draft Inquiry Report dated 30 September 2008.

The federal government policy of taxpayer-subsidised childcare is partly designed to achieve its policy goal of lifetime employment of women. Indeed the PC in its draft report on Paid Parental Leave –

- **highly valued the lifetime paid employment of women** by stressing the advantage of paid parental leave of stimulating, “lifetime employment rates of women – potentially contributing around six months of net additional [paid] employment of women [and promoting] ... some important, publicly supported social goals, and in particular, the normalcy of combining a caring role for children and working”;³ and
- **denigrated the alternative of ongoing unpaid employment as mothers in the home** by characterising a mother’s failure to return to paid work as a ‘perverse impact’ to be avoided and therefore recommended against making the period of paid parental leave too lengthy as “long durations of care are likely to erode a primary carer’s work-skills, with consequences for subsequent job quality and career prospects. In addition, long leave many ‘normalise’ staying at home, decreasing the likelihood that carers will seek re-employment.”⁴

Similarly, the PC stressed the importance of a mother’s lifelong ‘attachment’ to the workforce, but not her ‘attachment’ to her children by spending years nurturing them, declaring that around six to nine months maternal leave with newborns was an appropriate bonding period before returning to paid work. Ironically, this brief ‘bonding period’ has been sold (and bought by the public) as a plus for women’s rights, maternal and child health etc. even though its very purpose upon expiry is to deprive these same babies of their mothers for years spent in the paid workforce.

2.3 How this discrimination is justified

Various policy justifications are offered for allocating disproportionate funding, which discriminates against home-caring parents, for example the reasoning just considered for awarding much greater support to working mothers than home-based mothers as part of the ‘paid parental leave’ proposal. Here are some other justifications.

- (a) **Childcare ‘affordability’ vs. stay-home ‘affordability’:** The apparent justification for discriminating against stay-home parents is the women would prefer to be in paid work if only they could ‘afford’ childcare. However, research shows that the real aspiration of most women is ‘stay-home with children affordability’ over full-time work. Up to 80% of women with young children would prefer either to work part-time ‘around their children’ or not to engage in paid work at all.⁵ Australian adult and child psychiatrist Dr Peter Cook, who has studied the effects of childcare for decades, wrote in his 1996 book *Early Child Care – Infants and Nations at Risk*, “Repeated surveys show that many working mothers would prefer to care for their own children if they could afford it. There are no compelling reasons why affluent societies with large numbers of unemployed should not support mothers to do so ... It is psychological and economic folly for a society to spend vast sums of money subsidising child care for mothers who would much rather be helped to care for their infants themselves, while at the same time paying unemployment benefits to the next group of future mothers (and others) who would love to do the jobs occupied by mothers of young children.”⁶
- (b) **Housing affordability for some:** Another justification for subsidising childcare (over and above other care options) is that it helps parents to gain an income to help with ‘housing affordability’ and that without this subsidy the income from work might not cover childcare costs or be marginally profitable. However, it is unfair to discriminate in favour of one class of home-buyers (working parents), by providing them with subsidised ‘housing affordability’ when many others are in the same position. More broadly, why should some citizens (i.e working parents) be subsidised to earn a second come and not others? For that matter, what is fair about subsidising two-parent households with two incomes but not those struggling on one income?

³ *Ibid.*, p xiv.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 2.24 to 2.25.

⁵ Steve Biddulph, “Raising Babies – Should under 3s go to Nursery?” HarperCollinsPublishers, 2005, p41.

⁶ Peter Cook, “Early Child Care – Infants and Nations at Risk”, News Weekly Books, Melbourne, 1997, p 17.

- (c) **Productivity tool or poverty trap?** It is often argued, to justify subsidised daycare, that as individuals and as a nation, we are more productive when more parents (particularly women) join the paid workforce. (This argument is also used to promote taxpayer-funded paid parental leave.) However, as will be argued here, any short-term productivity gains for the families and children concerned and for the nation will be more than wiped out by the lower future productivity of people who have spent their babyhood in long daycare. In other words, long daycare is a potential poverty trap for individuals (Part 4), which could ultimately sap the hidden wealth of the nation, our social capital (see Part 6).
- (d) **Trained childcare professionals do a better job:** Parents are being made to believe childcare workers can do a better job. However, this is not borne out by studies (see Part 4.2) showing that the less time children spend in childcare the more securely they are attached, which is in turn a predictor of many benefits including emotional health. The government should, if anything, be encouraging parents to develop and use parenting and life skills. Good parenting is a lot harder than many people realise and if the necessary skills are not passed on within families, they do not necessarily come naturally. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many people ‘don’t know how to parent’ these days and that children of ‘time poor’ parents are, for example, less likely to be eating nutritious home-cooked meals, which is associated with childhood obesity.
- (e) **Daycare is here to stay!** The daycare industry is a recent phenomenon. Over the years, many long-established businesses have come and gone with the times. Though widespread, daycare should not receive preferential treatment in the form of taxpayer-funded support, especially in the face of known harms.
- (f) **Families need daycare to earn the income:** This has been brought about by government policies promoting an ever-increasing cycle of dual-income dependency (Part 6.1), which makes life such a struggle for single-income families. Rather than add to this dependency, this Submission recommends non-discriminatory parent care support and other policies that assist families to survive on one income. This will give parents the choice to use childcare or to nurture their children at home.
- (g) **Group care is best for children:** Some argue ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ and group care comprising numbers of adults and other children is therefore the best way to bring up and to socialise children, akin to ancient tribal traditions. However, this is not the case as Cook argues “Some childcare advocates argue that infants are being properly returned to group care with multiple carers, as in a tribe; but they ignore the fact that, uniquely in the history of our species, this policy raises infants in institutions that do not include their mothers or anyone having an enduring bond with the child, let alone any real love for these very children.”⁷ See Part 5.2 on this point.

PART 3 MARKETING THE DAYCARE EXPERIMENT

3.1 How daycare became ‘quality early childhood education’

Childcare was originally of course an invention of adults for adults, not created with the developmental interests of children at heart. However, with vested interests in the daycare industry and governments after votes as well as increased revenue from working parents (mostly mothers), daycare has ‘morphed’ into the new concept of ‘quality early childhood education’. The four concepts merged into this concept are –

- i. the **developmental phases** from babyhood, infancy (the pre-verbal phase) and toddlerhood;
- ii. **care** for children under school age;
- iii. **education** for children under school age; and
- iv. **quality**, suggesting that the package of early education and care is beneficial, not harmful.

