

Australian Childcare Policy

Introduction

The Australian Government has been a principle player in shaping the childcare practices in the society. Childcare practices are primary concern in the society because they tend to influence the social growth (Gong, Breunig and King, 2010). Other than caring for the children, parents spare time to contribute in national development. As a consequence, parents have to seek caregivers to address the needs of the children in their absence. Nevertheless, the concept of childcare provision tends to attract debate owing to the fact that the nature of care offered to the children influences both cognitive and the social development. Instances of negligence on the part of the caregivers, for example, would affect the social wellbeing of the child. Thus, the concept of childcare provision is not only a concern of the parents, but also the government and other stakeholders. Normally, government respond to the social challenges by creating policies that would address the identified needs.

Overview of the Childcare Policy

Australia parliament created childcare act in 1972. The Child Care Act 1972 dictates that the Australian Government should play a centre role in administration, operation and funding of the child protection services (Gong, Breunig and King, 2010). This development was a critical step towards changing the societal responsibility in child upbringing. In the past, childcare was a concern of the parents; however, as structural changes occurred in the society, caring for the children especially in the absence of their parents became a concern for the society. The Child Care Act 1972 does not only define the involvement of government,

non governmental institutions, and parents, but also provides the modality of association
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between the above entities. The Act defines childcare as attention offered to children in their own homes or in the homes of the persons. Further, policy dictates the role of officers offering the child care and the extent to which such activities should be accorded to the respective children. This policy directly influence the creation and running of the child care centres. The provisions that allow the establishment and running of the childcare centres influenced the social model. Since the law allowed the creation of places where children can receive care, it elicited debate on the nature of support that each institution should receive as well as operation modality of the care giving centres. The stakeholders, interested parties, and the government have demonstrated continuous effort in shaping the child care services.

Discussion of Child Care Act 1972

The child care act created an avenue for addressing social challenges attributed to child upbringing. Prior to the creation of the policy, parents faced the challenge hiring the care givers, women sacrificing their best day to attend their children, an aspect that directly influenced the women supply in the labour market (Gong, Breunig and King, 2010). After the creation of the Child Care Act 1972, the number of child care centres increased thereby calling for more funding from the government. Consequently, the provision of the child care service became a societal responsibility.

Available literature shows the Australian Government began funding child care in 1972 after the creation of the child care act 1972 (Pocock & Hill, 2006). The funds were in the form of capital grant directed to the non profit making institutions that had established child care centres. The funded institutions used the funds to meet the staffing cost as well as research related to child care. This development opened a new chapter in the society because

the child care centres could use the funds to offer quality care to the children. Further, the funding directed to these institutions influenced the cost of care offered by these institutions.

The cost associated with the running of the child care centres impacted the quality of care as well as passing the burden to the families (Pocock & Hill, 2006). The government's intervention was instrumental in influencing the number of families that could acquire the services of the child care providers. Although cost associated with care provision affects all the families that seek the services of the childcare providers, the low income family felt the greatest burden of coping with the cost (Pocock & Hill, 2006). Thus, the government intervention was critical in creating a new social model of addressing the concerns of the society.

Over the years, the Australian Government and the respective stakeholders have implemented the policy by creating strategic plans including creating advisory council in order to realise the object of the policy. Some of the strategic plans initiated by the government in conjunction with stakeholders are Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council established in 1998 and Child Care Benefit created in 2000 among others have influenced the manner in which the government has demonstrated her involvement in the childcare provision (Comlaw). In addition, there has been a continuous initiative aimed at transforming the manner in which the child care provision occurs in the society.

Key Components of the Child Care Act 1972

Child Care Centre

The child care policy recognizes child care centre as a place where children receive care. The child care centre may allow the children to reside in the centre or attend the place on regular basis. The policy bestows power to the minister to dictate the creation of child care

centres in compliance with the stipulated requirements. Since the policy recognises the existence of a child care centre, it creates an opportunity for the government to monitor the activities within the child care centres and offer financial assistance to the child care centres.

Capital Grants

Institutions that meet the legal requirements of the child care centre are eligible to capital grants funded by the commonwealth government. The approved projects in this grant include land, construction or alteration of a building. Child care institutions which intend to extend their buildings or acquire land for construction of the child care centres may apply this grant (ComLaw). Notably, the respective minister has to approve the alterations or the request to acquire capital projects.

Approved Equipment Grant

The policy further provides for approved equipments. Under this provision, child care institutions are entitled to receive grants for the approved equipment. The child care centres need facilities to enhance the quality of care they offer to the children. Unfortunately, the non-profit making child care centres face the challenge of acquiring these facilities (McIntosh and Philips, 2002). In this sense, the approved equipment grants is useful in improving the quality of care that the child care centre would offer to the Australian children.

