



Royal Commission Submission

As part of the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, the Outside School Hours Care Association of South Australia (OSHC SA) would like to contribute to and participate in the innovation and development for the access and availability of Outside School Hours Care to preschool children, aged three to five years.

OSHC (SA) Association is proudly recognized as a peak body for Outside School Hours Care in South Australia and are active members of the National Outside School Hours Services Alliance (NOSHSA).

With a strong history of representing the Department, Independent and Catholic schools' sector and privately owned OSHC services, our advocacy aims to be inclusive of all aspects of the Outside School Hours Care sector.

As part of our role in the OSHC sector, we aim to provide for our members by offering tailored professional development/access to existing professional development, networking opportunities and by advocating and contributing to the continuing improvement of OSHC service provisions both in the South Australian and at the national table, and recognition for OSHC Educators.

Having recently collated data from our members relating to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, we have captured results from over 126 services in South Australia. These services represent those in operation across school sites inclusive of the Department of Education, Catholic Schools and Independent Schools of South Australia. The data collated indicates that more than fifty percent of these OSHC services have never offered OSHC to preschool aged children in South Australia.

From this, we have outlined the barriers to consider that were identified in the results obtained for the notion of preschool aged children attending school based OSHC services in South Australia.

Considerations

There are a number of current barriers for preschool aged children attending OSHC services that encompass a wide range of considerations including safety, facilities, wellbeing and learning. These considerations pertain to the children, families and workforce involved in the Education sector.

It has been highlighted that there are concerns around providing developmentally appropriate facilities for preschool aged children such as appropriate furniture, toilet and changing areas, resources, sleep, rest and eating areas. These facilities are currently catered for school aged children, not only with suitability to their size, but also their developmental stages which they have been adequately transitioned into.

Environmental Spaces and Programming

The physical spaces and environment of existing OSHC services are not typically aligned with the space and environmental needs of preschool aged children. This includes their outdoor learning environment, many of which are not fenced and are designed to better suit the size and type of play of older children such as monkey bars, climbing apparatuses, spinning equipment etc.

The accommodation of sleep and rest provisions raises challenges around the adequate space, equipment and appropriate environment to provide safe and desirable conditions. This is also a consideration that is not currently incorporated in the programming of services in Before/After School and Vacation Care. OSHC services have will often have the means to provide areas for relaxation and rest, however they are not designed to accommodate for a secure and appropriate sleep environment.

To balance the programming needs of both the My Time Our Place (MTO) and Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) brings challenges for providing quality programming and care in both areas. Whilst there are similarities in some of the approaches to these frameworks and play based learning, there are such disparities in the needs and outcomes to achieve both. Furthermore, the staffing arrangements are a major factor in being able to achieve this.



Access and Staffing Arrangements

Research conducted through NOSHSA highlights that there is currently a workforce shortage within the OSHC sector on a national level. OSHC services have proven to find great difficulty in seeking and employing qualified educators. This is already putting immense pressure on the sector. The pool of educators within the OSHC sector primarily includes primary or middle/secondary education trained educators.

To add to this, the need for Early Childhood qualified staff and a higher educator to child ratio for preschool aged children would incur further pressure for services and their staff as well as the retention of these staff.

Of the small selection of services offering OSHC to preschool aged children, the consensus highlights that OSHC for preschool aged children has become a more sought-after service over the years. OSHC services are an attractive alternative for families compared to long day care, largely due to the fees being far more attainable than a long day care for more families. Catering for this demand has been identified as having been difficult to accommodate, primarily due to the extensive list of approvals and staffing required, highlighted by the OSHC National Workforce shortage and lack of qualified educators in the sector.

In some cases, OSHC services have helped manage the needs of a preschool community by capping the number of preschool aged children who can attend the service each day, creating a competitive element for families who need to obtain care.

The National Workforce shortage in the OSHC sector across Australia is more challenging for rural and remote services. Providers of remote and rural OSHC services should be afforded greater flexibility to open a POSHC service without the arduous expectations required by the current Commonwealth Government requirements. With exception of the standard requirements of course, these additional requirements are directed at the OSHC Third Party Provider sector which create considerable challenges for school leaders and volunteers to apply and complete the process. Remote and rural communities require more flexibility to facilitate the opening of OSHC or POSHC programs that is commensurate with the demand of their community.

Safety and Wellbeing of Children

The safety and wellbeing of all children in a care environment is at the utmost importance, and these barriers present many concerns in being able to achieve this effectively. There are significant considerations pertaining to the development and needs of preschool aged children, who require tailored support that differs to school aged children.

The scope of play is marginally different between preschool and school aged children, based on their developmental stages, exposure and experiences. There is excellent educational value in multi-age environments as we can see in existing OSHC services, however the readiness between most preschool children to Foundation/Reception children is noticeably different and it is that 12 months of preschool that prepares them for this.

Child Care Subsidy

Childcare subsidy currently penalizes families for choosing preschool and/or OSHC over long day-care, with fees being charged regardless of children attending long day care services.

By allowing the flexibility with Child Care Subsidy offered for POSHC services on existing Preschool sites. Families should not be locked into long day-care for an entire year to retain a place in service. Children aged three and above should be given more flexibility to choose between long day-care and POSHC without being penalised through the fees attached for using one service and not the other.

Summary

With these significant barriers and the current lack of Government investment for the OSHC sector in South Australia, three-year-old preschool aged children attending OSHC services would not be considered as best practice or as a sustainable model.

Preschool aged children are at a vulnerable time in their education and care journey, whereby their foundation years are incredibly important and require due diligence and appropriate consideration.



We would like to see the development of the Preschool OSHC (POSHC) sector within South Australia, where preschools and Early Learning Centre's offer a POSHC service that can provide Before, After and Vacation Care for families within their service.

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Outside School Hours Care Association of South Australia (OSHC SA) is a proud alliance of the National Outside School Hours Services Alliance (NOSHSA) of which this submission is supported by.