

That the government should fund universal free childcare

Childcare in Australia is, with the exception of COVID-19 conditions, largely privatized with some government subsidies (Child Care Subsidy, Additional Child Care Subsidy). Subsidies exist for low-income households, children with disabilities, grandparents, and/or parents transitioning into work. The government is NOT responsible for regulating/funding childcare centers themselves, and parents must still pay for childcare services. Lowered fees under CSS/ACSS are proportionate to parental/guardian income if they meet the criteria for eligibility of CCS/ACCS.

To assist workers as much as possible during COVID-19, the government has made childcare free for parents. They have done this by paying childcare centers 50% of the income they had before 2nd March 2019 with the condition that childcare centers do not charge families anything for their services.

This has reignited the debate of whether there should be universal free childcare. A complex debate that involves many stakeholders: including the children themselves, parents and families, the government, childcare companies and childcare workers.

On the one hand, universal free childcare will allow parents of all financial and circumstantial backgrounds, especially women (who are still the predominant carers of children in their early years), to pursue careers more freely. Economically, more women will contribute to the workforce and workers may experience higher rates of pay.

On the other hand, universal childcare will promote the use of childcare services that may or may not be the best thing for the children themselves. Where more families are able to have their children taken care of without financial pressures, flow on effects like increasing birthrates may occur. Economically, the government will be required to fully fund childcare on top of education.

Questions to consider:

- What is your definition of childcare? What sorts of services and age groups?
- Is childcare a privilege or a right?
- Will this affect the quality of childcare services positively or negatively?
- Is private or public childcare best for the economy?
- Are children a government responsibility?
- How will different groups of people be affected by the changes?
- What are the key differences between the status quo and government funded universal free childcare?
- Who are the most important people in this debate? Why? And which sides benefits them more?

Resources as starting points:

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/child-care-subsidy/who-can-get-it>

<https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=29ec4602-eee4-4f0a-b0dc-05e99971021a>

<https://www.smh.com.au/business/the-economy/why-it-s-time-for-universal-free-taxpayer-funded-childcare-20201014-p56540.html>

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/may/31/how-much-would-it-cost-to-make-free-childcare-permanent-and-would-it-be-a-good-idea>