# More than 'just convenient care': what the research tells us about equitable access to outside school hours care

———

Report prepared by:

## Associate Professor Jennifer Cartmel and Dr Bruce Hurst

*Griffith University, Brisbane*

**Author contact details**

0420 153 7387 / 07 3382 1236

j.cartmel@griffith.edu.au

ian.hurst@unimelb.edu.au

# Contents

# 1. Executive Summary

*Outside school hours care (OSHC) is a significant site of care, play and learning for children aged five to twelve years in New South Wales, Australia. There has been an increased level of demand for care linked to workforce participation particularly of women. The growth in New South Wales services mirrors national and international trends. The growth of services also has the potential to support the development and wellbeing of children when its value as a site of play and learning is recognised.*

OSHC services include school age child care services that operate before and after school (BASC) and during vacation periods. OSHC services have a high level of systemic complexity as they address the expectations of children, families and the wider community. Using a review of academic and grey literature the authors have gathered evidence that suggests that quality OSHC provision for children in an interplay between the following elements:

1. The benefits of OSHC to stakeholders
2. The image of OSHC
3. The partnership between OSHC and schools
4. The workforce delivering OSHC service.

This report has a particular focus on equitable and inclusive access for children and each of these elements deserve attention to ensure that all children benefit from OSHC and parents feel supported to utilise the services. Attention is given to the Swedish educare system which has a more seamless approach to schooling and OSHC provision.

Recommendations include more research about the OSHC as a site for children's development and the partnerships between OSHC, schools and families. In particular the focus will be on children from vulnerable circumstances such as those at risk of abuse or neglect, of working sole parents and families requiring additional support to help raise their children. A deeper understanding about the value of OSHC will enhance community perceptions and commitment to the utilisation of services to contribute to children's wellbeing and development.

**Table 1 – Recommendations from Academic Literature Review**

| Focus area | Recommendation | Suggested implementation |
|---|---|---|
| Supporting specific priority groups while acknowledging that each group has unique complexities that make 'easy' answers elusive in terms of access, inclusion, participation. | 1 More research needs to be conducted in partnership with priority groups to better understand their engagement with OSHC. | NSW Department of education should cross-collaborate with internal departmental directorates to develop co-designed pilots within the OSHC sector (lead policy objectives for pilots). |
| | 2 More research needs to be conducted in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to better understand their engagement with OSHC. | NSW Department of Education should prioritise cultural inclusion and professional development in relation to better supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in developing applicable grant programs. |
| Exploring how the benefits (other than workplace productivity) and functions of OSHC can be communicated to families. | 3 Greater awareness needs to be created about the educational and developmental benefits of OSHC. | NSW Department of Education should:<br>• trial resource toolkits to support OSHC providers inform their communities of benefits via department website.<br>• work with sector stakeholders such as peak bodies to discuss ways to promote benefits. |
| | 4 Research needs to be conducted into the educational and developmental benefits of OSHC. | NSW Department of Education should develop collaborative initiatives with the early childhood education directorate and schools directorate, with input from the OSHC sector, to support further research and strategic projects. |
| Promoting OSHC as a site of play and friendship rather than 'just convenient care' | 5 Explore ways to promote OSHC as a site of play and friendship to children. | NSW Department of Education should trial resource toolkits specifically designed to support OSHC providers to incorporate opportunities to build play into their programs via department website. |
| | 6 Support OSHC services to improve their approaches to working with older children. | |
| Supporting children with additional needs | 7 Review existing inclusion supports for mainstream OSHC services to build the capacity of services to care for children with high support needs. | Future work conducted by the NSW Department of Education BASC Reform Design and Delivery team should incorporate the considerations of this Review into its planned approach to solutions (onsite, transport access, NDIS support, etc). |
| | 8 Explore possible benefits of providing transportation between specialist schools and mainstream OSHC. | |
| | 9 Explore increased provision of OSHC at specialist schools. | |
| OSHC perception and image | 10 Greater awareness needs to be created about the educational and developmental benefits of OSHC with school principals and management. | The NSW Department of Education BASC Policy team should:<br>• work with its Schools directorate to develop policy objectives that support school leadership teams to 'shift mindsets' in relation to OSHC.<br>• explore ways to work with universities to develop courses about partnerships between OSHC and Schools available to principals and OSHC coordinators/providers as part of Master of Education/MBA. |
| | 11 Explore ways of supporting school principals to recognise the benefits of positive partnerships with OSHC coordinators and providers. | |
| OSHC Workforce | 12 Introduce the use of *Professional Standards for OSHC educators*. | NSW Department of Education should:<br>• consider ways to disseminate the *Professional Standards for OSHC Educators* to all services with suggestions for implementation within services.<br>• form a working group to review, develop and consider mandating qualifications for the OSHC workforce.<br>• collaborate with education and training providers to ensure recognition of the importance of field placement. |
| | 13 Review the qualification requirements for OSHC services to ensure that the workforce has the skills and knowledge to care for children with high support needs. | |

# 2. Introduction

This literature review is a scoping of Australian and international literature to provide comparative national and international approaches towards OSHC access and provision, highlighting best practice and innovative approaches to facilitate equitable and inclusive access. The review also provides practical and relevant recommendations for next steps to help OSHC providers, schools and parents to support children to access care, particularly those from the identified priority cohorts.

# 3. Methodology

Using a preliminary research paper written by the NSW Department of Education as a foundation, the authors undertook a systematic literature review examining approaches to equitable and inclusive access within OSHC services. A combination of peer-reviewed articles, grey literature, Government and policy documents was used due to limited relevant research available about Australian OSHC services. The literature was sourced electronically and identified by searching the Griffith University library databases for example Informit (Humanities and Social Science Collection and the Health Collection), Proquest (Academic Research Library, Health and Medical Complete, Psychology Journals, and Social Science Journals), Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Cambridge Journals Online, Expanded Academic (ASAP), PsychINFO, Scopus (Elsevier), Intute [Social Sciences], Informaworld, Australian Government and Politics database, SAGE Journals Online, EBSCO Host, Australian Journals Online, ISI Web of Knowledge, OECD Publications Online, and Web of Science. The search terms included the following "Outside School Hours Care", "School Age Care", "Educare", "Fritidshem", "early childhood education AND inclusion", and "early childhood education AND priority access".

The review has been organised into the following themes. These themes emerged from the literature cited in this review:

- The development of Outside School Hours Care in Australia
- Priority groups in Outside School Hours Care
- The benefits of Outside School Hours Care
- The image of Outside School Hours Care
- Professional partnerships in Outside School Hours Care
- The Outside School Hours Care workforce.

# 4. Findings

## 4.1 The development of Before and After School Care in Australia

Before and After School Care (BASC) services operate in the hours before and after primary school, and serve a range of functions centred on providing custodial care of children on behalf of parents who are mostly working or studying. BASC is part of a broader suite of services called Outside School Hours Care (OSHC). OSHC includes vacation care and curriculum day programs that operate on pupil-free days and school holidays as well as before and after school hours sessions. For the purpose of this review, the primary term used will be OSHC. Almost all research investigates OSHC more broadly rather than drawing distinctions between its various components. When appropriate, research relating specifically to BASC will be identified.

The provision of OSHC has a long history in Australia. Cartmel (2007) explains that activities have been provided after school since the early 20th century. These early programs differ from contemporary services in that they were recreational rather than focused on care. Care-focused programs began to grow in the early 1980s with increasing participation of women in the workplace (Brennan, 1994; Cartmel, 2007; Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014).

The number of OSHC settings and children participating in OSHC has grown rapidly in popularity over the last four decades (Baxter, Hand, & Sweid, 2014; Winefield et al., 2011). According to the Report on Government Services 2020, approximately 459,730 children aged between 6-12 attended Australian Government CCS approved child care services in 2019. This is around 27% higher than attendance figures of 362,123 for the same age group five years earlier in 2014, and almost 80% higher from 2010 figures (257,724). For NSW, approximately 148,665 children aged between 6-12 attended Government CCS approved child care services in 2019, which is 37% higher attendance than in 2014 figures of 108,222 and approximately 85 per cent higher than attendance recorded for 2010 (68,403).

With these figures only accounting for children aged six and older, accessing approved service child care subsidies, it is likely that the figure could be somewhat higher. However, this is nonetheless a significant number of Australian primary-age children attending OSHC; across most Australian states and territories, these figures point to around a 20% proportion of the estimated resident population, which is almost double the proportion from a decade earlier. In the context of this review, it is uncertain what proportion of these children are from priority groups (these groups will be defined in a dedicated section).

OSHC serves multiple purposes. According to Hurst (2019) these purposes have experienced ongoing transformation since its inception. In a contemporary, Australian context, OSHC serves three main functions: safety, play and education. Government regards OSHC as primarily a service that provides safe custodial care of children to support parents' workforce participation. However, OSHC is increasingly also seen as a site of play and education, purposes that are foremost in *My Time Our Place,* Australia's curriculum framework for OSHC (Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2011b).

> *The Framework acknowledges the importance of play and leisure in children's learning and development and that their learning is not limited to any particular time or place (p. 3)*

Whilst the care-based workforce function is no doubt important from an economic perspective, this should not trivialise the role of OSHC in relation to play and education. Safety, play and education are all recognised as rights in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a treaty to which Australia is signatory (United Nations, 1989). Some children spend up to 5.5 hours per day in OSHC, highlighting its importance in providing a setting for play and education in the hours outside school (Network, 2000). Children in particular value OSHC for the play it provides, stating that fun and friends are the factors they enjoy most (Hurst, 2013, 2017; Simoncini, Cartmel, & Young, 2015). Once again, Article 12 of the UNCRC is a reminder that children's views about OSHC are important and demand consideration. The purposes performed by OSHC services, as well as how these services are perceived by children and families, are critical in this review given its examination of how more families can benefit from participation. These aspects will be explored in more detail later in the review.

The ways in which OSHC is delivered can differ greatly across settings. In NSW, approximately 68% of OSHC services are located on government and non-government school grounds (National Quality Authority IT System). Services often operate in makeshift spaces that are adapted but not designed for the delivery of OSHC. In some instances, OSHC services share a space with other school programs which requires OSHC staff to set up and take down program materials and resources each day (Cartmel, 2007; Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). Services are operated by a range of possible agencies. Whilst some services are managed and delivered by schools, the marketised approaches adopted by successive federal governments means that OSHC appears to be increasingly delivered by large corporate providers.

Services are also often delivered by church parishes, local governments, parent committees of management (Hurst, 2017). In NSW government school sites, management and operation of OSHC is currently determined by a competitive tender process that opens management to a range of providers (NSW Government, 2019). According to the ACECQA National Register and TimeSeries Splits, 30.12% of all OSHCs in NSW are delivered by single-service Approved Providers. This is marginally down from 33.79% in Q3 2013. As at Q2 2020, 53.02% of all OSHCs were managed by a private for profit, compared to 35.17% in 2014.

It is important to recognise that there is no single way to conceptualise and deliver OSHC. Before and after school programs are delivered in many countries including Sweden, Denmark, the US, England, Scotland, Germany, Switzerland, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Iceland, Norway and Canada (Bae, 2018; Hurst, 2020a). The types of program delivery emerge from each country's unique cultural, historical and political contexts (Bae, 2018; Hurst, 2017). 'Extended education' is being increasingly adopted as a universal term by most academics who research OSHC settings. It is not possible to capture the diverse modes of OSHC provision globally in the context of this review. Helpful summaries are provided by Hurst (2020a) and Bae (2018), who attempts to categories different models of extended education, some of which are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2: International categories of OSHC provision (Bae, 2018)**

| Mode of provision | Characteristics | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| School aged educare | Custodial care<br>Child-driven, play-based curriculum<br>Holistic view of children's development | Sweden<br>Denmark<br>UK<br>Australia |
| After school programs | Custodial care<br>Structured activities that aim to support academic achievement particularly for marginalised communities | US<br>Canada |
| All day schools | Custodial care | Germany |
| Supplementary education programs | Academic programs to supplement school education. E.g. tutoring and cram schools | Korea<br>Japan |

Australian OSHC belongs to Bae's 'school age educare' category which applies the Swedish term for OSHC. Services of this type are characterised by the play-based approach

to programming typically adopted in Australian OSHC but also a recognition of the role that OSHC plays in supporting children's development. Swedish services are very similar to Australian services, which is important for this review. A significant percentage of contemporary research into OSHC is performed by Swedish academics, which means their work can provide valuable insights for Australian contexts. Consequently, this review draws on some Swedish literature where relevant, acknowledging of course that there are some important distinctions between the two cultures.