⁷ Peter Cook, “Mothering Denied – How our culture harms women, infants, and society”, 2008, p 72. This book in electronic form was lodged in December 2008 with the Productivity Commission in response to 30/9/08 draft Report on Paid Parental Leave. Copy attached to this Submission, with kind permission of the author.

Implicit in this message from government is that notion that long daycare plus education are a great package for children in all three developmental phases. However, this will be shown not to be the case. Research referred to in Part 3 and Part 4 establishes beyond doubt that –

- long daycare at any age, regardless of any ‘educational’ component, carries numerous risks of lifelong emotional and developmental harm for children, especially for those under age two, making parental care at any age far preferable to long daycare;
- children before the age of about three years (or slightly younger for girls), as anyone familiar with child development knows, engage in ‘parallel play’ are not ready for group interactions. They do not need a formal education or group care and do much better the more time they spend being nurtured by their parents, even by those classified by health professionals to be ‘insensitive mothers’ (see Part 4.2);
- children aged three and over are developmentally ready for an educational programme in a group setting, such as a sessional short-hours preschool.

3.2 The daycare experiment

- (a) **A massive experiment with a long fuse:** This Submission examines the effects long daycare on Australian children and the appropriate policy response. Daycare involves, “a massive experiment in raising infants and young children ... in the absence of any adults who are related or who have any continuing commitment to them.”⁸ This experiment has for the first time in history simultaneously separated millions of babies, infants and toddlers from their mothers and has no successful precedent. As will be shown, much harm is associated with daycare. However, this is only the harm we know about. As Cook points out, there is an important difference between saying that there is no proven evidence of harmful effects, and there *are* no harmful effects. *Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.* Early childcare advocates have, without excuse, attempted to reverse the burden of proof. Harm can exist even though we have not proved it yet, for example –
- latent harm, which may not show up for years, such as the most recent NICHD finding that 15 year olds’ abnormal cortisol readings were associated with early daycare, see Part 4.3; or
 - harms which cannot conclusively be linked to daycare exposure, without research.
- (b) **Why no proper debate so far?** The daycare experiment has not been properly debated in Australia because its potential for widespread harm is not well understood. The harm it causes is still ‘under the radar’ because –
- it may appear small in individual cases;
 - it is difficult or unpleasant for people, especially those who have made use of daycare, to recognise and understand the types of ‘invisible’ harm identified in childcare studies, such as deep emotional scarring that lasts for life that may cause people to struggle to form relationships or be productive as adults;
 - these effects have a long fuse (Part 6) and people like to focus on the here and now;
 - the public are unaware of harm, which the government has failed to audit and report.
- (c) **The government must be accountable:** As the government is sponsoring this experiment in children’s care, it must be accountable, as for a new drug put on the market. However, while drugs can be tested before release on humans, the most reliable way of establishing whether daycare harms children is to study those children. Australia has the benefit of a vast number of international studies which, as will be shown, demonstrate significant daycare-associated harm risks for children (Part 4) and society (Part 6). These risks can be reduced but not overcome by improving the ‘quality’ of daycare, because of certain fundamentals in the daycare environment (Part 5).

The government must therefore educate the public about these harms and commit resources to identify all daycare harm risks and regularly report them to the public. This includes identifying latent harm in adulthood. That way Australians can make informed decisions about the best care for their children and harm associated with daycare is not dismissed as having other causes.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p 86.

PART 4 HOW DAYCARE HARMS CHILDREN

4.1 Harm risks other than daycare

There are a number of harm risks for children including, it will be argued, time spent in daycare. Just some of the other factors affecting a child's harm risk include the quality of parenting, family break-down, the child's socio-economic status and an individual child's temperament. Some children will sail through daycare unscathed and others will not. There is no way of telling in advance. However with appropriately designed studies, researchers are able, despite these so-called 'confounding variables', to determine whether and how daycare carries *increased risks*, over the home-cared cohort, of adverse outcomes.

4.2 Benefits of daycare, far outweighed by harm

Recent data from longitudinal studies report improved understanding and language in daycare children, particularly children from deprived or dysfunctional homes. The Australian Longitudinal Study concluded, for example, "Infants in informal care had higher learning domain scores than infants not in care. These results point to the beneficial effects of informal care, even for at-risk groups."⁹

However, this must be weighed against data showing an increased risk from long daycare of emotional disturbance and conduct disorders and insecure attachment. The NICHD study found, "children who spent more time in a child care centre (as opposed to in another person's home with a non-relative, or in a home with a relative other than their mother) tended to show benefits in terms of their cognitive and linguistic development, but to also show more behavioural problems, being more aggressive and disobedient."¹⁰

The NICHD study also analysed children aged 15 months and found evidence of whether quality childcare compensated for lower quality maternal care was mixed, but the less time children of insensitive mothers spent apart from them in childcare the more likely they were to be securely attached.¹¹

4.3 Life-long harm risks of daycare

Despite the complexity of studying the effects of early non-parental childcare, research has found compelling evidence of daycare-associated harm, after controlling for other risk factors. As summarised by Cook, "Centre-based childcare by unrelated carers during infancy carries a number of immediate and long-term risks for healthy behavioural and emotional development. Various aspects of the childcare experience affect risk, such as the quality and quantity, but 'universally available, high quality, affordable childcare' is an unachievable goal – 'an abstraction'."¹²

(a) **Harm related to daycare 'dosage':** Cook wrote "The more hours spent in early daycare, the greater the risk of adverse effects. Long daily separations and other factors can lead to insecurity in the infant's attachment to his mother, and this may have effects that continue through childhood and beyond. In addition, long hours of separation *diminish the mother's own sensitivity to her child* during the time that they do have together. There is evidence that emotional disturbances arising out of insecure early attachments adversely affect relationships in adolescence and adult life. Rewarding secondary attachments may occur in childcare if the carer has time, is affectionate, dependable and continues to be available, but this is not often possible in real-life 'affordable' childcare."¹³

Given this evidence, it is difficult to justify government policy (see Part 2.1) which encourages sole parents on income support (usually mothers) to use daycare for up to 50 hours per week, provided they work for a minimum of just 15 hours, by awarding them the maximum Child Care Benefit (\$3.47 per hour fee reduction) and the Child Care Rebate (reducing any outstanding fee payable by 50%).

