

PRIME MINISTER

EMBARGO: 4.30 p.m.

6 May 1974

THE CARE AND EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN  
MINISTER

During his speech today in Sydney's marginal Bennelong electorate, Mr. Whitlam announced the details of the Labor Government's new child care program.

Mr. Whitlam said that by 1978, half a million Australian children would have access to both pre school educational opportunities and child care. Pre school education will be free for all children. Child care will be subsidised with parents contributing to the cost according to their means. Eventually, all children, whether they be at home or in care, would benefit under the plan.

The goals of this new program are:

- . to increase the social development and learning ability of all children, regardless of income, family or ethnic background;
- . to provide care for all children who need it, be it occasional or regular;
- . to increase the quality of parents' lives, in particular, the life of the working mother.

This program would include not only full day care facilities and educational opportunities. It will also offer emergency and occasional care, before and after school care, holiday programs, informal play groups, toddlers' groups and baby-sitting pools.

Each community will be involved in the development of facilities appropriate to their area.

The cost of such a program will be \$130 m. in a full year.

In contrast, the previous government promised \$5 million towards child care in 1972 but neither the Gorton nor the McMahon Government managed to spend anything. The Whitlam Government has spent \$18 million on child care in the last six months.

The Liberal-Country Party says that it really cares for the children of Australia yet it is prepared to spend in a full year less than the Whitlam Government has spent in developmental programs in the last six months.

The Liberal-Country Party agrees that there are over 300,000 children requiring child care and yet it says that it will reject or reduce this program, not because it isn't adequate to overcome the needs in a community, but because it would cost too much. A detailed outline of the child care program ... is attached.

For these facilities to be developed in an imaginative and decentralised manner, the Australian Government will make grants through the States to Local Government and community organisations. The Australian Government will provide assistance to the communities to enable them to work out their needs and administer the facilities of their choice. Evidence and commonsense demonstrate that quality care requires the involvement of parents and the community in this program. The Australian Government program will involve families and community organisations in the control of facilities in their areas. Such a scheme will make possible the full and imaginative use of the present limited supply of professionally trained people. It will also use those skilled mothers in the community who might choose to earn a living caring for children rather than on an assembly line.

Education for the care of children must involve all those people who are or could be caring for children: first and foremost the parent, both mother and father; secondly those called upon by parents as a substitute to help care for their children; thirdly, the highly trained professional, the mothercraft nurse, the pre school and primary school teacher, the social worker, psychiatrist and other professionals whose work is associated with children.

A program of this sort will cost about \$130 million in a full year.

A program of this sort is needed :

- . 15,000 children left unattended during the working day;
- . 365,000 children under the age of six who are children of working parents. One in every two of these children is in the care of persons absent from the home for more than eight hours per working day;
- . one in every three of these 365,000 children is in the care of relatives, friends or neighbours. One in every ten only attend a nursery school, creche or similar institution.

The Liberal-Country Party says it really cares for the children of Australia. It says it would reject or reduce a program designed to overcome the present need both for care and education of the young. It says it would cost too much.

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DETAILED OUTLINE OF THE PROGRAM FOR THE  
CARE AND EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

The Labor Government has developed a new and imaginative program for the care and education of young children. This program is now ready for implementation.

The program will offer diverse and interrelated facilities in the development of which each community will be involved. The scheme will benefit half a million children by 1978.

Key features:

- . pre-school education will be free for all children whose parents choose to send them. All children, whether they are cared for in their own home or elsewhere will have access to these educational opportunities;
- . child care will be subsidised, with parents contributing to the cost according to their means. The main thrust of the program in the first few years will be to offer financial and other assistance to the children of disadvantaged families.

The Australian Government program breaks down the traditional distinctions between child care and pre school facilities. It recognises the need for educational, health and welfare components in child care; it recognises the need for these same services for children whether they be at home or in care. What matters is the total development and happiness of the child and the family. The programs now being developed will offer genuine choices to mothers and families and will ensure that all children enter school free of the disadvantages which may follow from inadequate pre school and child care facilities.

The key element in the 'new design' is flexibility. Innovation and diversity will be stimulated.

This program will not only include full day care programs and education programs, it will offer emergency and occasional care, before and after school care, holiday programs, informal play groups, toddlers' groups and baby sitting pools, to mention but a few. Similar schools are already in existence in other countries. Australia lags behind the rest of the world.

The program is sensibly based on a recognition of the value of much of the care already being provided within communities. At present one in every three children remains in the care of relatives, friends or in what has become to be known as family based child care. This form of care will continue to be developed and will begin to be supported by a wide range of services. The thrust of the government's contribution will be the provision of emergency facilities for sick children or children in the care of a sick mother, access to education within family day care facilities, counselling services, training opportunities for the day mother and provision of welfare and medical services.