## Government regulation of OSHC in Australia

OSHC services are subject to the same system of regulation and monitoring as early childhood education and care services such as Long Day Care, Preschool and Family Day Care, although there are important differences. Regulations are relatively new to OSHC. The sector was first subject to accreditation when it was a late addition to the Quality Improvement and Accreditation Scheme in 2004, joining a number of years after other early childhood service types (see Figure 1 Timeline). In 2009, OSHC joined early childhood services in the National Quality Framework (NQF), which was the centrepiece of the early childhood reforms introduced by the Rudd federal government.

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) now oversees the NQF (2019). The NQF consists of a number of components, each of which govern some aspect of OSHC provision. The National Law provides a set of universal standards that services are required to meet. Due to Australia's federated system of government, there can be differences in laws across states and territories. All states and territories except WA are subject to the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010*. In addition, each jurisdiction has its own supplementary laws and regulations.

In NSW, OSHC is subject to the *Children (Education and Care Services National Law Application) Act 2010* (ACECQA, 2019). The National Laws are supported by National Regulations and these apply mostly to the minimum safety and physical requirements that services are required to meet. They cover matters such as safety standards and processes, staff ratios and qualifications, and space requirements. In addition to laws and regulations, services are also subject to the National Quality Standard (NQS). The NQS provides a series of benchmarks spread across seven Quality Areas that are considered necessary for quality outcomes for young children. In addition to health and safety outcomes, the NQS also makes provision for children's learning outcomes, partnerships with families, service governance, physical environments, curriculum and pedagogical practices (ACECQA, 2019). In addition, OSHC services are also required to apply the pedagogical principles outlined in *My Time, Our Place*, Framework for School Age Care in Australia (DEEWR, 2011b).

All registered OSHC services are subject to regular assessment against National Law and Regulations and the NQS by state regulatory authorities and overseen by ACECQA.
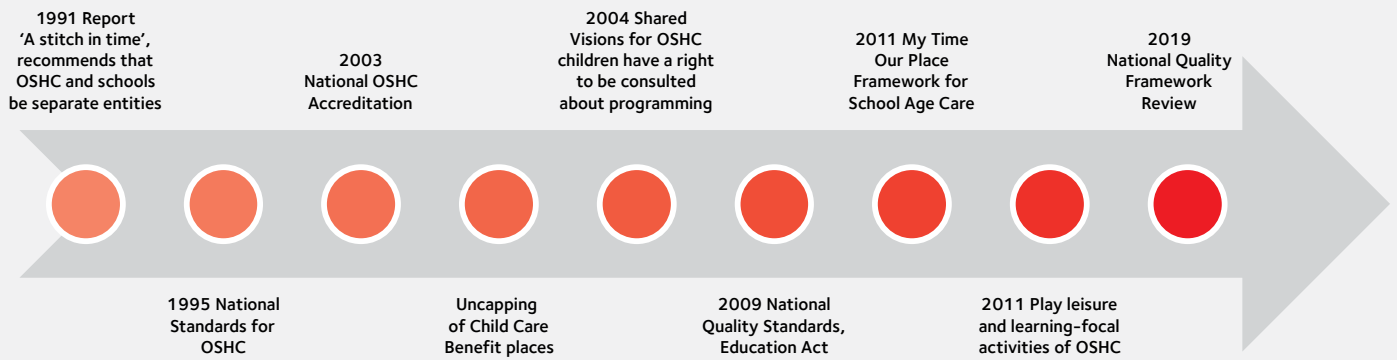
**Figure 1: Timeline of key events in the development of the OSHC system in Australia**

Whilst the NQF aims to ensure universally high quality education and care for children, its efficacy is disputed. Some entities regard the currently regulatory regime as expensive and a barrier to participation for some families (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2014a). Some of these implications will be considered later in this review.

## My Time, Our Place – The approved learning framework for Before and After School Care

One of the most significant developments in OSHC in the last 30 years was the development and introduction of *My Time, Our Place* (the MTOP Framework), the first ever learning framework for Australian OSHC services. The MTOP Framework plays a significant role in this review. As a central component of the NQF, the principles and knowledge it contains are a pivotal influence on the practices of OSHC workers. The MTOP Framework drew upon contemporary OSHC and early childhood research to outline the many ways that high quality OSHC provides more than 'just' care (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). The MTOP Framework recognises that alongside other children's settings, OSHC provides children with opportunities to maximise their potential and develop a foundation for future success in life. The MTOP Framework is conceptualised as providing a holistic approach to OSHC pedagogy.

> *A school age care program encompass all the interactions, experiences, routines and events, planned and unplanned, which occur in an environment designed to support wellbeing and foster children's learning and development (DEEWR, 2011b, p. 6).*

The MTOP Framework provides a universal set of intersecting Principles, Practice and Learning Outcomes to guide the practices of OSHC professionals (Figure 2).
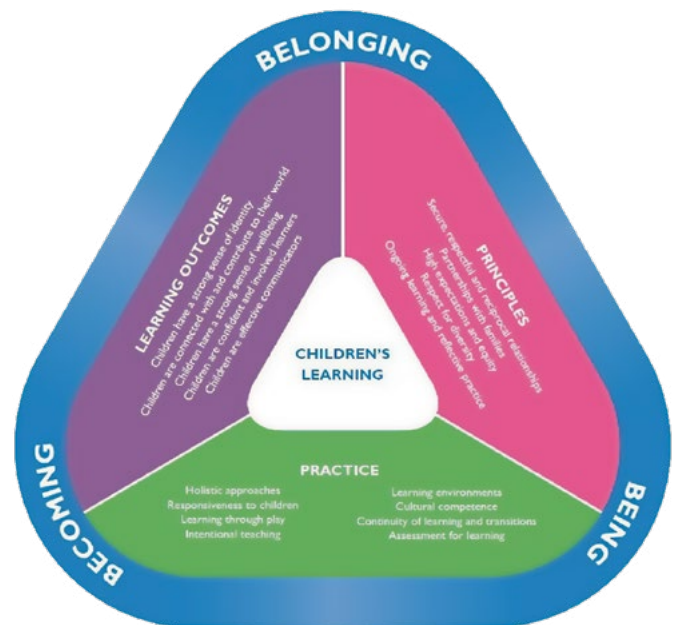


**Figure 2: Elements of MTOP Framework for School Age Care (DEEWR, 2011b) – Corrected diagram, 2014)**

This review will not explore each of these Principles, Practices and Learning Outcomes in detail. It operates from the assumption that each element is fundamental to the question of how to improve access to OSHC for high priority groups. The most relevant details of the MTOP Framework will be drawn upon to inform analysis and discussion.

It is tempting when considering questions of access to prioritise the operational, practical details, such as pricing of services, physical infrastructure and availability of spaces, but the holistic view promoted by the MTOP Framework is a reminder that human factors are just as relevant. For example, the following are all of direct relevance when considering the diverse requirements of priority groups:

- **Principle 1:** Providing children with secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- **Principle 2:** Working in partnership with families and school communities
- **Principle 4:** Having respect for diverse family contexts, practices, values and beliefs
- **Practice:** Ongoing critical reflection and evaluation of the ways that professionals work with children and families, and the environments they provide (DEEWR, 2011b).

One of the requirements of Australia's regulatory regime is that OSHC services use a recognised learning framework to inform their practices (ACECQA, 2019). The MTOP Framework is not prescriptive. It provides a broad set of principles around which professionals form their practices in ways that meet the unique requirements of their families, schools and communities (DEEWR, 2011b). Whilst OSHC services are able to use other learning frameworks such as the Early Years Learning Framework, the vast majority of services found their practice on the sector-specific OSHC Framework (ACECQA, 2011b). All recommendations in this review will therefore account for the MTOP Framework and its contents.

The MTOP Framework is also accompanied by supporting documents. *The Educators' Guide to the Framework for School Age Care in Australia* (DEEWR, 2012a) adds important detail to support understanding and implementation of the Principles, Practices and Learning Outcomes. There is also *Promoting Collaborative Partnerships Between School Age Care Services and Schools* (DEEWR, 2012b), a text that seeks to provide guidance on how to collaborate positively with schools and school management bodies, an issue that has impacted on school age care delivery for decades (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). It is noted that between 2019-2020, the NSW Department of Education partnered with Early Childhood Australia to provide <u>a free, online program to all OSHC educators</u> which focuses on unpacking the MTOP Framework (Note: the program is currently under review).

Whilst stakeholders within the OSHC sector are mostly accepting of the principles in the MTOP Framework and the holistic view it takes of the purpose of OSHC services, it is also worth noting that not all stakeholders share this perspective. Simoncini et al. (2015, p. 116) point out that "community perceptions have yet to catch up to this vision of SAC (OSHC)". Five years since the publication of this paper, this review ponders whether this perception altered significantly in 2020, particularly with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a significant, even devastating, impact on the provision of OSHC.

# 4.2 Priority groups in OSHC

This section provides a background on what this review refers to as 'priority groups' and OSHC. It summarises the available literature with respect to priority groups to better understand what is currently known about their engagement with OSHC

services. In doing so, it provides a foundation and rationale for the rest of the literature review, introducing its founding assumptions about why access to OSHC is important.

## Defining 'priority groups'

The notion of a priority group has long-standing acceptance in Australian education and care services. For at least the past two decades, up until 2018, the Australian Government had a set of published Priority of Access Guidelines for federally funded child care services, including OSHC. The 2010-11 version of the guidelines mandated that services ensure priority of access to the following groups:

Priority 1—a child at risk of serious abuse or neglect

Priority 2—a child of a single parent who satisfies, or of parents who both satisfy, the work, training, study test under section 14 of the *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999*

Priority 3—any other child.

Within these main categories, priority should also be given to the following children:

- children in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- children in families which include a disabled person
- children in families which include an individual whose adjusted taxable income does not exceed the lower income threshold or who or whose partner are on income support
- children in families with a non-English speaking background
- children in socially isolated families
- children of single parents (DEEWR, 2011a, p. 68).

In the 2010-11 version of the *Child Care Services Handbook,* 'priority' was defined as belonging to a group most in need of care. In the current version of the guidelines, the mandated aspect of the guidelines have been removed by the Australian Government, instead opening it up to services to 'set their own rules for deciding who receives a place' (Australian Government Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2019, p. 51). The current version of the Handbook instead applies a looser definition, naming children at risk of abuse and neglect, children of working sole parents, and children of families 'most at need' as 'priority' groups (p. 51).