⁹ Social Policy Research Paper No. 36 "Growing Up in Australia: How well are Australian infants and children aged 4 and 5 doing?" (Findings from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children Wave 1, Part 3: Children's use of non-parental care), Australian Government, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, published 25 September 2008, <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/research/prp36/sec3.htm>.

¹⁰ Jay Belsky, "Early child care and early child development: Major findings of the NICHD Study of Early Child Care", *European Journal of Developmental Psychiatry*.

¹¹ National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Early Child Care Research Network. "The effects of infant child care in infant-mother attachment security: results of the NICHD study of early child care." *Child Dev* 1997; 68: 860-879. cited by Cook in "Rethinking the Early Childhood Agenda", *MJA* 1999; 170: 29-31

¹² Peter Cook, "Mothering Denied", p 85.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p 85.

- (b) **Abnormal cortisol levels:** Abnormal cortisol readings in children whilst attending daycare and again at age 15 are extremely worrying, “The hormone cortisol is part of the body’s normal response to stress, and it helps to arouse appropriate responses in the face of danger. Normally its level in the blood is higher in the morning, falling throughout the day. But many infants stressed in childcare show elevated levels of cortisol that remain abnormally high through the second half of the day – even if the daycare is of ‘high quality’. These are likely to have lasting effects on various body ‘settings’ and responses to stress. At age 15, adolescents who had been in childcare as infants had cortisol levels that were significantly *lower* than normal on waking. Eminent researchers concluded that these abnormal findings were related to the adolescents’ early childhood experiences, and also to early mothering that had been assessed as less sensitive during infancy. These effects were judged to act independently, and one effect can add to the other.”¹⁴
- (c) **Daycare increases multiple harm risks, regardless of quality:** Despite a widely held belief to the contrary, the NICHD study established that more time spent in daycare increases harm risks to children, regardless of its *quality*, “First, no quality threshold could be detected at which more vs. less [day]care had a noticeably greater or lesser impact on problem behaviour (NICHD Early Childhood Research Network, 2001). Thus the relation between dosage of non-maternal care and externalising problems reflected a constant dose-response relationship: As quantity of [day]care increased, so did problem behaviour. Importantly, intern-level analysis revealed that it was not just the case ... that children with extensive child-care histories were simply more independent and assertive than other children. Rather, in the NICHD research, they were found to show evidence of neediness (e.g., demands a lot of attention, demands must be met immediately, easily jealous), assertiveness (e.g., talks too much, bragging/boasting, argues a lot), disobedience/defiance (e.g., talks out of turn, disobedient at school, defiant-talks back to staff, disrupts school discipline), and aggression (e.g., gets into many fights, cruelty-bullying-meanness, physically attacks others, destroys own things). ...What is incontestable ... is that quality of child care, as so long asserted, does not explain these potentially disconcerting effects of what has become a widespread experience for American and English children and that the effects detected concern truly aggressive and even destructive behaviour, not just independence and assertiveness.”¹⁵
- (d) **Daycare carries increased risk of infections:** There is good evidence of an increased risk of infections, some of which are not trivial, as Cook wrote, “Parents are not told of this risk, which is perhaps one of the most clearly demonstrated *effects* of group child care, since at least part of the causal connection lies in the group day care conditions which help infections to spread. In a paper about the control of infections in child care, Ferson (1994) said “Recent reports have documented increased risks of infectious illness among children in group care, their family contacts and the staff caring for them. Children who attend group care have more episodes of upper respiratory and middle ear infections, pneumonia and gastroenteritis than children cared for at home. They are also at increased risk of life-threatening infection by *Haemophilus influenzae* type b. Conditions which commonly affect adult contacts include upper respiratory tract infections, hepatitis A, cytomegalovirus (CMV), enteric infections such as giardia, rotavirus and shigella, and skin infections and infestations.”¹⁶

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 86.

¹⁵ Jay Belsky, Emanuel Miller Lecture “Developmental Risks (Still) Associated with Early Child Care”, *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, 2001; 42(7): 845-859.

¹⁶ “Early Child Care”, p 62.

(e) **Breastfeeding benefits lost:** Early daycare interrupts optimum breast-feeding, namely for 12-24 months and then for as long as mutually desired by both mother and child.¹⁷ "Human breast milk has many unique short-term and long-term values for health of human babies; no other milk is so well matched to the needs of human infants. Mutually satisfying breastfeeding brings many benefits for both mother and child, and it helps to achieve the normal level of health."¹⁸ Health and developmental **benefits for the child** include¹⁹ –

- the likely reduction in some childhood leukemias, urinary tract infections, celiac disease, sudden infant death syndrome, type 1 diabetes in children and into adulthood;
- protection against a range of chronic illnesses that can develop in adulthood including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, atherosclerosis and high blood pressure;
- a 1996 study found that children aged six and a half who had been exclusively breastfed scored an average of 7.5 points higher in verbal intelligence tests and overall IQ tests and that teachers also rated the breastfed children higher at reading, writing and solving mathematical problems;
- greatly helping establish a strong, loving attachment bond between mother and baby;
- over the first three years, when trillions of connecting pathways between the brains billions of cells are being formed or 'wired', an infant's experiences during breastfeeding help to develop structures and functions in the brain in ways that enhance the child's sense of security and social relationships and this sets the basis for many lifelong patterns, such as those of learning, behaviour and emotion;
- benefiting the child's endocrine and immune systems, by tempering the responses to stress, and so reducing the risks of disease throughout life.

Benefits for the mother of breastfeeding include²⁰ –

- promotion of recovery from childbirth and delayed return of menstruation and fertility, depending on the duration, intensity and frequency of breastfeeding;
- emotional closeness to the baby, stimulating the mother's oxytocin and prolactin hormones, thereby reducing stress and fostering emotional bonding.

Surprisingly, an Australian study of new mothers found, "that returning to work on a part-time or casual basis presents almost as much of a barrier to breast-feeding as working full-time. In a study of almost 3700 mothers and their babies, at six months after giving birth 56 per cent of the women who were not working were breastfeeding. This figure dropped to 44 per cent for women who returned to work part-time, and 39 per cent for women working full-time (Cooklin et al, 2008)."²¹

(f) **Australian Longitudinal Study:** This study, while acknowledging the NICHD childcare harm findings, has not gathered enough data on childcare to draw any definitive conclusions, reporting "We did not replicate North American findings of more negative social-emotional outcomes in children with longer hours of care (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network 2006). However, the cross-sectional nature of the LSAC Wave 1 data did not allow a clear test of this effect, which typically has been linked to the cumulative effect of time in care over the first four years."²²

In summary: Babies placed in daycare (even high quality care) for more than 20 hours per week (and in some cases just 10 hours per week²³), face greater risks of –

- i. poor emotional health (including increased hostility and anxiety in boys, and over-dependency, anxiety, and depression in girls);
- ii. poor behaviour such as hyperactivity, aggression, cruelty, bullying and disobedience;
- iii. contracting infections.

