

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2008-09 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome 1

DEEWR Question No. EW738_09

Senator Siewert provided in writing.

Question

Early Childhood Education

What work has been done to develop culturally appropriate early childhood programs to address the needs of specific Indigenous communities in the NT?

Answer

State and Territory Governments are responsible for ensuring the delivery of preschool, including guiding or monitoring the cultural appropriateness of the preschool programs.

The Australian Government supports the inclusiveness of child care through the Inclusion and Professional Support Program. This program funds Inclusion Support Agencies (ISAs) and Indigenous Professional Support Units (IPSUs) to support child care services in the Northern Territory.

The ISAs provide support to mainstream child care services to assist them to include children with additional needs, such as children from diverse cultural and language backgrounds, those with a disability, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The support provided includes advice on how to provide culturally inclusive programs, assistance in the development of resources and referral to local community organisations.

The Australian Early Childhood Association (NT Branch) is the ISA in the Darwin region and Children's Services Support Program (Central Australia) Inc is the ISA based in Alice Springs.

The IPSUs provide professional support, advice and training for Indigenous child care services to enable them to provide quality care. They also work with mainstream professional support agencies to ensure that professional support is targeted to meet the identified local needs of Indigenous child care services and that professional support to mainstream services is culturally appropriate.

The IPSU in central and north is provided by the Regional and Remote Aboriginal Children's Services Support Unit (RRACSSU).

In relation to the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) crèche measure, training is being provided to support the new crèche services in the NT through the Indigenous Professional Support Unit (IPSU), in conjunction with Charles Darwin University. The IPSU will be providing basic child care skills training from July to

November 2008 for local women in the 10 communities where new crèches are being established. The IPSU will also be providing ongoing training and support to these services once they are established.

The Australian Government is also working with the State and Territory Governments under the Council of Australian Governments to implement the commitment to ensure universal access to quality early childhood education in the year before formal schooling by 2013. This will involve a significant funding contribution to each jurisdiction delivered through new Commonwealth/State financial relations under COAG to reduce the barriers to access, according to different starting points and circumstances in each jurisdiction. Funding arrangements will be finalised by the end of this year with implementation to commence in early 2009.

The Australian Government is also working with State and Territory Governments under COAG to introducing new national quality standards for child care and preschool and a new early years learning framework which will provide an overarching framework to guide programming and planning for children's early learning and development. The implementation of the National Quality Standards and Early Years Learning Framework will occur from July 2009 onwards. These initiatives will support improved quality and national consistency in the delivery of preschool to ensure programs meets the needs of all children, including Indigenous children.