These two definitions of priority appear to be informed by two distinct principles. The first is that parents require custodial care for their children whilst they are working or studying and therefore unable to care for them. The second is that there are identified groups in Australian society who are considered vulnerable and whose children would most benefit from being placed in institutional care. Certainly, these two principles intersect and are not entirely divorced. However, the first is mostly concerned with economic concerns and OSHC's role in supporting workforce participation. The second is concerned with mitigating the effects of disadvantage and marginalisation. This review concerns itself mostly with the second cohort, defining 'priority groups' as those
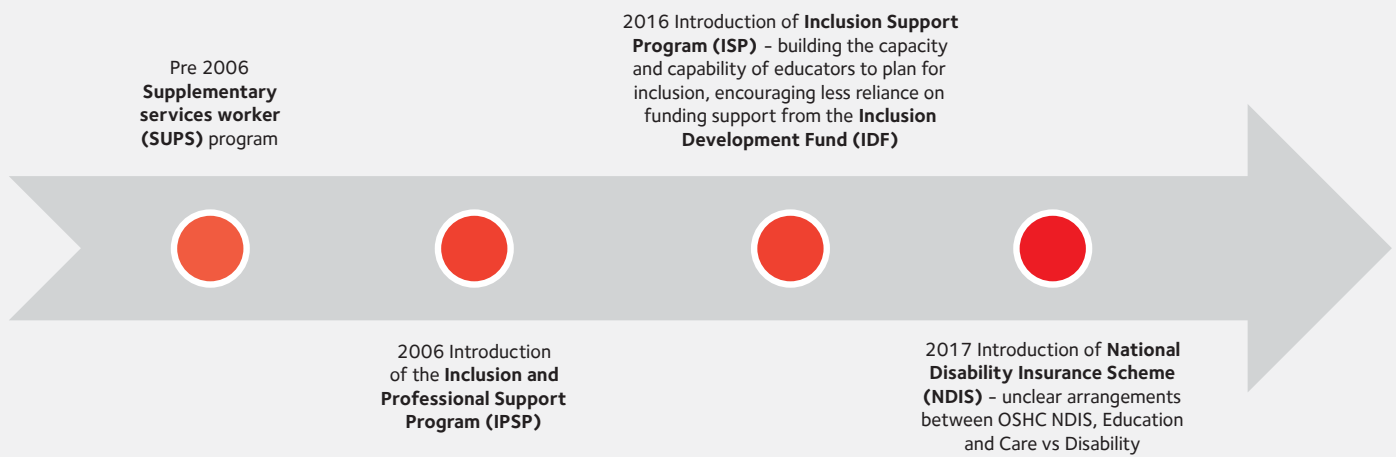
Figure 3: Timeline of the signature features of inclusion support

The timeline shows:

Pre 2006 **Supplementary services worker (SUPS) program**

2006 Introduction of the **Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP)**

2016 Introduction of **Inclusion Support Program (ISP)** - building the capacity and capability of educators to plan for inclusion, encouraging less reliance on funding support from the **Inclusion Development Fund (IDF)**

2017 Introduction of **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)** - unclear arrangements between OSHC NDIS, Education and Care vs Disability

families who experience varying types of disadvantage and exclusion and their children who are most at risk of poor developmental and educational outcomes. The reasons for this will be made clear in the remainder of this section.

The development of these responses to priority groups was paralleled with the development of systemic approach known as inclusion support. Since the 1990s, there have been a succession of federally-funded inclusion support programs, which are depicted in Figure 3 and described in greater detail later in the review.

## Who uses Outside School Hours Care?

There is little denying that working parents need OSHC. However, as a cohort, this group are already the most prominent users of OSHC. Families where both parents work are currently the most likely to use OSHC, whereas those where no parent works are amongst the least (Rioseco, Baxter, & Warren, 2017). Therefore, when considering questions about how to improve access to OSHC for those who do not use it, attention needs to be directed towards those who are less likely to use it and will benefit most. Given the lack of peer-reviewed research investigating OSHC, it is therefore unsurprising that there is almost none directly addressing OSHC and children from priority groups. For that reason, the analysis in this section necessarily draws mostly on research relating to early childhood services and international forms of school age care.

One of the few texts that provides insights into priority groups in OSHC is the *Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)* (Rioseco et al., 2017). The report demonstrates that priority groups are amongst those least likely to use OSHC. Vulnerable children are less likely to participate in formal activities in the hours outside school, which includes OSHC, increasing the likelihood that they will be unsupervised (Mullan, 2013). Family income is significant predictor of who is likely to attend. The odds of attending OSHC are tripled among children living in households in the middle third, and 7.4 times higher

for children in households with the highest equivalised incomes (Rioseco et al., 2017). This is replicated in family structures with families where both parents work amongst the most likely to attend and those where no parents work the least likely. However, the group where a child is most likely to attend is in sole parent households where the mother works full time. This demonstrates that whilst income appears most significant although not necessarily causational, there are other complexities that motivate parents to use OSHC. The importance of income manifests in other ways. Children from the wealthiest third of government schools are 4.8 times more likely to attend than the poorest third (Rioseco et al., 2017).

There appears to be a contradiction in that children from government schools are twice as likely to attend compared to those from private schools. However, the authors point out that private school families have a broader range of after school options, in particular sports and arts enrichment programs. The LSAC suggests that whilst not universally so, children of low socio-economic status are less likely to use OSHC. This is of particular concern, when economic disadvantage is a recognised risk factor in childhood trauma and poor educational and life outcomes (Toumbourou, Hall, Varcoe, & Leung, 2014).

Further insights are provided by the NSW Department of Education bi-annual 'Have Your Say' Survey on OSHC. The survey for the second half of 2019 yielded responses from 6,217 parents and carers across 515 postcodes. 54 respondents raised matters relating to disability. Of these 54, 47 respondents indicated that they experienced difficulty accessing BASC, whilst 39 indicated similarly for vacation care. These participants listed a range of factors including:

- There were no places available for children with disabilities
- Staff were not adequately trained to care for children with disabilities
- Costs were too great and/or funding not sufficient

- Services were not registered for support via the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)
- There was inadequate transport available to and from the service.

These concerns echo those raised Sims (2003), which also reported encountering some OSHC services that were not adequately trained and/or unreceptive to including children with disabilities.

Swedish research also provides insights into priority groups and the use of OSHC. Swedish fritidshem (leisure homes) are structured and conceptualised similarly to Australian OSHC, and children with intellectual disabilities and from other priority groups are less likely to attend (Karlsudd, 2012; Lundback & Falth, 2019). Lundback and Falth's (2019) literature review provides numerous examples of the complexities priority groups face in accessing Swedish fritidshem. There are examples of children in need of special support being refused access on the basis that they are 'unsuited' to the fritidshem environment. Gadler (Cited in, Lundback & Falth, 2019) argues that one possible reason priority groups are discouraged from attending is because educators are not sufficiently familiar with children's rights articles that underpin national policy. Whilst this assertion relates to a Swedish context, it is possible that some Australian educators are also unfamiliar with a child's right to attend OSHC. Further there are also concerns about the economic and time constraints relating to providing proper care for children from the priority groups. Services often consider an additional educator necessary to care for children with high support needs. Whilst the federal government Inclusion and Professional Support Program can provide funding for additional educators, the program does not pay the full cost of the worker, which may be a barrier. These factors are likely exacerbated by the watering down of the Priority of Access Guidelines in Australia which no longer positions attending OSHC as a right for those with the most need.

Research from the early childhood and care sector gives further cause to suspect that other priority groups fail to use OSHC. Brennan and Adamson (2014) report that children who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, have non-English speaking backgrounds or have disabilities are less likely to attend early childhood education and care. Similarly, the longitudinal E4Kids study found that vulnerable cohorts were less likely to attend ECEC (Gilley, Tayler, Niklas, & Cloney, 2015). Broadly, people experiencing disadvantage are less likely to access child care and other community services (Australian Social Inclusion Board, 2012). Therefore, whilst these studies relate to early childhood service types, it is reasonable to suggest that families from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-English speaking backgrounds or who have children with disabilities will also be less likely to attend OSHC. However, it is important the dearth of literature about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and OSHC, which highlights the need for more research in partnership with Indigenous communities.

## Government programs

There are a number of existing government programs that arguably make OSHC more accessible for priority groups. Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is a national program that provides fee assistance for parents who use all forms of child care. The rates of subsidy are determined by family income and the number of hours attended meaning that families with the lowest incomes receive the greatest assistance. There is also Additional CCS, which provides short-term support for families experiencing extreme financial hardship (Services Australia, 2020). The cost of OSHC is likely a barrier for many priority families given that they likely experience multiple forms of disadvantage, but it is unclear if CCS addresses that barrier as there is no substantive data to provide an insight (Wong, Harrison, Whiteford, & Rivalland, 2014).

The other main program targeted at priority families is the federal government's Inclusion Support Program (ISP) (Australian Government Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2020). The ISP aims to:

- support eligible mainstream Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services to improve their capacity and capability to provide quality inclusive practices for all children, to address access and participation barriers and to support the inclusion of children with additional needs, with their typically developing peers
- provide parents or carers of children with additional needs with access to appropriate and inclusive ECEC services that assist those parents or carers to increase their activity including work, study and training (Inclusion Support Program (ISP) Guidelines, updated 25 September 2020).

The term 'additional needs' refers broadly to children with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from diverse cultural backgrounds. The program seeks to accomplish its aims in a number of ways. Inclusion Agencies employ Inclusion Professionals (IP) who advise and support OSHC services to access resources that assist with inclusion. The program also provides access to specialist equipment and sometimes funding for additional staff (Australian Government Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2020). ECE services that receive support through the ISP must develop a Strategic Inclusion Plan (SIP) for their service, in collaboration with the Inclusion Agency (IA). SIPs provide a self-guided inclusion assessment and planning tool for services, and includes strategies for improving and embedding inclusive practice in line with the National Quality Standards (NQS) (KU NSW/ACT Inclusion Agency, 2020).

Although the ISP has existed in various iterations for approximately three decades, it is uncertain how effective the ISP is in providing access to OSHC for priority groups as there is no publicly available research that provides any insight. Anecdotally, through their contact with OSHC services and peak bodies, the authors believe that children with disabilities, particularly those who attend specialist schools,

are unlikely to attend OSHC at a mainstream school. It is however widely accepted in the OSHC sector that priority groups are more likely to attend Vacation Care. There is also a perception amongst some OSHC workers that Inclusion Professionals often come from early childhood backgrounds and do not always understand OSHC. However, there is again no research to support this. One small, unpublished study by the Victorian Inclusion Agency (VIA) (2021) provides some insights into the effectiveness of the ISP. The VIA found that services who had at least one visit from an IP were more likely to achieve an 'exceeding' rating in their National Quality Framework outcome. Whilst far from conclusive, this provides some evidence that engagement with the ISP can result in better standards of OSHC delivery, which benefits all children, including those with high support needs.

An earlier iteration of the ISP was the federally funded Supplementary Services (SUPS) Worker program. Sims (2003) provides first-person accounts from SUPS workers of their experiences supporting the inclusion of priority children in OSHC and ECEC. The examples of poor-quality practice come mostly from OSHC services and depict some confronting examples of services that were unwilling and unprepared to include priority children, and not responsive to their needs. These accounts are important because SUPS workers had close relationships with parents, and arguably closer than those made possible by the current ISP. The SUPS workers who participated in Sims' study provide suggestions of what constitutes quality practice with priority children and families:

- Being positive about and accepting of the child
- Being prepared
- Positive interactions with the child
- Being flexible willing to learn (Sims, 2003).

It is of course important to remember that when this study was conducted there were no minimum standards or regulatory framework for OSHC. The principles identified by Sims are all foundational in the current OSHC framework which has now been in place for 10 years. Additionally, OSHC as a sector now has a higher percentage of qualified workers and 20 more years' experience of including priority children. Nonetheless, this research is important in the context of this review because it suggests that parents can be good judges of what a quality children's setting looks like and whether or not it is suitable for their child.

Another important program is the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), a federally funded program that provides financial support to individuals who have permanent or ongoing disabilities (National Disability Insurance Agency, 2020). The NDIS provides access to a range of supports including medical services, mobility assistance, support workers, transportation and participation in community activities. The extent to which these supports are available to children who might attend OSHC is unclear. For a child to receive NDIS funding to attend OSHC, the service

needs to register with the NDIS, which anecdotally few mainstream services appear to have done. Children who attend mainstream OSHC at their own school might benefit indirectly from NDIS funding attached to the school for things like mobility and communication aids.

It is highly probable that if more work was undertaken to support OSHC services better understand the NDIS, these services would be better positioned to provide environments accessible to children with high support needs. It is also fairly likely that the support might need to address attitudes given that some OSHC providers might be resistant to including children with high support needs (Sims, 2003).

## What sort of OSHC program?

When considering children with complex disabilities, consideration needs to be given to of the most suitable OSHC delivery mode as well. Demand for specialist rather than mainstream OSHC for children who attend specialist schools has increased over the past decade (Queensland Children's Activities Network (QCAN), 2019). In their Position Paper, QCAN (2019) present a number of arguments in support of specialist OSHC, in particular that such services may be better able to meet the needs of children with complex support needs and that these children have a right to play opportunities with their peers that are relevant and meaningful to them.