¹⁷ "Mothering Denied", p 18.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p 20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 18-20, this list that follows paraphrases Dr Cook's material.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p 20.

²² "Growing Up in Australia", Part 3: Children's use of non-parental care.

²³ Peter Cook, "Rethinking the Early Childhood Agenda", *MJA* 1999; 170: 29-31 refers to the NICHD finding that infants whose mothers rated in the lowest 25% for "sensitivity" (summarising extensive observational assessments) had an increased risk of insecure attachment if they had over 10 hours' non-maternal care per week.

4.4 Newspaper reports confirm research predictions

Australian newspapers daily report unexplained, disturbing new trends in poor mental health and behaviour of our young children and teenagers, bearing striking parallels with harm risks predicted by research into daycare effects including as outlined in Part 4.3. Whilst a range of other factors such as family break-down no doubt contribute, the possibility that a child's early exposure to daycare (or other non-parental care) exacerbates or adds to these problems cannot be discounted and may well be conclusively proven if the relevant data were collected. Here are a few recent examples that were reported in Queensland in the space of just three weeks from 22 October to 12 November 2008 –

(a) **Under-age drinking** – *The Cairns Post*, 12/11/08, "Australia's underage drinkers consume more than 175 million drinks a year ... according to a new report highlighting "alarming" rates of illegal alcohol consumption. Specialists from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre say their findings show "getting pissed" is still a firm priority for young Australians. "We've shown teenage drinking is a big money spinner for the government," said Dr Christopher Doran, lead author of the study in the journal of *Addictive Behaviours*. ... The report also found high rates of drinking in younger age groups, with 17 per cent of 13-year-olds drinking four drinks a week, and 30 per cent of 14-year-olds consuming six drinks. Spirits were the drink of choice for boys, while girls favoured alcopops."²⁴

(b) **Unexplained rise in child anxiety and mental problems** – Biddulph wrote in 1996, "There has been a huge growth – a trebling in 20 years – in the number of children under three years old in full-time daycare. An epidemic of mental health problems has taken place among children and adolescents in that same span of time. The cause seems to lie in the whole lifestyle of hurry and stress, leading to a loss of family time, of which daycare of babies and toddlers is just a part."²⁵

The Courier-Mail, 26/11/08, "Children as young as three are being treated for mental health conditions in some Queensland hospitals ... according to new figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics last week. The findings revealed that younger people are now more likely to have a mental disorder than older people. In Queensland, figures show one in four teenagers have mental problems including panic attacks, obsessive-compulsive disorders, depression and substance abuse. The findings were confirmed by Dr James Scott, the Child and Family Therapy Unit director at the Royal Children's Hospital in Brisbane. Dr Scott said that a big part of the burgeoning problem was changes to the family environment, and that a secure relationship with at least one parent was enormously important. The biology of people hasn't changed ... The pace of family life has changed as well, with little quality time such as mealtimes. Dr Scott said the hospital had treated "distressed preschoolers" – boys exhibiting extreme behaviour problems "where they hit the other kids, are aggressive and unable to sit still and focus", and girls "withdrawn, quiet, silent, tearful and clingy".²⁶

(c) **Escalating violence and extreme behaviour in schools** – *The Courier-Mail*, 22/10/08, "Up to 22 students a day are being suspended from a high school in Brisbane's south because it can't cope with soaring levels of violent and extreme behaviour. The Queensland Teachers' Union made the shocking claim as 3000 of its members continued rolling strikes to highlight disadvantage in 54 Logan-Albert-Beaudesert schools. The union said inadequate funding contributed to escalating violence at schools in the region where students regularly assaulted or threatened staff and their peers. Smoking, drugs, truancy, abusive language and unsafe behaviours like tackling were other common triggers for suspension."²⁷

The Courier-Mail, 27/10/08, "A battle is brewing to contain a 26 per cent spike in school student suspensions over the past three years. The alarming wave of aggressive behaviour from south-east and north Queensland students comes as the Government pours another \$28.6 million into "positive behaviour strategies" this financial year. ... But the arsenal of strategies including the costly [Statewide Positive Behaviour Support programme] appears to have done little yet to curb problem behaviour."²⁸

²⁴ "Teen drinking a \$100m problem", *The Cairns Post*, 12/11/08.

²⁵ Steve Biddulph, *Raising Babies*.

²⁶ Suellen Hinde, "Toddlers in Distress", *The Courier-Mail*, 26 October 2008.

²⁷ James O'Loan, "Logan school locks out violent teens", *The Courier-Mail*, 22 October 2008.

²⁸ James O'Loan, "Out of Control – Alarm as unruly students force suspension spike", *The Courier-Mail*, 27 October 2008.

- (d) **Rise in despair and self-harm by children** - *The Courier-Mail*, 9/11/08, "Troubled teenagers are self-harming in ever increasing numbers by deliberately cutting and burning themselves, research has warned. Children as young as 13 are using ripped soft drink cans to inflict their injuries in school toilets a Queensland leading psychiatrist has told the *Sunday Mail*. University of Queensland director of child and adolescent psychiatry, Professor Graham Martin OAM, said "The figures are alarming. Self-injury is definitely on the increase both with those who do it once and never try it again and with those who get into it and do it lots and continue to do it." Prof Martin ... has been leading research into this epidemic.

The researchers found that 14 per cent of first-year high school students had tried to cut themselves. The figures show that 1 per cent of 18 to 35-year-olds had harmed themselves in the past month and 8 per cent in the same age group had done so in the past year. The results are part of the first ever study of self-injury across all ages in a representative sample of 12,000 Australians aged 10 and above. Professor Martin said the problem was alarming because mental health resources were not there to manage it ... "We are surprised at the level of despair in young people, their sense of hopelessness about the future and their level of self-harm. Our study shows anxiety is the main feature – often with people who have been through a family trauma or some kind of abuse – but that is not always the case." He added that the practice of self-harm was most prevalent in educated, upper-middle class young women, but there had also been an increase in young males".²⁹

PART 5 WHY EVEN 'QUALITY' DAYCARE HARMS CHILDREN

Part 3 outlined **how** daycare can harm children by exposing them to increased harm risks, compared with their home-raised cohorts. Daycare is known to be associated with certain risks but the precise **causes** are not fully understood. Explaining and providing **why** harm results is difficult. Probable explanations are offered in this Part, bearing in mind that copious evidence of harm - without an understanding of all its causes - is a very good foundation for policy decisions in the best interests of children.