Recurrent Grants

The provision for the recurrent grants dictates the government's involvement funding the wages and salaries of the child care centre officers. Further, every state or territory has the power to allocate certain amounts to aid in funding the recurrent grants. The recurrent grant is essential because the child care institutions have to pay the salaries and wages of the employees in order to realise their objectives. A number of studies seem to peg the quality of

service the child care institutions offer to the ability of the centres to higher qualified personnel. This factor dictates that the child care centres must seek or develop mechanism of raising funds for paying the salaries and wages of the employees.

Confidentiality

The policy recognises the need to protect the confidential information of the children receiving care in the child care centres. The policy dictates that any individual or party interested in acquiring information concerning children receiving child care services must seek the consent of the institution and provide reasons for seeking such information (McIntosh and Philips, 2002). This provision is instrumental in protecting the privacy of children put under the childcare. The policy criminalises unauthorised use of the protected information. This policy seems to protect identity of children and their families against practices that would lead to leakage of private information (McIntosh and Philips, 2002). Arguably, this provision is critical to protecting children from blatant breach of personal privacy. Such laws are also useful in limiting child related crimes such as trafficking and victimization. Nevertheless, the policy gives the secretary the power to grants certificate concerning the information of the child.

Research Grants

The policy provides that the respective minister may approve a research grant on behalf of the commonwealth government. The policy restricts the government to fund research in the field of childcare and related matters as well as initiation and development methods of childcare. The research grant is useful because it is essential in establishing new mechanism of improving the child care service in the society (Wise, 2000). Further, it helps in improving the provisions of the child care policy. Arguably, since the society is susceptible

to continuous challenges, research in the field of child care is critical in developing strategies of addressing the emerging challenges in child care.

Advisory Committee

The provision of the policy on the advisory committee provides that the respective minister may establish child care standard committee and convenor of the committee. The establishment of such committee is critical to the realisation of quality child care needs in the society. Nupponen (2005) observed that certain challenges in the child care need creation of taskforce in order to ascertain the cause or measures that the government or the stakeholders may take in addressing the identified concerns. Further, the government has to monitor the quality of care the child care institutions offer to the Australian children. Arguably, the establishment of the childcare committees enables the government to task the child care institutions to offer standard care to the children.

Impacts of the Child Care Act 1972

The child care policy directly influences the disbursement of government funds to designated child care provision centres. Since the creation of the policy, the Australian government has awarded capital, recurrent, and research grants to child care institutions. The capital grants has enabled the development of child care facilities to the standard set by the government. Most of the child care centres are non-governmental facilities that depend on grants and funds from well wishers (Frith, Kambouris and O'Grady, O. 2003). Thus, the government efforts to award funds for the child care institutions was an instrumental step towards improving the state of child care provisions in the country. Although available literature tends to suggest that the Australian children need more child care facilities, the fund

created through the policy have been instrumental in improving the conditions of existing child care centres (Frith, Kambouris and O'Grady, O. 2003).

The child care standard committees created by the policy have played critical role in changing the quality of child care service in the country. The government monitor the operation of the child care centres through the committees. This move is necessary in realisation of quality care services to the children. Moreover, the government funds for research have enabled interested stakeholders to review the state of child care in the country (Wise, 2000). A number of researchers have applied for these funds have made important contribution towards the improvement of the existing conditions of child care in the country (Nupponen, 2005). The policy has limited the acquisition of private information concerning the children put in the child care providing facilities. The preservation of individual's information is necessary because it limits the violation of individual's liberty.

Attempts aimed at Improving the Child Care Act 1972

While the child care act tend to define the funds that the commonwealth government would award to childcare institutions, the government should consider increasing the amount of funds allocated to the child care centres. The increased amount of funding would enable stakeholders and interested entrepreneurs to develop more facilities for childcare provisions (Wise, 2000). The committees established by the policy should have a greater autonomy of recommending the creation of more child care facilities.

Recommendations

This research recommends that government should review the provisions of the act which define the amount of funds that the government would allocate to the child care centres. By reviewing the clause the government would be able to allocate more grants for the

development of capital projects. Presently, the government allocation to the child care centres is not sufficient to increase the number of child care facilities at the rate which would meet the growing needs in the society. Notably, the quality of child care service depends on the amount of the funds and facility available in the child care centres. In this sense, increasing the amount allocated to child care centres would enhance the quality of service offered in the child care centres.

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