



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

21 August 2009

Inadequacy of Out of School Hours Care forces women into unemployment and underemployment and threatens their financial security

WIRE - Women's Information CEO Samiro Douglas said that key findings of The Australia Institute's report 'Outcomes for Australian Women of Governmental Responses to the Global Financial Crisis' accord with what women are reporting to WIRE's Victorian telephone support and information service.

"We have noticed an increase in women contacting us who are struggling to pay for their housing and are in need of financial and material aid," said Ms Douglas.

In particular the finding that women comprise up to 80 per cent of hidden unemployment – that is, they want work but are unable to arrange for the care of family members and so are reported as not looking for work – comes as no surprise.

"Many women who call our helpline, visit our Information Centre and volunteer for us, tell us that because they are unable to access care for their dependents, they can't find work during the hours they need or are forced to put their careers on hold and accept less hours, less pay and less challenging work than they are capable of," Ms Douglas said.

"This can place considerable strain on the family's finances, especially for single mothers. The flow on effect is that more women end up with inadequate superannuation and are more likely to live in poverty in retirement," Ms Douglas said.

In particular women with school aged children report that the inadequacy of the Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) system acts as a barrier to them being able to re-enter the paid workforce even though they would like to.

"Often there are just not enough places available for all those working families who need them. And for those lucky enough to secure a place, the hours of operation, inflexibility, expense and lack of quality activities and facilities can be a real problem. Of course that fact that there are 10 weeks school holidays during the year and only 4 weeks annual leave in most workplaces is also a difficulty," Ms Douglas said.

"The whole system needs to be rethought and restructured to meet the needs of modern working families," Ms Douglas said.

WIRE, as a member of Security for Women, supports the national alliances of women's organisations calling for the Prime Minister to refer both early childhood care and OSHC to the Productivity Commission, to report on the most efficient means of financing child care so as to enhance both productivity and women's capacity for workforce attachment.

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