Why then do harm risks persist, even in 'quality' care? The answer is almost certainly that all long daycare centres have in common a unique combination of features (eg. a sense of aggression) including deficits (eg. no parents, lack of personal space) that differ from the home environment.

5.1 Parental deprivation

The most obvious thing missing from a daycare centre is are the child's parents. Separation from the mother or 'maternal deprivation' is almost certainly the biggest risk faced those children. Humans have evolved over millions of years as carrying mammals, with strong two-way attachments between mother and infant, without which babies would not develop properly, would be neglected or 'left behind' to perish. Cook argues there is a natural, biologically-based, best-fit pattern of human mothering that includes breastfeeding, carrying, secure attachment, mutual rewards, enjoyment and empathy.³⁰

When this pattern is disturbed, by separating babies from their mothers for long periods, inherited survival mechanisms are interfered with and babies do not develop properly, therefore the mental and physical health of both will suffer. Babies left for long hours in daycare centres often fail to bond securely with their mothers. One example is the NICHD study finding that regardless of childcare quality and other variables, boys in more than 30 hours of non-maternal care per week had an increased risk of insecure attachment.³¹ Studies also show societies where the mother constantly 'carry' their young experience almost no violence.³² This may explain why children in long daycare, who are not carried as much, due to staff to baby ratios, are more likely to become more aggressive.

²⁹ Suellen Hinde, "Teen self-harm alert – Doctors warn of increase in cutting and burning", *The Courier-Mail*, 9 November 2008.

³⁰ Peter Cook "Mothering Denied", p 83.

³¹ Peter Cook, "Rethinking the Early Childhood Agenda", *MJA* 1999; 170: 29-31.

³² Prescott JW. (1979). *Deprivation of physical affection as a primary process in the development of physical violence*. In: Gill DG. ed. *Child abuse and violence*. AMS Press: New York. (pp. 66-137.), cited by Cook, in "Mothering Denied".

5.2 Other special ‘close adults’ are absent

Babies develop best through to adulthood when they bond constantly with a main carer who loves them for life. In other words, babies need love of ‘their special adults’ that money can’t buy. Biddulph explained to *The Sunday Times* why daycare centres cannot provide the kind of love children need to develop properly, “Babies need to be loved, and one or two or three close adults are best. When researchers study this using videoed interaction over many hours, mothers and grandmothers, fathers and so on, have hundreds of little exchanges a day, where the baby seeks and gets a smile, a bit of chat, is noticed and responded to. Paid carers in even the best nurseries miss these interactions more than two-thirds of the time. The empathy region of the growing brain of a one-year-old baby doesn’t grow well if it isn’t being cuddled, chatted to, and finely responded to. Even the chaotic, muddled and messy family situation does this interaction better than the Ofsted supervised nurseries with their 140 goals and “curriculum”.

“The Blair government don’t understand the importance of love. Thankfully, most families do,” he says. “Being able to form relationships, be a good boss, be a good parent, a happy creative person, all arise from early experiences of nurture and relaxed fun with people who see us as special. We are all just the babies we were, in bigger form. So it’s vitally important, like the foundations of a house. Everyone knows this really, it’s the central fact of psychology.” In fact he even accuses some ministers of having the psychological mentality of slammers themselves, even if they used nannies rather than nurseries to look after their offspring. “I think the government is made up largely of slammers, and of course nannies are their main option. They seem not to understand the soft and lovely side of family life, and how it’s worth more than money can buy.”³³

5.3 Other features common to daycare

A number of other features common to daycare centres are very likely unfavourable to children’s development. Here are some of them, from a number of examples so eloquently outlined by Biddulph³⁴ -

- (a) **Lack of peace:** The daycare environment is exhausting and overwhelming with so many children in one confined space. “It is noisy, even when the sounds are all happy, but add a certain amount of crying or angry shouts, and it is a stressful sound, which – apart from at ‘nap time’ (and that is rarely silent) – continues all day long. Apart from the noise there is a difficulty in keeping mental focus”³⁵
- (b) **A sense of aggression:** “Childhood *is* an aggressive time – even at home little children often resort to hitting, pulling, shouting, as they lack the skills to sort out conflict in better ways. But in a large group setting it gets worse. Groups of bigger boys, or meaner girls who physically or emotionally dominate things, can be a problem if your child is less assertive. Alternatively your child may become one of the dominators or bullies, as another way of dealing with a stressful environment. Under threes are too young to nurture or befriend each other for more than a few seconds, or even play together co-operatively. Problems soon arise. A carer will usually intervene to protect the weaker children, but not always in time. It is only bumps and biffs and unkind words – they won’t end up in hospital – but it is emotionally unsettling and scary to quite a few children”³⁶
- (c) **Anxiety-inducing environment:** The main dangers Biddulph identifies the main dangers of childcare as “a lack of an internal sense of deep safety, love and comfort. Nurseries are anxious places for the very young. Adult mental health depends on inner reserves, the memory of being totally loved and safe, which we can draw on to get through adult crises.”³⁷
- (d) **The lack of homeliness or a place of one’s own:** Children in daycare have toys but no personal space, apart from a coat hook, so children are unanchored moving from one spot to another.
- (e) **There are never enough adults to go around:** “The staff do their best to share themselves around, but it is non-stop all day. They respond to cries, divert problems, comfort a crying child, take someone to the toilet – and move on. Your child gets one tenth of their time at best, and rarely their full attention. Caring for so many children all day is difficult – you will see the adults ‘zone out’ by taking mental breaks when they can, simply for self-preservation”.

³³ Sian Griffiths, “Raising babies and keeping mum”, *The Sunday Times*, 6 May 2007.

