



CAA WEBCAST FORUM

JENNY MACKLIN

**Opposition spokesperson for Families and Community Services,
Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation**

November 2007

E & OE

ANNE CLARK: I'd like to introduce Ms Jenny Macklin, opposition spokesperson for families and community services, indigenous affairs and reconciliation. Welcome to the web cast Jenny.

JENNY MACKLIN: Good to be with you.

ANNE CLARK: Can you tell us first of all, what are your proposals for increasing investment in Australia's children?

JENNY MACKLIN: Labor really understands just how important it is to invest in little children. Like parents, like childcare staff, childcare owners, we really do know that learning begins from the day a child is born and so for the first time ever what we are proposing is to offer every single four year old in Australia an early childhood education. We want to make sure that's delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher and that'll be for 15 hours a week



for 40 weeks of the year and we want to deliver that in whatever setting a child might be in. So whether it's a long day care centre, a council owned, private, community based, family day care, or an independent separately run kindergarten, we want to make sure that children get that early childhood education in a way that unfortunately is not available to all Australian children. At the moment there are about 100,000 four year olds in Australia who miss out on a pre-school education and it's only Labor that is determined to change that. Unfortunately Mr Howard has done the usual blame game and said that's the responsibility of the States. Well a federal Labor government will change that. We'll make sure that those four year olds get high quality care as well as high quality early education.

ANNE CLARK: What are your proposals for maintaining and improving affordability, particularly in relation to the parent childcare benefit?

JENNY MACKLIN: Labor's made a major announcement on this issue of affordability because we really understand that unless parents can afford quality childcare then they're not going to be able to go to work and pay all the bills that are confronting so many families in the lead up to this election. So Labor has committed to increasing the childcare tax rebate from its current level of 30% to 50% but we've also said that we will make sure that we pay the childcare tax rebate more frequently. We will, in the first instance pay it quarterly, so every three months rather than parents having to



wait one or two years which is what they've had to do under Mr Howard's government.

We would also like to see the childcare management system brought into place as quickly as possible because we'd like to in fact pay the childcare tax rebate fortnightly as soon as that's feasible because we know that that fits more with the timing of the bills that parents get from their childcare centres. So this way we know that we're going to be able to pay 50% of parents' out of pocket costs and we do think that that will really make an enormous difference to parents.

Just to give you a couple of examples of places where I've been just in the last couple of weeks, in Bundaberg in Queensland for example, as a result of Labor's policy increasing the childcare tax rebate to 50%, parents in Bundaberg on an average income in Bundaberg will have 82% of their childcare out of pocket costs paid. So it will really be of enormous benefit to those parents in Bundaberg. Or to take another example, in Brisbane, an average family income with parents paying about \$240.00 a week, what Labor of course will do is halve that and that will mean an enormous benefit to those parents who at the moment are facing pretty hefty out of pocket costs.

ANNE CLARK: What are your proposals for helping the sector attract, train, recruit and retain a workforce?

JENNY MACKLIN: We know that this is a very very big issue in



childcare. Of course the skills shortage is a serious issue across Australia in many many professions but we know that unless we address this we're not going to be able to deliver the high quality care that parents want for their children and the childcare services also want to be able to deliver.

We've made a number of very significant announcements in this regard which amounts to over \$70 million dollars of investment in childcare staff. In the first instance what we've announced is that we will pay the TAFE fees for all those childcare workers who want to get a Diploma in Children's Services. We want to encourage existing childcare staff to be able to upgrade their qualifications if that's what they want to do and of course young people coming into the sector will be, we think, encouraged by this offer by a Federal Labor Government to pay their TAFE fees. So that's the first thing.

The second is we recognise that there's a serious shortage of early childhood educators. So we've announced that we will increase the number of university places in early childhood education by 1,500 places a year. We think that that's the only way we're going to be able to meet the demand for early childhood educators that we're going to need in our childcare centres and of course in our kindergartens to deliver early childhood education to every four year old.