In many instances, such opportunities cannot currently be provided by mainstream services. There is a concern that priority children in mainstream OSHC would be positioned as outsiders and 'Other'. Mainstream settings are unlikely to include peers from the child's school, something that many children without a disability would have ready access to. However, Cologon (n.d.) proposes that children still encounter social challenges in specialist settings, in that they are more likely to encounter bullying.

Despite the benefits proposed by QCAN, specialist OSHC sits uneasily against the aims of the mainstream support programs already discussed in this review in a number of ways. The main purpose of the ISP is to support inclusion in mainstream settings, something that is not provided by specialist OSHC, rendering it ineligible for the ISP. QCAN (2019) also detail how the requirements of the NQS are not currently a good fit for specialist services and present significant barriers to their establishment and operation. QCAN's paper describes how these and other factors conspire to make specialist OSHC too expensive for communities. QCAN propose that governments need to consider funding approaches that support the provision of specialist OSHC, suggesting that the NDIS appears the most viable option.

The provision of specialist OSHC proposed by QCAN is the focus of a pilot program being conducted by the Victorian Department of Education. Since 2018, the program has operated at five specialist and one mainstream school. Funding for the program has supported additional staff, specialised resources, training for staff and provision of excursions.

The Victorian Government has conducted an unpublished review that provides important insights into the accessibility of OSHC for priority groups. Similar to QCAN, the Victorian Government found that there is an ongoing gap in provision for children with complex needs that is not being addressed by the current marketised approach to OSHC provision; that the current mix of funding programs including the NDIS and CCS are not sufficient to address costs for parents; and that more work needs to be done to understand what quality practice looks like for children with complex support needs. Importantly, this program suggests that participation in OSHC has benefits for children with high support needs, and their parents and communities. In particular, the program gives children access to activities that they might not normally experience, and parents receive important respite as well as the capacity to achieve greater workforce participation.

Whilst specialist OSHC might seem to improve access for parents, it is unclear whether it provides the best developmental outcomes for children with complex disabilities. Cologon (n.d.) draws on a range of research literature to propose that mainstream settings provide better outcomes for children with high support needs. The benefits include improved academic, social and emotional outcomes, as well as greater community membership and participation. The uncertainties about mainstream and specialist OSHC point highlight multiple tensions. Whilst delivery at specialist schools has much to offer with respect to physical access, there is uncertainty as to whether it best supports children's education, development and community participation. Therefore, when adresssing access, consideration also need to given to the types of services children and families are able to access and the benefits they provide.

## International programs for priority groups

There is little other research that investigates how to engage priority groups in OSHC. One study that requires consideration for this review investigates a program run in the United States (US), 'Together We Play' (TWP) (Scholl, Dieser, & Davison, 2005). TWP was a pilot program that sought to integrate children with disabilities in US after school programs. Similar to the Australian context, children with disabilities have low levels of participation in after school activities. The central component of the program was the presence of a social inclusion worker, whose role it was to assess the OSHC environment, and facilitate initial access to OSHC, provision of physical supports, and also training of OSHC staff. The inclusion worker plays a vital role linking OSHC workers to agencies and supports that assist with inclusion, and operates on the assumption that one barrier to inclusion is that ASP staff lack confidence and experience including children with high support needs (Scholl et al., 2005).

The research reported positive results, claiming increased successful participation by children with disabilities, although the extent and nature of those improvements is unclear. On the surface, TWP seems very similar in approach and philosophy to Australia's Inclusion Support Program.

However, there appears to be one important difference. The inclusion worker in the TWP appears much more 'hands on', or actively involved, with OSHC staff than an Australian Inclusion Professional (IP) in that they have more license to train and guide OSHC staff. One requirement of IPs is that they build capacity of OSHC staff with respect to inclusive practice and that they are seen as facilitators rather than trainers (Australian Government Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2020). The assumption underpinning this requirement seems to be that in time OSHC services will be capable enough to no longer require an IP. This is a laudable aim and one shared by the TWP. However, at the time of the study, the designers of the TWP seem to acknowledge that OSHC workers needed greater support.

This raises critical questions about whether the current Australian ISP is the best model to support the inclusion of children with disabilities in OSHC at this moment. OSHC is a sector with high levels of transient staff, who often stay no more than a few years before moving on to other careers (McNamara & Cassells, 2010). Consequently, many OSHC services need to 'start again' every time a cohort of educators move on. As such, it is to be expected that as educators and coordinators leave, so too will some of the capacity to include priority children. This raises the question of whether, despite worthy attempts to build capacity, there will always be a need for IPs who provide hands-on support to OSHC services staffed by workers who are new to the sector and the principles of inclusion.

Later in this review, the image of OSHC is discussed in greater depth. Certainly, in order for parents of priority children to feel positive about OSHC, they need to see it as a setting that is confident in providing for their child's requirements and has adequate resources to do so. Enabling Inclusion Professionals to work more directly with the service might leave OSHC educators and coordinators more confident because they know they have access to a central resource who will provide direct assistance as well as link to other supports.

## Should older children be considered a priority group?

So far this section has focused on vulnerable groups with greater social needs who could benefit from, but do not often use, OSHC. Another group who under-utilise OSHC are older children, those aged 9-12 years. Whilst not considered 'vulnerable', older children are of interest in this review. OSHC is supposed to provide for children aged 5-12 years but only one-third of participants are aged 9-12 years (Hurst, 2017, 2020b). Whilst there is no definitive knowledge about why older children do not go to OSHC, Hurst has produced a number of studies investigating the question. There seems to be a perception amongst older children that OSHC is better suited to younger children. Older children who attend OSHC raise a number of issues that inform this perspective. In particular, these issues include whether:

- activities lack challenge and are better suited to younger children
- older children need their own spaces and resources
- the small number of older children means that there are not enough same-age peers to play with
- older children feel marginalised as a problematic minority (Hurst, 2015, 2017, 2020b).

Older children's lack of participation does not appear to be due to a diminished need for care. Statistics collected by the ABS (2018) suggest that parents find other care options for older children such as care by neighbours, family or older siblings. This raises the possibility that if OSHC was seen as more desirable by older children, they may be more likely to attend and thereby raise participation by a group for who these services are intended. Consideration might be given for how to support services to better cater for children of diverse age groups.

## Summary

This section provided a detailed review of the available literature relating to OSHC and children from priority groups. Whilst there is some literature addressing children with disabilities and high support needs, there is little addressing children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, diverse cultural backgrounds, economic disadvantage or at risk of abuse and neglect. It is also important to remember that families do not often experience just one form disadvantage, as vulnerabilities are often cumulative (Wong et al., 2014).

The current mix of funding programs, like the Child Care Subsidy and Inclusion Support Program, are certainly welcome in their attempts to make OSHC more accessible for a range of priority groups. The CCS does this by attending to financial barriers. The ISP is more holistic in that it seeks to address financial barriers for services, access to knowledge for services, physical access through specialist equipment and also social barriers through education. However, the low levels of engagement of priority groups in ECEC and OSHC suggest that there may be other, more effective ways of engaging priority families in OSHC. The factors that influence family participation in services are multiple and complex (Baxter & Hand, 2013).

This review does suggest that there is a need to investigate the provision of specialist OSHC services for children with high support needs. According to QCAN (2019), this examination should include a review of funding and regulatory programs. However, given the benefits of inclusion in mainstream OSHC identified by Cologon (n.d.), it is equally important to investigate how access to mainstream OSHC might also be improved. One other significant consideration is how priority families view the purpose of OSHC. If OSHC is viewed purely as a workforce program that is unable to meet their child's additional needs, then it seems unlikely that many priority families would want to access it. This

is something that will be addressed in more detail later in the review. This section also highlights the dearth of peer-reviewed literature relating to OSHC and priority groups, which is something that requires urgent attention.

# 4.3 The benefits of OSHC

OSHC services are a complex identity. On the one hand, services provide an institutional space to hold children waiting for their primary care givers who may be working or studying. Simultaneously they are developing as what could be described as a business unit, which provides income and employment to the providers of the service, which could be community groups or commercial entities. Schools as 'landlords' may receive remuneration for the provision of the physical space and resources. However, one might describe the core of the activity of an OSHC is to support children's development and wellbeing. Any changes to the current system will require innovative responses to deal with the high level of systemic complexity.

## Research into Benefits of OSHC for children

OSHC programs prioritise social and emotional skills of school connectedness, self-management, self-efficacy, growth mindset and social awareness. It should also be noted that with services opening 6:15–9:00am and 3:00-6:30pm (NSW services are usually 7:00-9:00am and 3:00-6:00pm), the potential maximum time that children can spend at the OSHC service may actually be longer than time spent in the 'school' classrooms in some circumstances.

## Research from Early Childhood

Research from the Early Childhood sector notes that access and full participation are not always available to all children in the learning and care services (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2014). The children that most commonly miss out are those with a disability or developmental delay and those from low socioeconomic circumstances at risk of abuse, neglect and developmental disadvantage; and children from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds (Noah's Ark, 2019).

## Possible benefits for children from priority groups

There is emerging research about the participation in high quality programs influencing social and emotional development which is a mediator of academic achievement. This research is emerging from international services as in Australia there has not been any research examining the length of time children attend OSHC services and the links to performance in the classroom. OSHC programs prioritise social and emotional skills of self-management, self-efficacy, social awareness and communication. These skills are linked to children's overall wellbeing, their capacity to engage in academic performance and future

life outcomes. Bae (2014) notes that the greatest number of empirical studies examining the education outcomes of participation in afterschool programs have been conducted in the United States. Further, Bae (2014) notes that if the benefits of OSHC are to be examined then the structure, process and outcomes of the program need to be considered. This is particularly pertinent to the Australia circumstances where the outcomes of the Framework for School Age Care are linked to learning, leisure and care.

# 4.4 The image of OSHC

Whilst there is only a small amount of peer-reviewed research into OSHC, particularly in comparison to other early childhood education and care settings, there are some recurring themes. These themes gain importance when they are reinforced by what is also known anecdotally. One theme that seems to run across much of the Australian research relates to how OSHC is seen by a range of stakeholders. In a review focused on improving access to OSHC, the image of the sector might at first appear to be a more important issue for advocates and people who work in services. However, in this section, the intent is to communicate the vital importance of the image of OSHC when considering access. How OSHC is perceived has implications that impact of all aspects of provision and engagement.

## 'Just care'

Earlier in this review, background was provided into the development of OSHC and the gradual transformation over decades from recreational after school activities into a regulated service that aims to provide care and supplement children's education in a leisure-based setting (Cartmel, 2007; Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). Whilst key policy documents like the MTOP Framework and the NQF might recognise that OSHC plays a more important role in children's development than just providing safe-keeping, this may not necessarily align with other perceptions of services and what they can provide (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). OSHC is frequently seen as providing 'just care' and of lower status than other early childhood services types (Cartmel, 2007). It is a perception of OSHC that is held by a range of stakeholders and has implications for its perceived relevance.

Government play a significant role in positioning OSHC as mostly care. Whilst the Rudd government's early childhood reforms in the late 2000s were welcomed by the OSHC sector, they exist in tension with economic priorities that conceptualise OSHC largely through a workforce lens. This is exemplified by the 2014 Productivity Commission inquiry into child care and early childhood learning which prioritises OSHC's care and economic functions above others (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2014b). The inquiry regards requirements for educational programs and qualified staff in purely economic terms as a cost with questionable efficacy and therefore barrier to participation. Certainly, cost is an important consideration for families, but it is limiting to

position OSHC's role in supporting education and development as a barrier to uptake. Recognising OSHC as an important contributor to development might in fact make it more appealing to both families and Government policy makers.

## 'Not core business'

Of particular importance for OSHC is the way it is perceived by school principals and other powerful actors within schools. Cartmel's (2007) PhD thesis provides a rich account of how some school principals view OSHC and the implications for services. 80% of OSHC services are located on school grounds, using school buildings and facilities such as classrooms, libraries, multi-purpose rooms, equipment and toilets. Principals are therefore critical stakeholders and sometimes gatekeepers who govern access to buildings and resources (Cartmel, 2007). There is a problematic view that has lingered since the early years of OSHC that it is a marginal consideration for principals and not prioritised or seen as 'core business' (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). This is unsurprising, given that for most schools, OSHC is something that has only been added to their list of functions in the last 30 years. However, relegating OSHC to a side concern has significant implications. Principals can be reluctant to share facilities and resources (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2014b). It also contributes to OSHC staff feeling undervalued, which impacts on their wellbeing, sense of value and capacity to perform their roles (Cartmel, 2007). Cartmel argues that when principals and OSHC coordinators hold contrasting views about OSHC, services may be delegitimised, compromised in their ability to provide quality programs. Their coordinators may be less likely to represent the best interests of children outside the classroom as well.