³⁴ Steve Biddulph, “Raising Babies”, pp25-30. The headings use Biddulph’s terminology for (a) to (g).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Sian Griffiths, “Raising babies and keeping mum”, *The Sunday Times*, 6 May 2007.

http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/families/article1751563.ece

- (f) **A mechanical quality to the day's events:** "Toileting, meals, nap time, nappy changing, face and hand washing, moving from activity to activity, are all mass activities. It's a rare staff member who sings to a baby or blows a raspberry on its tummy while changing its nappy – something a mother or father does all the time. This is an institutional life."³⁸
- (g) **A day is a really long time:** A whole day in a childcare centre is a very long time for a child, especially for children under two years. "A day at home can be long too, but it is punctuated by being part of the parent's life – going about, meeting friends, shopping – in a way that can be made enriching and interesting. There is more variety and change in a child's world outside than inside the fences or walls of a daycare centre."³⁹
- (h) **Absence of men:** Another unnatural feature of many daycare centres is the relative absence of men. This may be a particular disadvantage for the children of sole mothers, especially if they lack good male role models.

PART 6 WIDER DAYCARE HARMS

6.1 Dual-income dependency

For many, daycare and parental (mostly maternal) employment go hand in hand –

- where paid employment would not be possible for many without childcare;
- conversely, where daycare centres would close if women opted for unpaid employment in the home.

No doubt many families benefit financially from a second income. Many parents manage paid work successfully around their children, for example, where both are in part-time jobs with child-friendly hours. However, where taking on a second income interferes with full-time parental care of children, it also carries serious harm risks, which are indirectly attributable to government-sponsored daycare.

Parts 2.2 and 2.4 show how the federal government is telling families it is normal and safe to leave babies in daycare to return to work and is using billions of taxpayer funds to make daycare "affordable". The income earned by trading in parental care for childcare is seen by many as a gateway to personal wealth and national productivity. In the short-term this may be true. Families derive a greater income and the federal government presumably recoups its billions spent on childcare in tax revenue. However, in the long-term, childcare will prove to be a potential poverty trap in every sense for individual children (as seen in Part 3) and their families and for society as a whole (this Part 5).

Using taxpayer funds to subsidise childcare, in particular daycare centres has –

- propped up the uneconomic daycare industry, as we have discovered with the collapse of ABC Learning Centres, with massive losses borne by taxpayers;
- therefore promoted dual-income take-up, as more parents place children in "affordable" childcare places, courtesy of massive taxpayer subsidies.

This has brought about many unforeseen and often undesirable consequences for the families concerned and for society -

- (a) **There is often little change out of the second income:** because replacing a hands-on parent of a child under five is costly, and so it should be. Put simply "three into two will not go" ie. the government is encouraging parents to take on three jobs (2 incomes plus raising child/ren), when parents can only pay (with their labour) for two. So taxpayers are asked to pay towards the 'third' job of caring for children. The reality is that child-raising is a full-time job, requiring paid carers or an unpaid parent, yet many parents seem puzzled and outraged that childcare is 'unaffordable' or that it needs the entire 'second income' to fund it.
- (b) **Personal, loving parental nurturing of small children is forgone:** in return for a daycare centre place + a tax rebate towards those fees + whatever is left of the second income.
- (c) **Dual-income dependency spreads:** Dual-income couples and families push up the cost of living and housing, thereby creating a vicious cycle that forces lower income families to send the second parent (usually the mother) out to work to pay the bills.

³⁸ Steve Biddulph, "Raising Babies", p 28.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p 30.

6.2 School children may be under-socialised

The long-term harms caused by daycare cannot be seen in isolation. Ongoing dual-income reliance (after children reach school) causes more problems for children when both parents work full-time or outside school hours. These parents cannot spend as much time socialising their children as their stay-home counterparts. We take socialisation for granted but without it, people would not get along well and society would become uncivil. Children need to be taught, by example, by parents who are strong ever-present role models. This takes lots of time, every day, as parents constantly model good manners, coping behaviour, life skills, humour, a sense of fun etc. and help their children find a style which best suits them to cope with life. When parents are absent for most of their children's waking hours, subject to a range of other influences in a child's life, socialisation may suffer and emotional and behavioural problems from earlier non-parental may be compounded.

Primary school children of dual-income or sole working parents are more likely to spend time apart from siblings (eg. if they attend different schools or where younger children are in daycare) and spend as much as 11 hours each day away from home at school and Outside Hours School Care (**OHSC**). The effects of these prolonged parental absences on children and society as a whole are not fully understood. There is a need for more research in this area, to audit this government-sponsored institutionalisation of school children, including whether outcomes for these children differ and how the OHSC environment affects children. Secondary school children also no doubt suffer from the lack of contact and the socialising influence of their parents. Also, the time families do spend together, is more likely to be stressful and rushed, with less time to simply relax together each day.

6.3 School children may be under-supervised

The biggest risk for older children is the lack of supervision with many teenagers treated like adults and left to their own devices outside school hours. Of course, any parent can neglect to supervise a child and many working parents, regardless of their work status, ensure their children are supervised at all times. However, common sense suggests that greater numbers of children of working parents will find themselves without adult supervision in the hours before and after school in empty houses or in other public places. In the risk-taking teenage years, these are fertile conditions for depression, alcohol and drug use and teenage pregnancy. Sadly, with Internet access readily available, the reality is that unsupervised teenagers are also far more likely to become exposed to hard core pornography and depictions of extreme violence. These days, more than ever, teenagers need the community and parents to keep a close eye on them. There is research that shows in order to thrive adolescents need to have involved, loving, responsive caring from their parents. This means 'eyes-on, hands-on parenting' with more, not less, supervision than ever.

6.4 Far-reaching harm to society

The harms referred to in Part 3 are just early warning signs of the greater threats now considered.

- (a) **The contagion effect on teachers and other students:** When daycare-related effects on individual children aggregate at classroom level, the NICHD study found that other children are harmed, "Even children with much less care are affected when they end up in kindergarten [and preparatory level] classrooms full of kids with extensive care histories. So there is a contagion effect of sorts, with those unaffected becoming affected by the care histories of their classmates."⁴⁰

Cook observed "By school-age, the effects of early daycare show up as increased risk of aggressive and disobedient behaviour in the playground and classroom. Such behaviours not only disrupt the class, but induce similar behaviour in non-daycare classmates. This presumably makes teaching more stressful for teachers, and on a national scale is likely to have adverse consequences for society as a whole."⁴¹

There is obvious potential for this contagion effect to apply to other behaviours. See Part 6.4(f).

- (b) **Maternal health suffers:** When mothers are separated from their small children and enter the paid workforce, the baby is not the only one to suffer. The attachment between a mother and her baby is two-way and the mental health of many mothers is known to suffer from this separation, particularly for a large number of women pressured into paid work.

