

APPENDIX 7

DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH'S ROLE IN THE PROVISION OF CHILD CARE AND FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES 1972-1985

The Commonwealth Government first gave recognition to its intention to fund a range of community-based child care and family support services when it introduced the *Child Care Act* 1972.

The *Child Care Act* 1972

Enactment of the *Child Care Act* allowed the Commonwealth Government to provide financial assistance to help establish and operate non-profit child care centres throughout Australia and to provide subsidies to permit such centres to reduce their fees for low income and special need families. The then Government considered that action was needed to ensure that sufficient good quality child care facilities were available in the community for the proper care and development of pre-school aged children whose parents were unable for a variety of reasons to make other suitable arrangements.¹ The concept of 'good quality' covered both physical arrangements and professional staffing. The *Child Care Act* was later to form the legislative basis for the Commonwealth's subsequent initiatives in providing grants for child care and family support services administered through the Children's Services Program. In the meantime, the government established several committees of inquiry to examine the dimensions of the need for child care and family services and to investigate the range of possible approaches towards the funding of such services. The first of these committees was the Australian Pre-schools Committee.

Australian Pre-schools Committee 1973

On 19 February 1973 the Government established the Australian Pre-schools Committee and requested that it recommend measures the Government should adopt to ensure that 'all children (are) given the opportunity to undertake one year of pre-school education and that child care centres (are) provided for below school age children of working parents and underprivileged families'.² The Committee consulted State governments and representatives of a wide range of local government, professional and voluntary organisations throughout Australia concerned with early childhood services. Up to that time, pre-school education in Australia had developed separately from other educational services. Traditionally, it had been dependent on the initiative of parents or voluntary committees for its establishment. Consequently, pre-schools developed most extensively in areas where parents were aware of the importance of early childhood learning experiences. By the beginning of the 1970s the distribution of pre-school services was uneven and considered inequitable.³ With respect to child care, the Committee's consultations indicated that child care which was beneficial to the child's overall development was prohibitively costly and that existing child minding arrangements fell far short of the quality required.⁴ It was envisaged the Committee's report which was tabled in December 1973 would form the basis for implementing what was to be known as the Interim Pre-school and Child Care Program.⁵

The Interim Pre-school and Child Care Program

Controversy surrounded the establishment of the Australian Pre-schools Committee and the preparation of its report, with women's lobby groups such as the Women's Electoral Lobby claiming it was biased in favour of pre-school education as opposed to day care services. As a result, the Government requested an Interim Committee of the Social Welfare Commission in January 1974 to develop proposals for a range of pre-school and child care services for consideration in the context of the 1974-75 Budget.⁶ At the same time the Government also asked the Priorities Review Staff to examine the need for early childhood services.⁷ In considering the 1974-75 Budget allocation for early childhood services, the Government took into account the recommendations of the Australian Pre-schools Committee, the Social Welfare Commission and the Priorities Review Staff.⁸ The Government adopted the recommendations of these reports insofar as it decided to support a wider range of services including not only pre-school education centres and centre-based day care, but also family day care, outside-school-hours care and occasional care.

The Priorities Review Staff also recommended that a Children's Bureau be established to administer these services under the Interim Pre-school and Child Care Program. However, the Government decided that the Program would be administered by a Children's Commission and that the Special Minister of State, as Minister Assisting the Prime Minister would be responsible. In September 1974 an Interim Committee of the Children's Commission was appointed pending the establishment under statute of the Commission. The Interim Committee was given the responsibility for implementing the Interim Pre-school and Child Care Program.⁹

The Act for the establishment of the Children's Commission was introduced in the House of Representatives on 15 April 1975 and assented to on 11 June 1975. However, it was not proclaimed before the double dissolution of Parliament in November that year. Responsibility for the Interim Pre-school and Child Care Program remained with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet until June 1976 when it was transferred to the Minister for Social Security who established the Office of Child Care within that Department to administer the Program. Since June 1976 the Program has been known as the Children's Services Program. However, prior to this the Commonwealth had established a further committee of inquiry in December 1973 known as the Family Services Committee.¹⁰

Family Services Committee 1973-77

The purpose of the Family Services Committee was to report to the newly created Social Welfare Commission on the current and future welfare service needs of families in Australia. In particular, the Committee was required to examine 'the nature and range of desirable preventative, support and substitute services for families; and the roles and responsibilities of all levels of government, voluntary agencies and community groups in the provision of these services'.¹¹ During the Committee's inquiry, special emphasis was placed on the needs of families with children and on high risk groups. The establishment of this Committee reflected not only concern within the Australian community about social changes taking place, including the extent of family breakdown and the growth in single parent families, but also doubt about the relevance of existing systems of family support being provided by social welfare agencies. During this period the Commonwealth came under increasing pressure to provide more funds to improve services to children and families.¹²