According to Cartmel (2007), this image of OSHC as something peripheral to the 'normal' business of schools misrepresents the realities. As the extent of OSHC provision has grown, OSHC has become more, rather than less, connected and entangled with schools and school management. The education reforms of 2009/10 also mean that the educational goals of schools and OSHC are also more closely aligned (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014).

## A place of fun and friendship

When considering the importance of how OSHC is viewed, one perspective that needs greater consideration is that of children. Children have multiple rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a convention to which Australia is signatory (United Nations, 1989). This includes Article 12, the right to form and express a view about matters that affect them, and to have those views considered. As the primary recipients of the services provided by OSHC, what children think about and want from OSHC is critical to questions of access.

Research into children's views and OSHC is becoming more commonplace and sheds some light on their perspectives. Hurst (2013, 2017) conducted two small research projects

investigating the views of children aged 9 to 12 years, an age group less likely to attend OSHC. In both studies, the most important features about OSHC for the participants were the presence of fun and friends. The children desired activities that were both enjoyable, but also consistent with their level of development. Development was also relevant to their desire not just for friends, but those who were of a similar age. Similar results are reported by Simoncini et al. (2015) who surveyed a group of 164 Australian children. The authors reported that activities (52.4%) and play (34.1%) were the 'best' aspects of OSHC. Friends were also important with 18.9% of children reporting that friends were the best thing about OSHC. 43.9% of children reported making new friends at OSHC; girls in particular valued this aspect.

In another small, qualitative project, Bell and Cartmel (2014) found that Brisbane children preferred play in spaces that were outdoors or 'out of bounds'. These results again highlight how children like to see OSHC as a site of self-directed activity, a perception that recurs as a feature in all the studies cited in this section.

Similar findings about children's views of OSHC appear in international research literature. In the United Kingdom (UK), Oliver, Egharevba, and Petrie (2000) report that children value being able to meet and make friends. Icelandic children in the first years of primary school indicated that they saw OSHC primarily as a site of play where they could direct how they spend their leisure time, which contrasted with their view of school, which they saw as a site of structure and academic learning (Pálsdóttir, 2010). Similarly, two Swedish studies by Johansson and Ljusberg (as cited in, Pálsdóttir, 2010) and Klerfelt and Haglund (2015) found that children valued OSHC largely as a place for play and social engagement as well as fellowship with peers.

These studies have relevance for this review as the UK, Iceland and Sweden all conceptualise OSHC similarly to Australia (Hurst, 2017). Presented together with the Australian research, they present a compelling picture about what children want from their spaces in the hours outside school. Whilst it is easy to dismiss these views as children 'just wanting to play', this review reminds readers that play is a right in the UNCRC and one of the primary means by which children learn (Gonski Institute for Education, 2020; Lester & Russell, 2014; United Nations, 2013). If adults recognise the educational value of play, they are then more likely to support it in their actions (Kane, 2015).

## How Outside School Hours Care is viewed matters

This section has described the differing ways OSHC is viewed by various stakeholders. Government is inclined to view it as predominantly a care service that supports workforce participation and economic goals. This exists in conflict with regulatory texts that build on the emerging body of OSHC research that recognises its important role in supporting educational and developmental outcomes

(DEEWR, 2011b). There is little research that sheds light on how parents view OSHC. It is known that parents select OSHC primarily on the basis of location (Baxter et al., 2014), but this speaks mainly to convenience rather than their views about what OSHC should provide. School principals can sometimes view OSHC as an additional burden that sits outside their regular work, which grates with the views of OSHC coordinators and staff who are more inclined to see services as valuable contributors to children's development (Cartmel, 2007; Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014; Milton et al., 2021; Westoby et al., 2021). Milton et al., (2021) collaborated with key stakeholders at a NSW OSHC service to co-design a well-being program, Connect Promote Protect Prrogram (CP3) to be delivered within the OSHC program. Then there are the children themselves, who value OSHC for providing play and friendship (Bell & Cartmel, 2014; Hurst, 2013, 2017; Simoncini et al., 2015).

This review regards these sometimes conflicting images of OSHC as central to the question of improving access. In particular, attention needs to be paid to the views of children, which have historically been ignored with respect to policy and research (Hurst, 2017; United Nations, 2005). If Australian children desire OSHC to be a site of play and friendship, then efforts can be made to support it being seen in this way. Perhaps if children see OSHC as a desirable place then they are more likely to want to go. This is particularly the case for children in the later years of primary school who attend OSHC in lower numbers and can have a negative view of services (Gifford, 1991; Hurst, 2015, 2020b). Government might consider ways to support OSHC services to promote play and social engagement as the focus of provision. Consideration might also be given to ways of promoting OSHC as a site of fun and friends to improve community perceptions of the sector. In particular, promotion should be focused on priority groups who are often marginalised socially (Rioseco et al., 2017).

The views of some powerful actors would potentially work against attempts to shift community perceptions of OSHC, in particular those of school principals. Cartmel (2007) proposes that principals' views of OSHC have effect not just within the school – but also the communities they serve. Additionally, problematic attitudes to OSHC within schools can negatively impact on access to spaces and resources which has direct impact on the capacity of services to provide a quality program (Cartmel, 2007). Government should consider ways to support principals' engagement with the OSHC settings they support, which would add encouragement to provide OSHC with appropriate spaces that support play and social engagement as suggested by the Australian Government Productivity Commission (2014b).

Finally, consideration should also be given to identifying ways of shifting broad community perceptions of OSHC so that these perceptions better recognise the multiple purposes that OSHC serves. The view of OSHC as a service that supports play and development as well as providing care is

widely accepted in the OSHC sector and already expressed in the Framework and the NQF. However, it seems unlikely that this view will gain a foothold in the wider community. If the images of OSHC in communities can shift beyond being seen as 'just care', it potentially widens the appeal of OSHC to families who don't normally see OSHC as the right fit 'for them'. Current governmental perspectives on OSHC as a service that 'just' supports workforce goals provides an unnecessarily narrow perspective on OSHC's value and the support it can provide for families. There is really no literature to support how this work might be done. However, Sweden provides reassurance that it can be done. Sweden's OSHC services are very close to Australian services in how they are imagined but are much more closely aligned with the schools that host them. Swedish services are therefore more highly regarded by the community. Government might also consider building relationships with Swedish policy-makers and academics to understand better how this work has been done. Whilst the work of shifting perceptions is slippery and not as easy to quantify as lowering fees or funding buildings, it nonetheless offers much in terms of improving access if families, children, principals and government can see OSHC as more than just a necessary inconvenience.

## 4.5 OSHC and school partnerships

### Critical partnership between OSHC and schools

It is paramount that collaboration of schools and OSHC services are recognised. The majority of OSHC services are located on school sites. OSHC services offer opportunities for widely differing needs and interests of children. Increasing opportunities for school principals, key personnel in schools and wider community to have a deeper awareness of the MTOP framework and associated curriculum for a quality program in OSHC would strengthen understanding. When the school workforce value OSHC educators as partners in providing learning opportunities (both formal and informal), the outcomes for children are likely to be better (Harms et al, 2013). The School-age Care Environmental Rating Scale (SACERS) tool (Harms, et al, 2013) is a validated tool to evaluate the quality of OSHC programs to provide warm and caring support and learning opportunities for children. The items in the SACERS tool (Harmes, et al, 2013) include evaluation of the physical environment as well as the professional relationships between OSHC staff, and with school personnel.

The research suggests that qualified staff are more likely to manage relationships between the OSHC and school in order to negotiate critical aspects that support all children and families of the school community. A high level of child development knowledge, high level of observation skills, capacity to use play-work practice strategies and work with intentionality would ensure that the diversity of children's capabilities and interests could be met.

International data reveals that countries who operate OSHC services with smaller indoor space requirements, require OSHC leaders to be tertiary qualified. It has been noted that the services with lower ratios of indoor space had university qualified program leaders (Cartmel, 2019). These leaders were afforded equitable status to school staff. They have high level knowledge of children's development and programming skills to ensure the space and resources available is used effectively to support children's learning and care. SACERS (Harms, et al, 2013) highlights the qualifications/experience of OSHC leaders. OSHC leadership, in particular the capacity to advocate for themselves has a direct link to higher SACERS score. In the SACERS tool, items 36 and 39 rate the capacity of a service to function effectively on a school site. These items rate the partnership and leadership arrangements between the OSHC service and the school. When the school and teachers' value OSHC educators as partners in the education and care of children, then, the sharing of the physical environment is more congenial and the quality of the physical environment is likely to be better (Cartmel, 2007). See Appendix one for excerpts of items and subscales from SACERS (Harms et al, 2013).

### Case study: Swedish approach to OSHC and school management – a national curriculum

Swedish school-age educare centres (extended education/OSHC) are a part of the school, and these services share resources. The curriculum for OSHC is embedded into the national curriculum (Skolvert, 2018). This curriculum feature strengths the value placed on inclusion of all children in OSHC program. OSHC Staff (leisure-time pedagogues), require a three and-a-half years tertiary degree from a higher-level college or university (Ministry of Education and Research, 2016). Educational pedagogues (pre-school teachers) make up 60% of the personnel in the OSHC. The barriers between OSHC and school are less dramatic. Almost all (99%) Swedish children attend high-quality leisure centres during non-school hours.

Wider economic benefits have also been proven. Research evidence shows that when children have access to quality early childhood education they can expect better school success, a decreased crime rate, less substance abuse and increased long-term employment – all positives for the economy (Nilsson, et al, 2015).

If not out of consideration for the human rights of children, then out of consideration for the many economic benefits of a good childcare system and the future benefits for children and families, all countries should strive for reform of their early childhood education and care systems.

### Implications for priority groups

Where there are very strong partnerships between the community of the school and the OSHC, there are best practice examples of mutually beneficial decision-making and an alignment of values about the operation of the

service. This type of service operation characterises OSHC services that prioritise the development and wellbeing of children, inclusion of children with high support needs, and consideration of the needs of the parent community before income stream. Further, in these situations there are examples of negotiating about high quality use of the venue and resources to accommodate more children in the service (Cartmel, et al., 2019).

## 4.6 OSHC Workforce

So far, this review has addressed a number of different aspects of OSHC and their importance when thinking about how to improve access of priority groups. This section considers the matters relating to workforce. One matter already discussed in previous sections is how OSHC workers are perceived by parents and children. Workforce matters such as staff qualifications are critical in how workers and OSHC are regarded.

### A constantly changing workforce

OSHC is a sector that has undergone constant change since the 1980s in its purposes with the introduction of a succession of regulatory regimes (Cartmel, 2007; Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014; Hurst, 2017). Each of these changes has resulted in changes to the professional demands on workers, in particular an increasing administrative workload that accompanied the OSHC Quality Assurance Scheme in 2003 and the NQF in 2010 (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). As participation in OSHC has increased, so too has the size of the workforce, which grew 52% between 2013 and 2016 (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2017; Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2014b). Despite the increasing size of the workforce, roles in OSHC are not highly sought after. However, it is noted that using permanent part-time contracts has reduced turnover, along with financial and other incentives based on performance and tenure. Regardless, the lack of professional development opportunities, in particular OSHC-specific professional development opportunities, can leave many educators feeling undervalued (ACECQA, 2019b). The low status of the sector discussed previously in this review also means that its workers are often considered low status.

OSHC is staffed by a predominantly casualised workforce, which reflects its short periods of operation (ACECQA, 2019b). In 2016, 68% of the workforce were employed for 19 hours or less per week and only 10.3% worked full-time hours (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2017). The predominance of casual roles leaves OSHC workers particularly vulnerable to financial ruptures like the current COVID-19 pandemic. A further snapshot of the workforce is provided by McNamara and Cassells (2010) and ACECQA (2019b). Although there is nearly 10 years difference between reports, discussions with state peak bodies suggest that not much has changed in the last decade.

