



6 October 2019

Community Child Care Submission to the UANP Review

Community Child Care Association (CCC) is the peak body for community owned and not for profit early and middle childhood education and care services in Victoria. CCC is the Victorian peak body for Outside School Hours Care Services and the Victorian branch of the National Out of School Hours Association (NOSHSA). CCC is also the Victorian branch of the national peak body for community managed and not for profit services, Australian Community Children's Services (ACCS).

CCC welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Universal Access National Partnership (UANP) review process. As the peak body for community owned and not for profit education and care services in Victoria we are concerned about the impact of the UANP in early childhood services.

CCC has a mutual interest in ensuring that outcomes for children are improved in education and care. We concur that the funding supports high quality education and that it complements the existing arrangements in early childhood services.

CCC commends the Australian government for the increase in widespread participation and achieving one of the key objectives of the UANP. With an 84% increase in children accessing kindergarten the year before school over the last ten years, we know the continued support has been and will continue to be beneficial to many children and families throughout Australia.

The importance of the Australian Government in continuing to provide funding, along with state governments, for four year old children is paramount to ensure that quality kindergarten education is accessible to all Australian families.

Specifically, this funding offers a variety of service types with ways to think innovatively when designing a kindergarten program for children. Recognising the diversity of family needs across Australia is crucial in creating a partnership that provides what families and children need throughout the time they access early education. We feel that the effectiveness of kindergarten programs in centre based care services needs to be strengthened by messaging from the government to inform families that the kindergarten comes in many forms.

Recommendation:

- The Australian and State Governments work together to create a communication and marketing plan that supports the diversity of kindergartens across Australia.

We acknowledge that in some services, the UANP funding intersects with Child Care Subsidy (CCS). This funding is critical to these services, as the costs of centre based education and care are often greater than the costs in stand alone kindergarten. This ensures that families are provided with a variety of options when selecting the best kindergarten program that suits their family. Reducing or removing this funding would create a barrier to many of these children accessing these vital kindergarten education programs, and in turn a flow on effect for access for children, utilisation for services and workforce participation for families. We understand there is a need for accountability when services are receiving government funds for these essential early education services.

Recommendation:

- Services to be provided with a template to support financial documentation which allocates the funding for the kindergarten program. This documentation will support services in ensuring that they can provide documentation that is transparent and available to the governments on request.

It is our vision that there is excellent early childhood education for all children. As outlined in the *Lifting Our Game* report, the benefits of kindergarten are lifelong; for children, and for our society. We also know that this is especially true for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children or children who are experiencing vulnerability or who are disadvantaged.

Recommendations:

- That the governments work with agencies such as SNAICC to continue to increase the participation rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- That transportation methods are provided as a support mechanism for families experiencing difficulty in accessing kindergarten
- As per Victoria's legislation, health care card holders and other concessions may be eligible for 'free' kinder, this to be extended nation-wide.

We feel that there is an exciting opportunity to gather research and data through the UANP that can be used to support children across all of Australia. Currently data is not collected from stand alone kindergartens. If data was collected from these kindergartens as with CCS services, the data collected from the Australian Government would be highly beneficial for state governments and peak bodies in the sector to provide insight into early childhood education, and for everyone to be working collectively to maximise benefits for children and families. A regular workforce census would be favourable to support the collection of teacher and educator qualifications, tenure, difficulty recruiting and support the measurement and hopefully the improvement of these.

Recommendations:

- The Australian Government to share their national data with the State Governments
- The Australian Government to collect data from stand alone kindergartens similar to that of CCS services
- Bi-annual workforce census to gather information about teacher & educator qualifications and quality to include stand alone kindergartens
- A teacher registration nationally to support continuous improvement and strengthen the expectations of professional learning.

With the wealth of international research and national evidence to support the importance of early childhood education from birth to 5 years. The UANP supports children's now and their future. Children's experiences in the early years impacts their outcomes later in life. Supporting stronger mental health, increased wellbeing, happiness and success in life. We believe that providing children with more hours, would provide lifelong benefits for every child and in turn society. A commitment to ongoing funding is paramount to enabling services to plan and support the needs of the families and communities accessing services.

Recommendations:

- That the hours increase to 800 per year (20 per week)
- That the kindergarten program be expanded to 2 years before school
- That a commitment is made to ongoing funding

CCC congratulates the Australian Government for recognising the importance of the UANP. We believe that this review is a great step forward to collaborating as a nation and continuing to create excellent education and care services for every child in Australia. In collaboration with our members, CCC is ready to work with the government on implementing any of the recommendations above.