



Standing Committee on Family and Human Services

Meeting – Parliament House – Wednesday 1 June 2005

Overview

The Charlton Brown Group welcomes the Federal Government's commitment to identifying strategies to better help families balance their work and family responsibilities

Charlton Brown strongly agrees with the Government that flexible care services (in particular in-home care) will play an important role in getting the work/family balance correct.

Through initiatives like the *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy* (which has allocated \$104 million to in-home care till 30 June 2008) and the current review of in-home care, the Government is seeking to ensure that in-home care services will meet the future needs of Australian families.

While significant progress has been made on this front, there are still a number of issues that face the industry.

Issues

As an education provider specialising in the provision of training courses in the Aged Care, Child Care and Nanny service industries, Charlton Brown has identified the following as the key issues facing the care-service industry.

The country's reliance on the "black market" for caring for Australians

The estimated six billion dollar black market not only has tax implications – it also means this section of the market is completely uninsured. This creates enormous risks for children, families and aged people.

Lack of training in the industry

Currently there are no licensing or minimum training requirements for those providing in-home or outside-school-hours care services. A significant portion of the people that look after our children and elderly do not have any formal qualifications.

The work/life balance

A lack of equity exists for families in rural areas, single parents and shift workers with regards to work/life balance.

For families who have trouble accessing child care centres or need more flexible care options, there are not enough incentives for family members to return to the workforce.

As the Committee has already identified in Australia, only 43 per cent of women with two or more children are in the workforce, compared with 82 per cent in Sweden and 62 per cent in the UK.

Greater care options outside of traditional "child care centres" need to be provided.

There is also still a lack of flexible employment options that allow Australians to work whilst still caring for their children or elderly relatives at home.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations that Charlton Brown believe can assist with overcoming the above issues.

Expand the number of in-home care places

Charlton Brown recognises the Government's existing commitment to increase the number of in-home care places – but believes significant benefits will be gained by increasing the number further.

The more in-home care places are available, the greater the incentive for people to return to the workplace. It will provide greater flexibility and overcome the shortage in supply in child care centres and aged care facilities.

Introduce a government-regulated in-home care program

By introducing a government-regulated in-home care program a number of the issues facing the industry can be more effectively managed.

Regulating the industry in terms of minimum wage and minimum qualification requirements will not only help to overcome issues associated with the "black economy" (taxation, insurance and superannuation) – but more importantly it will ensure better care outcomes for Australians.

Charlton Brown recommends the Government analyse the successful *Live-in Caregiver Program* in Canada to assess whether a similar model can be implemented in Australia.

The program is regulated with the live-in caregivers having to meet strict requirements including training qualifications, communication skills and signed employment contracts.

A program such as this will:

- Improve the quality of in-home care for children and the elderly
- Establish minimum requirements with regards to wages, insurance, superannuation and work conditions
- Provide new work options for mature-age workers who are able to work flexible hours
- Meet the growing demand for specialists in multicultural care in Australia
- Increase the number of care providers who receive training – resulting in a more highly skilled workforce.

Make in-home care more accessible and affordable

The Government may also want to investigate the option of families being allowed to pay for in-home care with "pre-tax" dollars.