In 2006, 84% of workers were women, which is similar in proportion to the early childhood workforce (McNamara & Cassells, 2010). The age of workers is also worth discussion with 42% aged between 15-24 years. These younger workers are often studying for other careers such as teaching and are suited to the casualised nature of the jobs (Cartmel, Brannelly, Phillips & Hurst, in press). In 2016, 17.4% of workers were studying towards a Bachelor's degree (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2017).

There is also an interesting relationship between age and gender with higher proportions of males in the 19-24 year age group and males less likely to remain employed in OSHC after four years. The workforce is highly transient with only 26.1% having worked for four or more years in the one service (McNamara & Cassells, 2010; ACECQA, 2019b). This again suggests a high proportion of students who move on after completing study.

The workforce also has a diverse mix of qualifications and experience. In 2006, 52% of workers were unqualified, although that proportion appears to be decreasing (ACECQA, 2019b).

One of the most significant workforce changes that accompanied the 2010 NQF reforms was the introduction of mandatory qualifications for OSHC, which is expected to have increased the proportion of qualified workers. Accepted qualifications for OSHC cover a wide range of levels and disciplines related to childhood (ACECQA, 2020). There is no national list of prescribed qualifications for educators working with children over preschool age with each state and territory determining the qualification requirements for OSHC educators in their jurisdiction. Unlike the rest of Australia, NSW does not have any qualification requirements for OSHC educators.

Given that there are 381 potential qualifications across Australia, it is beyond the scope of this review to cover all of the possible qualifications OSHC workers can have (ACECQA, 2020). The most common qualifications are vocational at Certificate or Diploma level (ACECQA, 2019b). These include the only two vocational qualifications designed for OSHC, which are the Certificate IV and Diploma of Outside School Hours Care. However, a proportion of workers will also have qualifications in early childhood. Whilst the majority of possible qualifications have an educational focus, workers can also have qualifications in related disciplines like youth work, recreation or psychology (ACECQA, 2020). In addition, many workers will not have completed their qualifications. There is provision in the NQF for workers to be considered 'qualified' if they are "actively working towards" their qualification (ACECQA, 2020). This provision is likely intended to support services in responding to shortages of qualified workers and the historical involvement of tertiary students as part-time workers in OSHC.

These statistics describe a workforce that is diverse and eclectic, although it needs to be noted that it may not

necessarily be a workforce ideally suited to the needs of children from priority groups. Given the high proportion of workers who are unqualified or still studying, it is probable that many enter the job without the skills and experience needed to support children whose needs fall outside the mainstream. Of course, these workers can acquire knowledge and expertise on the job. However, the transient nature of the workforce means that it is difficult to retain those skills longer-term. In some services, coordinators are reluctant to invest in the professional development of short-term workers (Cartmel et al., 2020).

There are also questions about whether qualified workers have the necessary skills. Whilst the Certificate and Diploma OSHC qualifications have content relating to priority groups, the low levels of participation in OSHC by priority groups means that students may not gain relevant experience during their practical placements. It is also important to consider how well some qualifications are suited to work in OSHC. Students undertaking teaching degrees which have a developmental and academic focus may lack familiarity with the play and leisure-based pedagogies required for OSHC. This does not mean that these workers are not fit for purpose, but these are certainly factors that demand consideration when thinking about how to include priority children in OSHC.

## Professional Standards for Outside School Hours Care

One other factor to consider is whether OSHC workers are provided with adequate knowledge about 'how' to work with priority groups. The MTOP Framework functions as a broad set of principles around which workers are expected to form their practices (DEEWR, 2011b). However, the framework stops short of telling workers 'how to do it'. The Queensland Children's Activity Network (QCAN) sought to address this through their OSHC Professional Standards for Educators (The Standards) (QCAN, n.d.). The Standards aim to provide a universal illustration of what quality practice can look like in OSHC, including how to support children from priority groups. The document provides practice standards for four different categories of OSHC workers that account for different levels of qualifications and experience (Cartmel et al., 2020; Queensland Children's Activities Network (QCAN), n.d.).

The Standards certainly provide another perspective for workers who are unsure how to support children from priority groups. However, they fall short of a comprehensive guide. There is perhaps an opportunity to develop a practice guide for OSHC that provides suggested practices for workers when engaging with new family from a priority group. When making this recommendation, it does need to be acknowledged that there is a risk in universalising practices for families on the basis that they come from a priority group. Smith, Tesar, and Myers (2016) caution that to do so further positions already vulnerable groups as 'deficit and problematic'. Any practice guide needs to address this possibility.

## Summary

This section has provided a brief overview of who works in OSHC. It illustrates a diverse workforce made up predominantly of women and casual employees. Whilst the proportion of qualified staff is increasing, many workers are unqualified or working towards a qualification. Additionally, the diverse range of qualifications in OSHC mean that workers present with a complex mix of skills and theoretical biases. It is easy to see how all of these factors might lead parents to form a critical view about the capacity of some OSHC services to care for a child from a priority group whose needs might differ from the mainstream. This range of factors emerges from a complex history and cannot be addressed simply. However, how the OSHC workforce is seen by families is critical if they are to use the service. Perhaps something like the QCAN *Professional Standards for OSHC Educators* project (QCAN, 2018) offers one way to give workers more confidence in working with priority families and that this might contribute to parents also having more confidence.

# 5. Conclusion and recommendations

The question of how to make OSHC more accessible to priority groups is complex. One thing that is evident in completing this review is that there is a range of multiple, interconnected factors that each likely play a role in whether parents and children take up the opportunity to attend OSHC. Consequently, is highly unlikely that there exists a 'silver bullet' that will address this matter. The recommendations that follow need to be considered with this in mind, as interconnected and dependent upon each other.

The other factor that has also been made clear in this review is the clear lack of research literature about OSHC. Cartmel's (2007) PhD study was the first significant study into Australian OSHC, and whilst Cartmel's work has drawn much needed research attention to the importance of OSHC and facilitated the emergence of a growing number of researchers interested in outside school hours setting, there is much that still needs to be learned. This is particularly the case with respect to the question of access by priority groups. Whilst it is known that few members of priority cohorts attend OSHC, the reasons why are inferred from other related settings like early childhood, rather than clearly understood. This makes clear that there is an urgent need for further research that takes into account that all priority groups have unique complexities that make 'easy' answers elusive.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** More research needs to be conducted in partnership with priority groups to better understand their engagement with OSHC.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** More research needs to be conducted in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to better understand their engagement with OSHC.

This review has also made clear the importance of the image of OSHC. As already discussed, OSHC has low status in Australian society and is often seen by those outside the sector as services that perform the seemingly simple task of keeping children safe and occupied. However, this perception understates the multiple and complex roles performed by OSHC. Certainly, OSHC provides care for working families, but this review suggests that high-quality OSHC is also an important contributor to children's development and wellbeing, particularly for those children who spend large amounts of time there. OSHC is also a complementary educational setting that typically operates on school grounds. This however is again under-appreciated with OSHC often operating at arm's length rather than in concert with other school functions. It seems logical therefore, that how OSHC is seen would play an important role in whether parents choose to send a child there, particularly for priority families who may have smaller incomes. If OSHC is only seen as care for working families, then it is reasonable to assume that working families will be the dominant users as is currently the case in Australia. Something that Government should consider is how the other benefits and functions of OSHC can be communicated to families.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** *G*reater awareness needs to be created about the educational and developmental benefits of OSHC.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** Research needs to be conducted into the educational and developmental benefits of OSHC.

Not everybody sees OSHC in the same way. One group of stakeholders who are not always considered sufficiently are children themselves. Children are active citizens who likely play a role in determining whether they attend OSHC. This is particularly the case with older primary children who appear to see OSHC as a younger children's space. Research shows that children value OSHC settings that provide play and shared experiences with friends. There is an opportunity for government to work in partnership with other stakeholders to promote OSHC as a site of play and friendship, particularly for older children.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** Explore ways to promote OSHC as a site of play and friendship to children.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** Support OSHC services to improve their approaches to working with older children.

Consideration also needs to be given to how parents of children with high support needs view OSHC. Whilst higher numbers of children with high support needs attend vacation care, very few attend OSHC. One likely reason for this is that few specialist schools provide OSHC, which is significant given that parents prefer OSHC at their child's school. It also seems likely that many parents do not consider mainstream OSHC services suitably resourced and trained to care for children with high support needs. Whilst there are existing programs to support OSHC services with inclusive practice, this review questions whether those supports are adequate. Consideration therefore needs to be given to how OSHC provision can be improved for children with high support needs in a number of ways.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** Review existing inclusion supports for mainstream OSHC services to build the capacity of services to care for children with high support needs.

**RECOMMENDATION 8:** Explore possible benefits of providing transportation between specialist schools and mainstream OSHC.

**RECOMMENDATION 9:** Explore increased provision of OSHC at specialist schools.

When considering the image of OSHC, one other significant group are school principals. School principals are aware of the importance of partnerships with families and the school community. OSHC provides a conduit between families and schools and contributes significantly to children's social and emotional learning. As discussed, most OSHC services are provided on school grounds and provide for the children who attend those same schools. Despite this, as Cartmel (2007) demonstrates, principals can regard OSHC as not core business, low status and a necessary inconvenience. Underestimating OSHC in this way can have multiple impacts on the capacity of OSHC staff to deliver high quality experiences for children and families. Principals play a critical role in operational decisions relating to spaces, staffing, resources and policies necessary for OSHC provision. If school management hold a low opinion of OSHC, this is likely reflected in the quality of service offered. For this reason, consideration needs to be given to how the image of OSHC can be raised with this important group.

**RECOMMENDATION 10:** Greater awareness needs to be created about the educational and developmental benefits of OSHC with school principals and management.

**RECOMMENDATION 11:** Explore ways of supporting school principals to recognise the benefits of positive partnerships with OSHC coordinators and providers.

The qualifications of the OSHC workforce are a significant factor in the provision of high quality, equitable and inclusive environments for children. The research suggests that qualified staff are more likely to be able to demonstrate a high level of child development knowledge, high level of observation skills and to work with intentionality. The workforce is more likely to manage the demands of their role and responsibilities, particularly when working with children from priority groups.

**RECOMMENDATION 12:** Introduce the use of Professional Standards for OSHC educators.

**RECOMMENDATION 13:** Review the qualification requirements for OSHC services to ensure that the workforce has the skills and knowledge to care for children with high support needs.

OSHC has become an important context of childhood and family life for growing numbers of Australian children and their families. However, as this review has demonstrated, not all children and families access the benefits that OSHC can provide. OSHC services already play a vital role

supporting the development and wellbeing of many children. Responding to the recommendations provided in this review can further strengthen OSHC provision in New South Wales. It would contribute to an OSHC sector that is increasingly capable and professional and hopefully valued as such by more children, families, school principals and community members. Given the complex and interconnected nature of OSHC provision, addressing these recommendations will likely take slow and patient work. However, it is hoped that it will result in OSHC services that are seen as beneficial and the right of all children in the NSW community.

## POSTSCRIPT: Impact of COVID 19 Pandemic

At the time of preparing this review, Australian OSHC services were experiencing the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic. The circumstances of the pandemic had positive and negative consequences for the OSHC services. Attendance expectations and patterns changed (Baxter, 2021, which had implications for financial management and workforce. Findings from the 'Money Matters' report showed that the pandemic led to 'the loss of a significant portion of casual employees [which in turn] has had a resounding effect on the OSHC workforce (Network, 2020 p.9). The loss increases the likelihood that the OSHC sector has entered a cycle of hiring and retraining employees, while enduring a period of fluctuating and unreliable demand for bookings – which will impact the quality of care provided by services. This is of particular concern when, as this Review finds, research shows that high staff retention results in better care outcomes for children

The relevance of OSHC as an essential service with benefits beyond care was underlined.