We also know that it would be a good thing to help with the cost of that early childhood education at university and so we've said for

10,000 graduates of early childhood education, we'll pay half your HECS if you're prepared to go and work in a rural or regional area or in a very disadvantaged area. So that way we're providing some assistance with those big HECS bills but also encouraging early childhood educators into childcare.

ANNE CLARK: What are your proposals for ensuring increased investment in Australia's early education remains sustainable especially by locating centres in areas of need, not exasperating over-supply?

JENNY MACKLIN: This too is a very important issue and Labor has announced a very important policy in this area as well. Once again we've announced policy in this area that Mr Howard and the Liberals just completely ignore. We do know that there are areas of shortage where parents are finding it very very difficult to find a childcare place, so we've announced that we will build 260 new childcare centres where we can. We'll put them on primary school grounds because we want to help parents with the double drop off. We know that if you've got more than one child and you have to go to the childcare centre and then to the primary school that's obviously a lot of to-ing and fro-ing for parents so the extra childcare centres we've announced will go on primary school grounds but I do want to say most importantly that they'll go in areas of need. We have no desire to put these childcare centres where there's already an adequate supply of childcare places.

We want them to go where they are needed and so for example recently we've announced that we put one in an area in the Gladstone region that's growing very very rapidly. This is just outside the city of Gladstone. A very large number of young families, the primary school at Tannum Sands just outside Gladstone was just overjoyed when we told them that we were considering their primary school site because they're so desperate for childcare in the area. So that's an example of putting one in an area of need.

ANNE CLARK: Okay. What are your long term proposals for the governance of childcare sector in terms of regulations, accreditation etc?

JENNY MACKLIN: Well we certainly understand that childcare providers are really fed up with the level of red tape so everything we do, we will be very very conscious of making sure that we reduce red tape, that we don't increase it. We want the childcare staff who are the ones, let's face it, who really determine the quality of care to have as much time as possible available for caring for children, not filling in forms and having to spend time on the computer. So if I can say to any childcare staff or childcare provider who's watching this we're really aware of that issue and we'll be doing everything we can to reduce red tape.

We also want to encourage the upgrading of skills by childcare staff. So there'll be a program of recognition of prior learning which we'll

develop with the staff to make sure that if they do want to upgrade their qualifications we recognise or the TAFE or the university recognises the prior learning that those staff will have had on the job.

So they're just a couple of examples of how Labor will work with the sector to make sure that we continue to have a very high quality early childhood and childcare sector. As I said at the beginning, like many in the childcare sector we do understand just how important it is to combine care, high quality childcare with high quality early learning and if there's one message I'd like to say today, that's really it. We understand how important it is to deliver both of those things together.

ANNE CLARK: One of the questions that the sector has asked is in the zero to three age group in terms of differential funding and recognition of the costs of providing care to that age group and particularly with the pending changes of ratios that will happen in some of the States to bring everyone in consistent alignment, what are your thoughts on that?

JENNY MACKLIN: Well there are two issues of course. One is Labor has made the commitment to increasing the Childcare Tax Rebate from 30% to 50% so we do understand that affordability is a big issue and that will really help make sure that we continue to be able to provide affordable childcare by this increase in the Childcare Tax Rebate but we also understand that really probably the most

important issue for delivering high quality childcare is the quality of staff. So making sure that we do everything we can to support the employment of quality staff, to work with the childcare sector, to encourage the upgrading of qualifications, to pay the TAFE fees of those staff who are prepared to undertake a diploma, to make sure we provide additional places at university for those who want to do a university degree in early childhood education and then to pay half the HECS.

So they're I think very practical measures from Labor that really indicate our commitment both to quality and to affordability and of course our additional 260 childcare centres will also make sure that, where we do have a need for additional centres, they're delivered.

ANNE CLARK: Thank you very much Jenny for taking the time to talk with Child Care Associations Australia today on our web cast.

JENNY MACKLIN: It's a real pleasure. We're very pleased to do it. We're extremely pleased to have the opportunity to put our policies forward. We think we've covered the full range of areas that are so important for the sector and for parents. Quality, affordability and availability and we hope we get the opportunity to deliver them.

END OF TRANSCRIPT