In May 1977 the Family Services Committee presented a report to the Minister for Social Security entitled, *Families and Social Services in Australia*.¹³ In its report the Committee concluded there was an increasing need for policies and programs to assist families in their child rearing functions. The Committee recommended that welfare services should be funded that were designed to prevent family breakdown or were of a developmental nature and which took account of the variety of family structures and functions. In particular, services which could assist families in vulnerable situations and those with special needs should be established. One central recommendation noted the need to provide social services across a range of areas, forming the basis for shared planning and funding by Commonwealth and State governments. It further recommended that a funding program of three to five years should be mutually agreed upon by the Commonwealth and State governments for the development of this minimum network of welfare services. Funds could be made available to local government and non-government agencies which would enter into agreements with the State governments as to the nature, extent and quality of the service to be provided.¹⁴

In June 1977, following the publication of the Family Services Committee report, the then Victorian Minister for Social Welfare successfully sought funds from the Minister for Social Security to support, extend and improve existing family support services in that State.¹⁵ Five months later, following a meeting of Social Welfare Ministers in November 1977, a grant of \$200 000 was allocated to South Australia for the establishment of a Family Support Services Scheme for a six month period. On 31 January 1978 the Minister for Social Security approved funds for the establishment of a national three year pilot scheme to be known as the Family Support Services Scheme and to be administered by the Office of Child Care as part of the Children's Services Program.¹⁶ Since then the Scheme has been extended several times, the most recent being in August 1984 when it was extended to 30 September 1985.¹⁷

ENDNOTES

1. *Women's Budget Program, An Assessment of the Impact on Women of the 1984-85 Budget*, 21 August 1984, p. 71.
2. Australian Pre-schools Committee (J. Fry, Chairman), *Care and Education of Young Children*, Government Printer, Canberra, 1974.
3. Joint Committee of Public Accounts (Senator G. Georges, Chairman), *Income Maintenance Programs — Volume 2 Program Descriptions*, Report No. 213, AGPS, Canberra, 1983, p. 255.
4. *ibid.*, p. 266.
5. The Committee's report, *Care and Education of Young Children*, was presented to the Minister for Education on 9 November 1973 and tabled in Parliament on 11 December 1973.
6. At this stage the Commission was only an interim body as it had been appointed by the Government and held its first meeting in May 1973 prior to the introduction in October 1973 of the *Social Welfare Commission Act 1973* (assented to on 27 November 1973). The interim organisation was replaced in April 1974 once all members of the Commission had been appointed and had held their first meeting.
7. The date of the Government's request to the Priorities Review Staff was 22 January 1974.
8. The Social Welfare Commission presented its report, *Project Care: Children, Parents and Community*, to Parliament in July 1974. The Priorities Review Staff report, *Early Childhood Services*, was also tabled in July 1974.
9. Commonwealth expenditure on the pre-school education program commenced in December 1974 on the basis of 10 per cent funding for construction costs and for all approved staff in pre-schools built with Commonwealth funds. In the case of existing pre-schools the Commonwealth agreed to contribute to the cost of salary award increases since December 1973. (Department of Social Security, *Annual Report 1977-78*, AGPS, Canberra, 1978, p. 32.)
10. This Committee was appointed under section 17 of the Social Welfare Commission Act. Ministerial approval was given for the creation of the Committee in December 1973. The Committee held its first meeting on 10 May 1974.
11. Social Welfare Commission, *Annual Report 1975*, Federal Capital Press, Canberra, August 1975, p. 30.
12. Department of Social Security, Office of Child Care, *National Overview of the Family Support Services Scheme*, March 1984, p. 1.
13. The report was tabled in Parliament on 16 March 1978.
14. Family Services Committee, *Families and Social Services in Australia: A Report to the Minister for Social Security*, AGPS, Canberra, 1978, p. 2.
15. A grant of \$582 796 was approved for twelve months; this was increased by a further \$100 000 in November 1977.
16. The pilot scheme was originally referred to as the Family Support Services Program but in 1980 it was changed to Family Support Services Scheme to avoid confusion with the much larger Children's Services Program from which the Family Support Services Scheme derives its funding.
17. House of Representatives, *Budget Statements 1984-85, Budget Paper No. 1*, AGPS, Canberra, 1984, p. 136. Prior to this, the Scheme was extended in October 1980 and January 1982. The nature of the Commonwealth's future involvement in the Scheme beyond September 1985 is currently being considered by the Government.