To date there has been limited research about the short term and potential long term impact on OSHC service delivery and more importantly about the impact on the children's lives. Unpublished findings from COVID-engagement OSHC educator focus groups held by the NSW Department of Education in March 2021, indicate that many OSHC educators felt the pandemic, and the Commonwealth Government's response to it, underlined key differences between OSHC with other ECE service types. Participants in the sessions also emphasised the way in which COVID-19 enhanced more than ever the important role of clear communication between schools and OSHCs. Internationally, the Scottish peak OSHC organsiation has reported more engagement in outdoor activities; in Italy there has been a considered approach to provide holiday programs to compensate for the missed opportuntiies for social and emotional learning; and in the United States parents were reported to be concerned about the safety and the development and learning of their children (Adams, 2020). Post COVID 19 pandemic, research examining OSHC access and provision needs to take into consideration the geographical, social and economic landscape. In essence the key recommendations from this review will be even more important to ensure that OSHC services are available to children as sites of learning and development and to support families in their daily activities.

# 6. References

Adams, G & Todd, M. (2020). *Meeting the school-age child care needs of working parents facing COVID-19 distance learning.* Washington: Urban Institute.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2018). *44020DO001-201706 - Childhood Education and Care, Australia, June 2017.* Retrieved from: http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4402.0June%202017?OpenDocument

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). (2019a). What is the NQF? Retrieved from https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/about

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). (2019b). Progressing a national approach to the children's education and care workforce. Workforce report November 2019. Retrieved from https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-10/ChildrensEducationandCareNationalWorkforceStrategy_0.pdf

Australian Children's Education and Care Authority (ACECQA). (2020a). Actively working towards a qualification. Retrieved from https://www.acecqa.gov.au/qualifications/requirements/actively-working-towards-a-qualification

Australian Children's Education and Care Authority (ACECQA). (2020b). Qualifications for working in OSHC services. Retrieved from https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-01/ACECQAApprovedQualificationListOSHC.pdf

Australian Government Department of Education and Training. (2017). *2016 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census.* Canberra

Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). (2011a). *Child Care Service Handbook 2011-2012.*

Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). (2011b). *My time, our place : Framework for school age care in Australia.* Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). (2012a). *Educators My Time, Our Place. Educators' guide to the Framework for School Age Care in Australia.* Canberra: DEEWR.

Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). (2012b). *Promoting collaborative partnerships between School Age Care and Schools.* Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia

Australian Government Department of Education Skills and Employment. (2019). Child Care Provider Handbook. Retrieved from https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-provider-handbook-0

Australian Government Department of Education Skills and Employment. (2020). Inclusion Support Program. Retrieved from https://www.education.gov.au/inclusion-support-program-isp

Australian Government Productivity Commission. (2014a). *Childcare and early childhood learning: Productivity Commission draft report.* Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia

Australian Government Productivity Commission. (2014b). *Childcare and early childhood learning: Productivity Commission inquiry report.* Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia

Australian Social Inclusion Board. (2012). *Social inclusion in Australia: How Australia is faring*: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Bae, S. H. (2014) Values and Prospects of Extended Education: A Critical Review of the Third NEO ER Meeting, *International Journal for Research on Extended Education, 2*(2), 135-141.

Bae, S. H. (2018). Concepts, models, and research of extended education. *International Journal for Research on Extended Education, 6*(2), 153-164. doi:10.3224/ijree.v6i2.06

Baxter, J., & Hand, K. (2013). *Access to early childhood education in Australia*: Australian Institute of Family Studies Melbourne.

Baxter, J. (2021). *Child care in 2020: Families in Australia Survey Towards Covid Normal Report No. 3.* Australian Institute of Family Studies Melbourne.

Baxter, J., Hand, K., & Sweid, R. (2014). *Families' use of and needs for school aged care.* Paper presented at the Early Childhood Australia Conference, Melbourne.

Bell, K., & Cartmel, J. (2014). Stepping back in school age care. *Journal of Playwork Practice, 1*(2), 157-171. doi:10.1332/205316214X14111157717370

Brennan, D. (1994). *The politics of Australian child care: From philanthropy to feminism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brennan, D., & Adamson, E. (2014). *Financing the future: An equitable and sustainable approach to early childhood education and care.* Retrieved from Sydney: www.aph.gov.au

Cartmel, J. (2007). *Outside school hours care and schools.* (PhD Thesis). Queensland University of Technology, Retrieved from http://eprints.qut.edu.au/17810/ QUT ePrints database.

Cartmel, J. (2019). Space and OSHC. Brisbane: National Out of School Hours Alliance

Cartmel, J., Brannelly, K., Phillips, A., & Hurst, B. (2020). Professional standards for after school hours care in Australia. *Child and Youth Services Review*. 119. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105610

Cartmel, J., & Grieshaber, S. (2014). Communicating for quality in school age care services. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 39*(3), 23-28.

Cologon, K. (n.d.). *Inclusion in education: Towards equality for students with disability*. Children With Disability Australia.

Gifford, J. (1991). *What about us? Out of school hours care for older school-age children*. Canberra, ACT: ACT Children's Services Program Planning Committee.

Gilley, T., Tayler, C., Niklas, F., & Cloney, D. (2015). Too late and not enough for some children: Early childhood education and care (ECEC) program usage patterns in the years before school in Australia. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy, 9*(1), 9.

Gonski Institute for Education. (2020). Fair Play: A project exploring the benefits of structured and unstructured play opportunities for equity in education. Retrieved from https://www.gie.unsw.edu.au/research/fair-play-project-exploring-benefits-structured-and-unstructured-opportunities-play-rural-remote

Harms, T., Jacobs, E. V., & White, D. R. (2013). School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale, updated edition (SACERS). New York, NY: Teachers College Press

Hurst, B. (2013). *Children aged nine to twelve years in Outside School Hours Care in Australia*. (Master of Education thesis). University of Melbourne, Melbourne. Retrieved from https://minerva-access-unimelb-edu-au.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/38136 MINERVA Access database.

Hurst, B. (2015). Not always fun: Older children's play worlds in Australian Outside School Hours Care. *Journal of Playwork Practice, 2*(1), 7-22.

Hurst, B. (2017). *"Eat, play, go, repeat": Researching with older primary-age children to re-theorise School Age Care*. (Doctor of Philosophy Electronic document). University of Melbourne, Melbourne. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/11343/190706 Available from EBSCOhost cat00006a database.

Hurst, B. (2019). Play and leisure in Australian School Age Care: Reconceptualizing children's waiting as a site of play and labour. *Childhood, 26*(4), 462-475. doi:10.1177/090756821986531

Hurst, B. (2020a). After-school centres. In D. T. Cook (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of children and childhood studies* (pp. 30-32). London, New Delhi, Singapore: SAGE Publications.

Hurst, B. (2020b). Re-theorising the pre-adolescent child in School Age Care. *Global Studies of Childhood, 10*(2), 120-130.

Jinnah-Ghelani, H. & Stoneman, Z. (2009). Elements of successful inclusion for school-age children with disabilities in child care settings, Child Care in Practice, 15(3), 175-191. https://doi.org/10.1080/13575270902891024

Kane, E. (2015). *Playing practices in school-age childcare:: An action research project in Sweden and England*. (PhD). Stockholm University,

Karlsudd, P. (2012). School-age care: An ideological contradiction. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century, 48*, 45-51. Retrieved from https://ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ehh&AN=84469727&scope=site

Klerfelt, A., & Haglund, B. (2015). Walk-and-talk conversations: A way to elicit children's perspectives and prominent discourses in school-age educare. *International Journal of Research in Extended Education, 2*(2), 119-134. doi:10.3224/ijree.v2i2.19550

KU Children's Services. (2020). KU Children's Services. Retrieved from www.ku.com.au

KU NSW/ACT Inclusion Agency. (2020) Strategic Inclusion Plan (SIP) Barriers, Strategies and Actions - Fact Sheet. Retrieved from https://www.idfm.org.au/WWW_IDFM/media/Media/SIP-Barriers-Strategies-and-Actions-Fact-Sheet-(1)_1.pdf

Lester, S., & Russell, W. (2014). Children's right to play. In L. Brooker, M. Blaise, & S. Edwards (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of play and learning in early childhood* (pp. 294-305). London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Lundback, B., & Falth, L. (2019). Leisure-Time Activities Including Children with Special Needs: A Research Overview. *International Journal for Research on Extended Education, 7*(1), 20-39.

McNamara, J., & Cassells, R. (2010). Who cares for school age kids: Staffing trends in outside school hours care. Retrieved from http://www.natsem.canberra.edu.au/publications/?publication=who-cares-for-school-age-kids-staffing-trends-in-outside-school-hours-care

Milton, A C., Stewart, E., Ospina-Pinillos, L., Davenport, T., & Hickie, IB. (2021). Participatory Design of an Activities-Based Collective Mentoring Program in After-School Care Settings: Connect, Promote, and Protect Program, *JMIR Pediatrics and Parenting, 4*(2, e22822 doi: 10.2196/22822

Ministry of Education and Research Sweden. (2016). OECD Review of policies to improve the effectiveness of resource use in schools. Retrieved from www.oecd.org/education/schoolresourcesreview.htm.

Mullan, K. (2013). School's out - after-school's in: Children's after-school care arrangements and activities. In Australian Institute of Family Studies (Ed.), *Growing up in Australia: The longitudinal study of Australian children. Annual statistical report 2012*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

National Disability Insurance Agency. (2020). National Disability Insurance Scheme Operational Guidelines. Retrieved from https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/operational-guidelines

Network of Community Activities. (2000). *Out of school hours care: A case for regulation*. Retreived from www.netossh.org.au/pages/regease2.html

Network of Community Activities. (2020). *Money Matters: Viability of out of school hours care sector during the coronavirus pandemic and beyond*. Sydney: Network of Community Activities.

NSW Government (Producer). (2019). Out of School Hours Care Tenders. Industry Briefing. Retrieved from https://networkofcommunityactivities.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Final-OSHC-Tenders-Industry-Briefing-29-Nov-2019-2.pdf

Nilsson, M., Ferholt, B. and Alnervik, K. (2015). Why Swedish early learning is so much better than Australia's. Retrieved from https://theconversation.com/why-swedish-early-learning-is-so-much-better-than-australias-35033

Noah's Arc Inc (2019). Response to proposed changes to Inclusion Support Program (ISP) Guidelines, Malvern, Victoria: Noah's Arc Inc

Oliver, C., Egharevba, I., & Petrie, P. (2000). *Out-of-school lives Out-of-school services*: London: Stationery Office.

Pálsdóttir, K. (2010). After-school centres for 6-9 year olds in Reykjavic, Iceland. *Barn*(4), 9-28.

Queensland Children's Activities Network (QCAN). (2019). *Position paper for the provision of specialist OSHC services in Queensland.* Retrieved from qcan.org.au

Queensland Children's Activities Network (QCAN). (n.d.). Outside School Hours Care professional standards for educators. Ipswich, Australia: QCAN

Rioseco, P., Baxter, J., & Warren, D. (2017). Kids' care and activities before and after school. In D. Warren & Daraganova (Eds.), *Growing up in Australia – The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, annual statistical report 2017* (pp. 87-98). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS).

Scholl, K. G., Dieser, R. B., & Davison, A. (2005). Together We Play: An Ecological Approach to Inclusive Recreation. *Therapeutic Recreation Journal, 39*(4), 299-311.

Services Australia. (2020). Child Care Subsidy. Retrieved from https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/child-care-subsidy

Simoncini, K., Cartmel, J., & Young, A. (2015). Children's voices in Australian school age care: What do they think about afterschool care? *International Journal for Research on Extended Education, 3*(1), 114-131. doi:10.3224/ijree.v3i1.19584

Sims, M. (2003). SUPS workers' perspective of child care quality. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 28*(3), 25-31.

Smith, K., Tesar, M., & Myers, C. Y. (2016). Edu-capitalism and the governing of early childhood education and care in Australia, New Zealand and the United States. *Global Studies of Childhood, 6*(1), 123-135.

Toumbourou, J. W., Hall, J., Varcoe, J., & Leung, R. (2014). *Review of key risk and protective factors for child development and wellbeing (antenatal to age 25).* Australian Research Alliance for Children and Young People.

Victorian Inclusion Agency. (2021). *Impact evaluation – VIA impact on NQS outcomes.* Victorian Inclusion Agency. Preston, Australia.