⁴⁰ Julie Dmitrieva, Laurence Steinberg and Jay Belsky, "Child-Care History, Classroom Composition, and Children's Functioning in Kindergarten", *Psychological Science*, Vol.18 Issue 12, pages 1032-1039, 20 Nov 2007.

⁴¹ Peter Cook, "Mothering Denied", *ibid.*, p 86.

- (c) **Parenting and partnering skills are degraded:** The more time children spend in daycare centres, and then often later on, away from their working parents through to adulthood, the less parenting experience their mother and father will have. Similarly, children of happily married parents will have less exposure to the day to day interactions that make for successful partnering if they spend more time away with their peers rather than their parents. These children will likely have less success in partnering and parenting and reduced skills to pass on to their own children, leading inevitably to more family break-downs.
- (d) **Anti-social behaviour, incivility & crime:** We have yet to see the full impact of separating large numbers of children from their parents during infancy and then for very long hours, almost daily in some cases, during their primary and teen years. Given the inevitable decrease in parental time spent socialising, supervising or even being with these children, large numbers are likely to be less socialised than ever before, leading to anti-social behaviour and incivility towards their peers and others in society. It is natural for teenage children to experiment and find themselves in trouble, even with the law and, not surprisingly, this most often happens when parents are not around.
- (e) **Collapse of community organisations and volunteering:** Anecdotal evidence abounds of community organisations losing their volunteer army to the paid workforce. It was recently reported, for example, that Queensland's tuckshops face closure partly for this reason, "Soaring grocery bills and the huge increase in working mothers are sending school tuckshops to the wall. A survey commissioned by the Queensland Association of School Tuckshops found one in six, or 17 per cent, operated at a loss and possibly faced closure. Tuckshop convenors blame the ballooning cost of food ... and fewer volunteers."
- The decline of the volunteer culture, pressures the relatively small number that remain and, when the burden becomes too much for few to bear, volunteer organisations that benefit children, such as playgroups and sporting groups, collapse or scale down. Fewer will be free to volunteer to help charities whose beneficiaries will suffer. Also, as has often been reported, we will face a crisis in aged care. If people cannot find or afford time to nurture their own children, elderly relatives are also more likely to be institutionalised, rather than cared for at home.
- (f) **Cumulative 'small' effects and latent effects:** Adverse effects due to early childcare may appear at first to be small and are disregarded by many. However, their capacity to harm becomes significant when numbers of people are likewise affected or when a child's deficit leads to other harm. As noted by Cook, "The NICHD Network, already acknowledges that, even when the adverse effects due to early childcare are small, when large numbers of people are affected, subsequent adverse effects on society as a whole are likely. Even if only a few children who show increased aggression and problem behaviours in school continue to show such behaviour in adolescence and then into adult life, the costs could be very high. For example, do such behaviours carry over into how young people drive, drink alcohol or take drugs? ... in late 2008 the NICHD Early Child Care and Youth Network reported that, amongst other findings at age 15, "higher hours of non-relative care predicted greater risk taking and impulsivity".⁴²

6.5 Harm predicted to snowball

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of the daycare phenomenon is the inevitable inter-generational snowballing of the problems identified in Parts 3 and 4, from which we are currently buffered by –

- grandparents who step in to raise their grandchildren, while parents work; and
- a generation of more or less well-adjusted, good parents.

All seems fine when grandparents (who all home-raised their own children) step in to, often to 'save' their grandchildren from daycare. However, what happens to the next generation? It seems doubtful that parents who chose daycare for their own children will have the inclination to take on this hands-on role for *their* grandchildren. Instead, if this trend continues, the next generation will more than likely end up in some form of non-parental care. Given 'good parenting' is all-important in lowering a child's exposure to harm, it is of great concern that parenting skills may be lost or degraded as argued above. Without these two 'buffering' effects, impacts of non-parental care, such as daycare, will be far worse.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p 77.

PART 7 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Here is a brief overview of the conclusions in this Submission. Further detail is included below in the Summary of Conclusions and the Recommendations.

7.1 How should childcare be funded?

Taxpayers have borne the increasing burden of billions in childcare funding, which discriminates against home-caring parents. This discriminatory funding of children's care is grossly unfair. Australian parents should be given a real choice in how best to care for their children, by re-allocating childcare funding amongst ALL parents, regardless of their care preferences.

7.2 What else should the government do about childcare?

The childcare industry poses serious threats to the fabric of our society, yet it has continued expanding with the blessing of government and business, even in the face of the ABC Learning collapse. Meanwhile most people appear unaware of its potential to cause harm. The truth needs to be told.

On the basis of the already proven harm risks of increasing use of non-parental care, unless this trend is reversed, society will be almost unrecognisable in around 30 years. It may not happen overnight, but it will happen. Our children will inherit an increasingly uncivil, lawless and violent society as poor behaviour becomes the norm and infects other children; emotionally damaged children grow into adults without the optimum social and emotional skills to gain meaningful employment or have a happy home life; uncivil behaviour and crime rates rise and society spins even more rapidly out of control as the 'buffering effect' of grandparent-carers and currently well-adjusted parents (themselves home-raised) are replaced with hundreds of thousands of Australians who are currently spending their early childhood in daycare.

A narrow view that wealth is generated only by paid work, ignores the social capital that is lost when government policies induce or force parents out to paid work through childcare subsidisation. The tax revenue from working parents in the short-term will be more than wiped out by lower future productivity of people who have spent their babyhood in long daycare as well as intractable social problems and an overwhelming burden on future health, social justice and welfare budgets.

The government should further investigate and educate the public about potential harms associated with non-parental care, particularly daycare. Australians can then make informed decisions about the best care for their children. On the basis of already proven harms, parental nurturing must become the gold standard for the care of Australian children.

P.T.O.

