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FAMILIES NEED FLEXIBLE, AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE

Flexible, affordable child care should be a priority of the next Federal Government to ensure all families are able to balance the needs of work and family life.

Uniting Church National President, Rev. Dr Dean Drayton, said the Church wanted to see a child-centred approach to children's services that focuses on what is in the best interest of children and recognised their developmental, spiritual and social needs.

"Family friendly policies have been a key issue for both major parties during the campaign, yet none have given a real commitment to making child care more accessible.

"Access to child care is a major part of ensuring we have cohesive families. More and more families need to use child care to balance work and family commitments but so far we've only had passing commitments from all parties that they will make child care more available," Rev. Drayton said.

Rev. Drayton said families deserved real answers on how each of the major parties would ensure child care is more affordable, within close proximity, and available to all families at the times they need it.

"Without clear details of how they will make child care more accessible and affordable, promises of extra places are empty promises," he said.

UnitingCare Australia National Director, Lin Hatfield Dodds said the UnitingCare network has witnessed the growing shortage of centre-based child care places now available to working families.

"While both sides of politics pledge more government funded before and after school places and in-home care this is simply playing at the edges. The real answer must focus on the growing demand from working families for centre-based care, which receives no direct Federal Government operational assistance.

"UnitingCare's not-for-profit centre-based care providers are facing an on-going battle to recruit and retain staff, pay wage costs – which account for around 80 per cent of our running costs - and keep fees at an affordable level for families.

"The stringent regulatory standards required and our focus on providing quality care means it is imperative our centres recruit professionally trained staff. Unfortunately, the low award wages offered to child care workers have made the profession unattractive and there are now widespread staff shortages.

"We struggle to fill vacancies in existing centres, let alone find the staff needed to consider opening more centres to meet the growing demand for places," Ms Hatfield Dodds said.

Ms Hatfield Dodds said simply increasing Federal Government rebates or offering free care to families was not the answer.

"Increasing the CCB rebate means parents will get more back after paying their child care fees - it won't help meet the costs of paying staff wages and it will do nothing to help attract more staff into the sector. The Federal Government needs to consider training and wage subsidies to attract more staff to child care. It is only then that providers will be able to attract the high quality staff that are needed to expand existing centres or open new ones. Without this, the promise of more places will be a very empty one for Australian families."

ENDS

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