



17 July 2013

Health and Community Services Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Email: hcsc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

Public Health (Exclusion of Unvaccinated Children from Child Care) Amendment Bill 2013

I am writing to make a brief submission in response to the Public Health (Exclusion of unvaccinated children from child care) Amendment Bill 2013.

The Benevolent Society is Australia's first charity, operating since 1813. We educate, support and advocate for personal and societal change, to create a fair society where everybody thrives. The Benevolent Society helps the most vulnerable people in society, and supports people from all backgrounds including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. We believe that building stronger communities will lead to a fairer Australia.

The Benevolent Society began operating in Queensland in March 2008 with the establishment of an integrated child and family centre on the North Gold Coast, funded by the Queensland Department of Education and Training (initially the Department of Communities).

Since that time we have expanded considerably and now deliver 10 services from 12 locations, with funding from the federal and Queensland governments, business, trusts, foundations and philanthropists.

We run three of the four Early Years Centres in Queensland as well as five satellite services. Early Years Centres are one-stop-shop family hubs with everything from free drop-in infant health services to playgroups. We also operate two kindergartens and one long day care centre.

The Benevolent Society supports the object of the Bill, that is 'to give a person in charge of an education and care service or child care service the option to refuse to allow children who are not fully immunised to enrol in the child care facility or to participate in particular activities or services provided by the facility'.

We also support the key features of the scheme:

- a. the person in charge of an education and care service or child care service will be required to give parents the opportunity to have the child vaccinated before the refusal can take effect, and

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- b. the changes will not be compulsory, the person in charge of an education and care service or child care service will have the option to exercise them, and
- c. the person in charge of an education and care service or child care service will not be able to refuse entry or services to a child who cannot be vaccinated for valid medical reasons, and
- d. the changes apply only to child care facilities (including pre-schools and kindergartens) and not to primary or secondary schools.

We believe immunisations are an important way of protecting children against the most serious childhood infectious diseases. The majority of parents do vaccinate their children and so will be unaffected by the proposed changes. For the small number of parents who have not vaccinated their children, for a variety of reasons, the legislation serves to reinforce the importance of vaccination and act as a prompt for parents to talk to their health care provider about immunisation.

While we believe access to early childhood education and care is important for children, as a child care provider it is important that we are able to safeguard the wellbeing of children in our care by having the option to refuse to enrol children who are not fully immunised.

I would be pleased to provide Committee members with further information if needed.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of assistance at matt.gardiner@benevolent.org.au or on 3170 4600.

Yours sincerely

Matt Gardiner
State Director QLD