

18th March, 2020

Minister for Education
The Hon Daniel Tehan MP
190 Gray Street
Hamilton, VIC, 3300

Dear Minister Tehan MP

We write on behalf of our members who operate Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services throughout Australia. The ensuing situation with COVID-19 is likely to result in further and directed school closures which we acknowledge as necessary steps to protect the health and wellbeing of the community. These closures do however have significant impacts for the OSHC sector.

The OSHC workforce is highly casualised with 70-80% of educators generally employed on this basis. This is more than twice the national average. While the Australian government has implemented some strategies to support casual employees should they become ill with the virus, there are no strategies to support casual employees in OSHC to continue to be paid should the service be declared to close. Casual employees are more vulnerable than permanent employees as they often live week to week and do not have accrued leave or other protection in their employment conditions. Casual employees will still have ongoing living expenses likely reflected by what they are typically earning in their regular casual employment.

The Australian government's reduction in PAYG payments will only assist some OSHC providers during times of closure to sustain their permanent employees, however these measures will not be enough to support either the permanent or casual workforce who are fit, willing and able to work and stood down for reasons out of their control. Consequently we may see a significant number of educators leaving the sector and seeking alternative and more reliable employment opportunities or potential future educators turning away from the profession because of perceptions of uncertainty and/or risk to their future livelihood.

We are very concerned about school closures over the holidays (and during term) resulting in OSHC services not being able to provide Vacation Care. This is a highly sensitive matter at present causing our workforce and families significant distress. At this time we really need to be thinking forward and solution focused. While it is our first preference that school closures **do not** result in unnecessary closures of the onsite OSHC service (particularly Vacation Care) we understand that this may sometimes be necessary and directed by health departments. There is also the possibility that Vacation Care is able to operate during a school closure when the school is closed due to non-health related concerns. We have some ideas about how the continuity of OSHC might be assured including exploring possible alternative venues (where available) that may be suitable for hosting a centre-based OSHC.

We also believe there is another model of care to be explored in the way of in home care which is provided directly in the home of the family and currently exists as a CCS eligible service type. This opportunity might be helpful for both our educators and continuity of employment as well as families who are frontline or essential workers. We appreciate that a plan would be needed to expedite any administrative changes to service approvals etc required as well as arrangements to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children was protected. As mentioned, we understand this is a model of care that is already administered financially by the Australian Government, though the eligibility criteria would need to be relaxed to ensure that this type of care was accessible as a time limited emergency response while access to the centre-based service was not available due to a forced service closure or other emergency circumstance resultant of COVID-19. This model of care would also support the health department recommendations to minimize mass gatherings and to reduce the mixing of students.

In addition to some short term planning, there is also the need for a longer term plan ahead. The sector is currently experiencing a downturn as families withdraw their children from care environments in response to their concerns about COVID-19 in the community. A consequence of families withdrawing children from care is the likelihood that CCS payments to the education and care sector are less than usual. The funds available in the CCCF program won't be sufficient to sustain the sector when/if there is a mass closure of services. To ensure the essential services of OSHC remain viable into the future, the funding that would typically be available through CCS will be vital to ensuring the OSHC workforce is retained.

NOSHSA request that either CCS funding is able to be continued based on typical utilization for services so that educators (permanent and casual) can continue to be paid. If this is not possible, we request that a special emergency fund is established to redirect the equivalent of these CCS payments to services when they are unable to operate for COVID-19 related health reasons.

NOSHSA know that there will be a limited amount of time that a service can sustain operations before a permanent closure is imminent. As a consequence, this would be a catastrophic outcome for the sector, families, business and the future.

In times such as these, we recognise the importance of working together and supporting each other. In this way, NOSHSA would ask that schools waive rent, hire and co-investment fees from OSHC during 2020 if the service operates at a loss (due to paying employees while income is not being generated). The provision of education in Australian schools should not be reliant on income from OSHC providers and therefore a waiver of such charges while the sector rebuilds will be imperative to ensuring a future continuity of care.

We would value the opportunity to discuss these issues and opportunities in more detail and work towards a proactive solution in preparation for what is expected ahead.

Yours sincerely



Kylie Brannelly
Chairperson
National Out of School Hours Services Alliance
0432 808 620
