

Exciting changes ahead for Australian child care

A message from the Hon. Kate Ellis, MP, Minister for Employment Participation and Child Care

I am delighted to have the opportunity to talk about some of the exciting changes that the Australian Government, in partnership with all state and territory governments, is making in early childhood education and care.

From 1 January 2012, we are introducing a National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care services.

This means for the first time, all childhood education and care services in Australia will need to meet the same high standard of care.

This new National Quality Standard will help services focus on delivering high quality programs for children that support children's development and also support the introduction of a new quality rating system that will give families instant access to information about the quality of services available.

Also from 1 January 2012, the new Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority will oversee how the National Quality Standard is being applied across the country. States and territories will be responsible for the regulation, assessment and rating of services.

The evidence is clear that the early years of a child's life are critical. In fact, their experiences in the first five years shape their future outcomes for life. Nobody understands this better than the dedicated early childhood education and care sector.

The National Quality Standard is an exciting change and one which clearly demonstrates the importance of the sector and the high value placed on the work being done by early childhood educators.

However, we know that important change doesn't happen overnight.

The changes in ratios and qualifications will be introduced using a step by step approach, which will give services time to get ready and adjust to the new requirements. This approach means that any cost impacts are spread over time, and independent economic modelling has shown that any costs will be moderate.



In fact, we know that many services are already meeting the new staffing requirements without undue extra costs.

The National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) is performing a vital role in the transition to the new system. It is important to remember that the NCAC is still the authority in the administration of the current child care quality assurance system, and that services still need to meet the standards in the current *Quality Practices Guides* until the new system is introduced.

Recognising that we all want the best for Australia's children, the Australian Government is investing more than ever before in early childhood, providing \$18.2 billion over the next four years to improve the quality, affordability and accessibility of child care.

\$14.9 billion of this funding will help families with the cost of child care through Child Care Benefit and the Child Care Rebate. The Child Care Rebate meets 50 per cent of a family's out-of-pocket child care expenses.

Many families who use child care may not be aware that they are entitled to Child Care Benefit, or that the Child Care Rebate is not means-tested ■