7.3 Summary of Conclusions

Part in Submission	No.	Conclusions	Related recommendation	
2	Policies for children's care support	a	Policies for care of children currently discriminate against stay-home parents by allocating billions <i>exclusively</i> on childcare, but not vice versa	A. Equity in funding parental care choices
	b	It would be much fairer and give all Australian parents a real choice by dividing childcare funding, without discrimination, amongst all parents of such children. Parents could then either use it to get hired help, or use it to help pay other bills so either the mother or perhaps father can be at home with the child.	C. Community support for parents D. Ongoing funding for sessional pre-school programmes	
	c	In the current economic crisis, it also makes sense for parents to find employment in the home (if that is what they chose) thus freeing up jobs for others including otherwise jobless households.	E. Equity in family taxation	
3	Marketing the daycare experiment	d	The federal government should be accountable for its childcare policy, by investigating and publicly reporting on all harm risks associated with childcare since its introduction in 1981. That way, Australians can make informed decisions about the best care for their children and harm associated with daycare is not dismissed as having other causes.	F. Ongoing childcare audit
4	How daycare harms children	e	The more hours spent in daycare, the greater the harm risks for children than faced by parent-nurtured children. Yet the government provides the maximum subsidy to stay-home parents on income support for up to 24 hours' daycare a week (or 50 hours, for those working 15 hours per week).	B. Hierachy of children's care
		f	Time spent in daycare increases a child's risk of developing emotional problems such as anxiety, neediness, aggression and depression.	
		g	Time spent in daycare increases a child's risk of developing behavioural problems such as being disobedient, defiant, bragging/boasting, argumentative, jealous, cruel, bullying, mean, destroying property, disrupting school discipline.	
		h	Time spent in daycare increases a child's risk of contracting infections	
		i	Placement in daycare may interrupt optimum breast-feeding with a loss to mother of some health benefits and to the child of developmental and health benefits.	
		j	Recent newspaper reports include anecdotal and other evidence, of disturbing new trends in poor mental health and behaviour of young children and teenagers, bearing striking parallels with harm risks predicted by research into daycare effects.	
5	Why even 'quality' daycare harms children	k	Harm risks are found even in 'quality' care most likely because daycare cannot replace parents or other close adults in the child's life and all daycare centres (regardless of quality) have in common a unique combination of features that differ from the home environment	
6	Wider daycare harms	l	Unless the trend in non-parental care is reversed, it is predicted that the society our children will inherit in 30 years will be almost unrecognisable.	

RECOMMENDATIONS **ON INQUIRY'S TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Note: The following recommendations relate to the Inquiry's terms of reference "(b) alternative options and models for the provision of child care" and "(e) other related matters".

RECOMMENDATION A: EQUITY IN FUNDING PARENTAL CARE CHOICES

THAT, subject to Recommendation B, policies relating to the care of children should not allocate taxpayer funds so as to discriminate between parental choices for care of children OR between workforce and stay-home parents, therefore –

- A.1 Subject to Recommendations A.2, B and D, all government funding allocated to the childcare industry should be withdrawn by the deadlines specified below and immediately re-allocated as income support to ALL parents regardless of their care preferences. Funding to be withdrawn includes –**
- i. immediate withdrawal of funding to build 260 new 'Early Learning and Care Centres' by 2014, the first 38 centres costed at \$114.5 million in the 2008 Budget and cancellation of this project;**
 - ii. withdrawal, over 12 months, of all fee support or childcare industry subsidies including the Child Care Rebate and Child Care Benefit;**
 - iii. withdrawal, by the end of 2009, of all special funding (including training and incentive payments) for childcare workers that goes above and beyond normal funding arrangements for other trainees;**
- A.2 At all levels of government, childcare regulation costs (including accreditation, licensing, registration etc.) should be funded within three (3) years from 'user-pay' levies on all participants in the industry, including all Approved and Registered childcare service providers;**
- A.3 The federal government should reject any proposal to itself fund or otherwise mandate paid Parental Leave or benefits thereon, such as superannuation.**

RECOMMENDATION B: HIERACHY OF CHILDREN'S CARE

THAT an exception to the equity principle in 'RECOMMENDATION A' would only be justified in order to minimise proven harm associated with particular care options (for example, long-hours daycare) and that additional *per capita* funding for particular care options only be allocated if it promotes parental nurturing as the preferred 'gold standard' in children's care, followed by care by close relatives, in-home care with paid carers, family daycare and daycare institutions as a last resort.

RECOMMENDATION C: COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR PARENTS

- C.1 THAT the government provides more practical support for parents including –**
- i. Parent and Child Drop-In centres, such as Brisbane's Lady Cilento Parenting Centre for children under five years, offering –**
 - staff-facilitated baby groups and play groups;**
 - affordable access to parenting programmes such as the 'Triple P' Positive Parenting Programme; and**
 - help for parents to develop networks; and**
 - ii. investment in more in-home visits and help, particularly for mothers who are sick, in poverty, dysfunction or suffering with depression;**
 - iii. early intervention and detection of problems with child development, including investment in speech development,**
- to support all parents, especially who are isolated or struggling with the care of their children, sole parents or those on low incomes or income support.**
- C.2 THAT in providing such support, the need to reduce periods of separation between parents and their children aged under three (3) be taken into account.**

RECOMMENDATION D: FUNDING FOR SESSIONAL PRESCHOOL PROGRAMMES

THAT funding for sessional (short day) preschool programmes for children aged between three years and school age –

- D.1 be continued and made available to Australian children in that age group;
- D.2 not be tied or conditional in any way to the provision of childcare services or facilities in conjunction with the relevant preschool programme.

RECOMMENDATION E: EQUITY IN FAMILY TAXATION

- E.1 THAT the federal government introduce family unit taxation, allowing a family's tax burden to be distributed between the parents and each child -
 - i. to recognise that a family is akin to a business unit, in the business of raising children and providing stability to society;
 - ii. so as not to arbitrarily increase the tax burden on families whose income is not evenly distributed between the husband and wife, thereby giving them more flexibility to work child-flexible hours between them, without altering their tax position;
 - iii. so as to recognise the increased financial burden on, and benefits to society, of families raising children; and
- E.2 THAT, if Recommendation E.1 is rejected, the federal government should introduce income splitting for married couples, for the reasons given in E.1.

RECOMMENDATION F: ONGOING CHILDCARE AUDIT

- F.1 THAT the federal government account to taxpayers for its childcare expenditure over the years by providing the public with a genuine ongoing annual audit of any harm risks to children, parents and society resulting from childcare placement (including daycare and outside hours school care) since federal funding for childcare began in 1981 including –
 - i. adverse effects on daycare children, showing up in later life;
 - ii. the physical and mental health implications for mothers who are separated from their children under the age of five;
- F.2 THAT the audit in F.1 include research conducted by a national network of genuinely impartial health care professionals, having regard to relevant international research findings and available empirical evidence;
- F.3 THAT, where people born after 1980 commit crimes or suffer serious mental or physical ill-health, all levels of government collect, evaluate and publish reliable data on such people's whole-of-childhood care histories as is necessary to determine the increased risk, if any, of criminal behaviour or poor health associated with non-parental care.