United Nations. (1989). *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.* Geneva: United Nations.

United Nations. (2005). Committee on the Rights of the Child: General Comment No. 7. Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood (CRC/C/GC/7). In: United Nations Geneva.

United Nations. (2013). Committee on the Rights of the Child: General Comment No. 17. Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood (CRC/C/GC/17). In: United Nations Geneva.

Westoby, P., Cox, L., Cartmel, J., Roland, B., Treasure, L., Blane, A., & Morgan., (2021). Towards a 'third space' community practice school-aged-care: A learning community and 'the new neighburhood'. *Childhood, 28*(2), 309-324, doi:10.1177/097568221996428

Winefield, H., Piteo, A., Kettler, L., Roberts, R., Taylor, A., Tuckey, M., . . . Lamb, I. (2011). Australian parents' needs and expectations regarding out of school hours care: A pilot study. *Journal of Early Childhood Research, 9*(3), 196-206. doi:10.1177/1476718X10389142

Wong, S., Harrison, L., Whiteford, C., & Rivalland, C. (2014). Utilisation of early childhood education and care services in a nationally representative sample of Australian children: A focus on disadvantage. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 39*(2), 60-69.

# 7. Appendices

*These are resources that can support the partnership between OSHC services and schools.*

| Item No. | Item/ Subscales | Inadequate | Minimal | Good | Excellent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Indoor space | Insufficient amount of space for number of children enrolled. Space lacks adequate lighting, ventilation, temperature control, or is excessively noisy. Space in poor repair (Ex: peeling paint on walls and ceiling; rough, damaged floors). | Sufficient amount of indoor space for number of children enrolled. Adequate lighting, ventilation, temperature control, and acceptable noise level. Space in good repair (Ex: floors free of damage; walls in good condition; no peeling paint). | Ample indoor space for number of children enrolled (Ex: spacious areas allow children to move freely; space for furnishings and activities without limiting children's movement). Good ventilation, some natural lighting through windows or skylight. Space well maintained (Ex: floors cleaned, carpeting vacuumed, trash cleared). | Space is aesthetically pleasing (Ex: light, open, airy feeling). Natural light can be controlled (Ex: adjustable blinds or curtains). Ventilation can be controlled (Ex: windows open; ventilating fan used by staff). |
| 2 | Space for gross motor activities | No outdoor or indoor space specifically used for gross motor activities. Outdoor space completely lacks protection from the elements (Ex: lacks shade, windbreak, drainage). | Some space accessible outdoors or indoors for gross motor play on a daily basis. Outdoor space has some protection from the elements. | Ample space outdoors and some space indoors accessible daily (Ex: gym, yard). Outdoor space has at least one soft and one hard surface suitable for different types of play (Ex: asphalt for basketball; protective cushioning under climbing equipment). | Ample, pleasant, and varied space both outdoors and indoors available daily. Younger children have a separate space from older children. *NA permitted* Convenient access to outdoor space. |
| 9 | Access to host facilities | School-age child care program has no space dedicated to its exclusive use (Ex: program has no storage or office space, is housed in rooms used by other groups earlier or later in the day) | School-age child care program has some dedicated space. (Ex: some storage for materials). School-age program has some access to indoor play space in shared facilities when the space is not in use by the primary user (Ex: uses school cafeteria or classrooms for indoor play space; uses church Sunday school rooms on weekdays). | School-age child care has ample dedicated space for storage and administration. School-age program is the primary user of some shared play space (Ex: school-age room may be used by another group at times). Space for conferences and adult group meetings is satisfactory (Ex: dual or shared use does not make scheduling difficult; privacy is assured; adult-sized furniture is available). | School-age care program can arrange for exclusive use of a number of shared facilities on a regular basis (Ex: weekly access to school computer centre or library; access to community pool in recreation centre). School-age care program has its own classroom. Program has individual conference and adult group meeting space that is conveniently located, comfortable and separate from space used for children. |

| Item No. | Item/ Subscales | Inadequate | Minimal | Good | Excellent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 35 | Communication between program staff and children's classroom teachers | No communication between school-age child care staff and children's classroom teachers about children and/or program. | Some communication between school-age child care staff and the children's classroom teachers about practical concerns (Ex: reporting absence, exposure to contagious illness). Some communication about problems children are having in the school or after-school setting. | School-age child care staff and classroom teachers communicate monthly about academic issues (Ex: special projects, subject matter being studied, problems with homework). School-age child care staff and classroom teachers communicate monthly about children's social/ emotional issues (Ex: classroom behaviour, home situations). | School-age child care staff and classroom teachers communicate bi-weekly about general academic and social issues affecting the children. Joint planning done for individual children, as needed. |
| Inclusion Specific Elements 42 | Provisions for exceptional children | No modifications made to the physical environment, program, and/ or schedule for exceptional children. No attempt to assess child's needs or to find out about available assessments. | Minor modifications made to the physical environment, program, and/or schedule to permit child to attend (Ex: exceptional child allowed to play alone if not able to join group activities). Some attempt to find out about child's needs or to find out about available assessments. | Staff have information from available assessments or request assessment of child's needs. Staff use assessment information about needs of exceptional children and make modifications in environment, program, and schedule so that children can participate in many activities. | Consultation with professional special educators regularly available to assist in planning individual programs for exceptional children. Centre staff follow through with activities and interactions recommended by professional special educators to help children meet identified goals. |
| 43 | Individualisation | Little or no individualisation (Ex: same activities, procedures, schedule, environment, and consequences for all children). Children often fail tasks or cannot participate in ongoing activities. | Some individualisation provided (Ex: separate toileting scheduled for children needing special help). Staff make minor modifications so that children can be included in some activities. | Much individualisation provided in play activities and routines. Children participate successfully in tasks and activities that appropriately challenge their abilities. One-to-one and small-group activities provided in addition to regular program for exceptional children. | Objectives for children with special needs are incorporated into free play and planned activities. Staff use interactions with children, room arrangement, materials, and schedule to meet individual needs (Ex: raised picture labels on toy shelves for visually-impaired child; staff sign so hearing-impaired child can participate fully). Independence encouraged through environmental modifications, appropriate activities, and teaching strategies. |
| 44 | Multiple opportunities for learning and practicing skills | Staff do not provide repeated opportunities for learning and practicing skills identified as goals for the child. | Staff provide some opportunities for learning new skills. New skills usually practiced in special activities child does alone. | Repeated opportunities for learning and practicing skills. Some instances of skill practice during naturally occurring routines and events. | Frequent use of naturally occurring routines to reinforce learning objectives. Frequent use of naturally occurring events to reinforce learning objectives. |

| Item No. | Item/ Subscales | Inadequate | Minimal | Good | Excellent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 45 | Engagement | Little appropriate involvement (Ex: much time spent waiting for other children or staff; child with special needs wandering around). | Some appropriate involvement during staff-directed activities (Ex: children pay attention during small-group work). Some appropriate involvement during routines and play times. | Children are appropriately involved most of the time during staff-directed activities, routines, and play times. Staff frequently interact with children and provide attractive, developmentally appropriate materials to maintain active involvement (Ex: staff guide wandering child to attractive play area; help non-mobile child change activity when ready). | Transitions between activities, routine care, and play times are arranged so children maintain involvement (Ex: children continue to play until next activity is ready). Many alternative activities available for children to use independently or in small groups (Ex: child who loses interest in story is allowed to build with Lego). |
| 46 | Interacting with peers | No attempt made by staff to promote peer interactions. No peer interaction occurs. | Occasional efforts to promote peer interactions, mostly in special activities not related to ongoing events (Ex: asking for and passing things done in a special small group, but not during lunch). Some effort to promote peer interaction in ongoing events. | Many efforts to promote peer interactions at planned group times (Ex: child given chance to answer question at story time, to help someone else set the table). Some peer interaction encouraged during free choice activities. | Many efforts to promote peer interactions during free choice activities. Frequent efforts to include child with special needs in appropriate peer interactions throughout the day. |
| 47 | Promoting communication | Staff do not encourage children's communication (Ex: do not ask questions, ignore children's attempts to communicate). Communication to children is primarily directive. Staff do not provide communication options required by child with special needs (Ex: do not face hearing-impaired child when talking, do not provide communication board or use signing to child who is unable to speak). | Staff provide some communication opportunities during structured activities, using alternative communication options when necessary (Ex: communication board used during snack time). Staff occasionally encourage children's communication outside of structured activities. | Staff adjust speech to children's level of understanding. Communication with children includes much social conversation and information sharing. Staff ask developmentally appropriate questions and attend to children's answers. Alternative communication options used throughout the day. Staff involve other children in communication with child with special needs. | Staff frequently promote children's communication (Ex: give verbal descriptions of ongoing activities, expand on children's talk, prompt or model communication, and reinforce children's attempts to communicate). Staff use routines and activities throughout the day to reach appropriate communication goals for the children. |

# APPENDIX 2

Guided Conversation to open up dialogue between OSHC providers and School Management/ Administration. These conversations are a reflective process based on the COCR model of critical thinking (Cartmel, et al., 2015) which are intended to transform practice. This sample conversation is based on the material contained in the resource Leading Learning Circles for Educators involved in Study (Cartmel, et al., 2015).

CONVERSATION devised using - Cartmel, J., Macfarlane. K., Casley, M., and Smith. K. (2015) Leading learning circles for educators engaged in learning, Brisbane: Griffith University and Department of Education, p 25

Available for download http://www98.griffith.edu.au/dspace/bitstream/handle/10072/69381/104005_1.pdf;jsessionid=318BDF19AC25D7B81BF2CEF696BE9AA9?sequence=1

## A conversation about inclusive approaches

### Opening

Tell the participants that you are going to have a conversation about taking an inclusive practice and approaches that underpin children access to before and after school care services. The focus on children's physical, personal, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing as well as cognitive aspects of learning as it pertains to lifelong learning and the capacity and potential to become effective citizens. School age care settings are places to learn about self, others and the world – in other words learning about living and learning through living.

### Deconstruct

- Describe the situation or experience as we currently approach inclusive access for children in our school community.
- What practices, processes are being used here? What have we done here that we always do?
- What is the context – what else is happening for us, for the families, for the child, for community, for colleagues?

### Confront

- Are there ways of doing things in this situation that we should confront?
- What can we do to confront taken for granted ways of acting? Are there ways that we ask them to conform? How we conforming to others?
- What is expected by others – what is woven into this situation that is difficult to confront?

### Theorise

- What are the theories that help us here? From where can these be drawn?
- Can we draw ways of understanding from philosophy or cultural understandings?
- What are the values being exemplified here?

### Think Otherwise

- How else could we think? What has been revealed?
- What could we prioritise that we hadn't before in relation to making OSHC more accessible, more inclusive?
- Where are we now – what new insight do we have?
- What do we know now that will help us think and see differently?
- What will we do differently?

### Closing

Draw the ideas to a close and thank everyone for their participation.

# 8. Glossary

**Before and After School Care (BASC):** Care, leisure and play provided in the hours before and after school.

**Educare:** an international term used by researchers to describe forms of school age care similar to those provided in Australia and characterised by play-based approaches.

**Educator:** Person who works with children in a School Age Care service.

**Extended Education:** an international term used by researchers to embrace the range of institutional learning and care opportunities available to children and young people outside of regular school lessons.

**MTOP framework for school age care:** *My Time Our Place: Framework for School Age Care services in Australia.* Curriculum framework used to guide OSHC services.

**National Quality Framework (NQF):** Government regulatory framework that provides uniform standards for all Australian childcare services including School Age Care.

**National Quality Standard (NQS):** Minimum operating standards for all Australian childcare services including School Age Care.

**Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) or Out Of School Hours (OOSH):** Commonly used Australian terms for School Age Care.

**School Age Care (SAC):** Services that provide care, leisure and play for children aged 5 to 12 years in the hours before school, after school and during school vacations.

**Strategic Inclusion Plan (SIP):** a self-guided inclusion assessment and planning tool for services to develop, in collaboration with the Inclusion Agency (IA), which includes strategies for improving and embedding inclusive practice in line with the National Quality Standards.