



Media release

22 June 2006

What about the kids – better care solutions for the under fives?

Recommendations for a comprehensive and national approach to the way that care is provided for children under five years, were released today in a new discussion paper.

'What about the kids: Improving the experiences of infants and young children in a changing world' looks at the effects of early childhood education and care and the issues surrounding the 'work or stay at home' decision in families.

The paper examines the social and economic supports that are needed to provide parents with good choices around their children's care and offers solutions to how we can address the issues impacting on parents' choices. Issues such as work place culture, maternity leave and family-friendly working conditions, the tax system and poverty can all impact on the care choices available to parents.

The paper highlights the strong concern that the care choices available to parents and associated pressures may not always provide the maximum benefits to Australia's young children during a critical, developmental period in their lives.

"From birth, children need reliable, consistent and responsive care and this requires a strong national approach that keeps children's development at the centre of any planning and decision making, and that enable parents to care for their children in ways that give kids a good head start in life," the NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People, Ms Gillian Calvert said.

The work for the paper has been done during a period of international debate about the growing body of research showing that children's experiences in the early years has a lifelong impact on health, well-being and competence.

"The level of concern, confusion and frustration shown by the community about this issue demonstrates that we can't afford to continue with an inconsistent and disconnected 'system' that struggles to meet the needs of parents and children," the Chair of the National Investment in the early years (NIFTeY) Professor Graham Vimpani said.

The paper sets out that agenda for the community – families, businesses, service providers and governments – and provides evidence-based solutions to help address issues raised in the current debate over arrangements for the care of young children.

This timely document also outlines four key recommendations that point the way forward to achieving good outcomes for children:

- Quality childcare and strong regulations, including implementing a staff to child ratio of 1:3 for children under two in centre based care, and limiting the number of infants and toddlers in home-based care
- Workplace action to provide for family responsibilities including legislation to provide both paid and unpaid parental leave
- Provision of tax benefits, not penalties, to parents with young children
- Extra support for children living in poverty

“The reforms proposed are of particular importance for improving outcomes for vulnerable children- the issue of breaking the cycle and putting in place better opportunities for kids in poverty and indigenous children is a critical issue for all levels of government,” the Queensland Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, Ms Elizabeth Fraser said.

The full report *What about the kids: Policy Directions for Improving the experiences of infants and young children in a changing world* and a shorter summary paper *What about the kids: Improving the experiences of infants and young children in a changing world* have been sponsored by the National Investment for the Early Years (NIFTeY); the NSW Commission for Children and Young People; and the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian.

The papers are available through the following websites:

www.kids.nsw.gov.au

www.childcomm.qld.gov.au

www.niftey.cyh.com

For media inquiries contact:

QLD: JoAnne Haywood Ph: 07 30330220

NSW and other states: Michelle Neathercote Ph: 02 9286 7282 or mobile on 0413 456 080