

Minister for Community Services

Linda Burney MP



Thursday 23 October 2008

Media Release

Improving the quality of child care for under twos

The Rees Government is moving to improve the standard of care for babies and toddlers under two by increasing the ratio of carers to children in long day care services, Minister for Community Services Linda Burney announced today.

Ms Burney said centre-based or mobile child care services would be required by law to have one carer for every four children under two, compared to the current legal requirement of one carer for every five.

Ms Burney said the move had long been on the Government's agenda, and was approved by Cabinet following widespread consultation with the industry and a strong working partnership with the Federal Government.

"The majority of parents have to work, and they have the right to know their child is receiving the best possible standard of care while they do," Ms Burney said.

"Research tells us that higher regulatory standards correlate with higher measured quality, and that good quality early childhood care can improve child development and school performance – especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

"For babies, the individual care and nurturing they receive is fundamental to their emotional wellbeing and their safety.

Ms Burney said existing research was accompanied by an economic analysis conducted for the Government by Booz & Company.

The report found the move would have a modest cost impact, but Ms Burney said this would be outweighed by the benefits to children and the community as a whole.

"However the Commonwealth's commitment to making childcare more accessible to families, and a significant increase in the value of child care subsidies, will help minimise the impact on families.

"Early childhood advocates in NSW have been seeking this change for a long time, and their arguments are extremely compelling."

Ms Burney said many child care services already offered a 1:4 ratio for children under two.

"The Booz & Company report found 34 per cent – more than one-third – of all long day care centres currently operate with a 1:4 ratio. We want to increase this to 100 per cent," she said.

More/...

“This change will not come into force until the current regulation is replaced in 2010, giving child care services time to plan for the change.”

SDN Children's Services Inc. CEO, Ginie Udy, today welcomed the Government's announcement of improved child to carer ratios for infants as a positive step towards universal high quality early childhood services in NSW.

“SDN has been a strong advocate of the 1:4 ratio for many years so we are pleased to see the Government has finally taken this important step towards improving the quality of child care in NSW,” Ms Udy said.

“These new standards will help to bring all NSW centres up to an acceptable minimum level of staff numbers. SDN applauds the new Minister on committing the government to improving the standard of care for children in NSW.

“SDN had the opportunity to raise the ratio issue with the Community Services Minister, Linda Burney when she recently announced the review of the children's services regulations and she has clearly decided there is no more time to waste in implementing these changes.”

Ms Burney said a review of the 2004 Children's Services Regulation is underway to deliver quantifiable savings to the industry, helping them offset any cost impact of this change.

“We will be consulting widely with the industry on the best way to bring about the ratio change, as part of the review.”

“No-one wants costs to go up, but we all want the best care possible for our children. At some stage we have to weigh up the pros and cons of cost versus quality – and that time is now,” she said.

Ms Burney said NSW would continue to work with the Commonwealth on reducing the cost impact of this important quality reform.

Background:

- Booz & Company reported that some 1,418 of NSW's 2,277 licensed long day care centres offered places for children aged up to two.
- These centres had a total maximum licensed capacity of 19,664 places for this age group, and an 88 per cent utilisation rate.
- The report consulted widely with childcare operators through an Industry Reference Group. Participants included Early Childhood Australia (NSW Branch), Community Childcare NSW, Country Children's Services Association, the National Association of Community-Based Children's Services, the Family Day Care Association, Mobile Children's Services Association, Occasional Care Association, the NSW Department of Education and Training, the Association of Independent Schools, the Catholic Education Commission, Local Government and Shires Associations, Ethnic Child Care Family and Community Services Co-op, KU Children's Services, SDN Children's Services, Uniting Care Children's Services, ABC Developmental Learning Centres, CFK Childcare Centres and Child Care NSW.
- The not-for-profit sector, most sector peak groups, advocates and academics were all strongly in support of the move to a 1:4 staff to child ratio.