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Sarah pays the price

YOUNG mum Sarah Schafferius is well aware of how expensive child care can be.

And with proposed changes set to make it more costly, she believes the Government isn't doing enough to help working mothers.

The 27-year-old from Manly West, on Brisbane's bayside, is mum to David, 2, and pregnant with her second child. She works three days a week in marketing.

"If childcare costs go up then I know a lot of mums who will have to weigh up whether it's worth them carrying on at work," she said.

"Affordability is certainly a factor I considered when I looked at child care and returning to work. If anything, the Government should be doing more to help families, rather than making it harder for them."

Mrs Schafferius used to pay \$75 for David to go to an ABC childcare centre, but after the company's collapse, she found a place in family daycare - saving her \$25 a week.

"It would be a shame if I had to give up my career because of childcare costs," she said.

"If I left the workforce I would have to start all over again when my children were in school."

Hannah Davies



COSTLY CARE: Sarah Schafferius, with David, 2, is worried about rising childcare bills. Picture: Jeff Camden

PARENT TRAP

Gerard McManus
Hannah Davies

Childcare costs rise under revamp

QUEENSLAND parents could soon pay \$5000 more a year for child care, under a Federal Government plan to lift preschool education standards.

The proposed changes will be rolled out in all Australian childcare centres in a bid to tighten up the industry by improving staff-to-child ratios and qualifications.

But industry experts say the cost to parents is likely to be "substantial" and make it even harder to find childcare places.

A government report by consultants Access Economics shows how,

under one scenario, childcare costs could jump by \$125 per child per week if all changes were implemented.

Childcare Queensland president Gwynn Bridge said initial costings suggested most childcare centres in Queensland would likely have to raise annual fees by \$5000 a child.

She said changes to staff-to-child ratios would force some centres to take even fewer children.

"We are extremely concerned about this plan, as the incurring costs to families is looking to be substan-

tial," Ms Bridge said. "The repercussions for Queensland are terrible, and we are in a unique and uncomfortable position compared with other states."

"Childcare places for babies are already under high demand, and the proposed changes mean we will be able to take on even fewer."

"We are advocating on behalf of families to ensure we get the best outcome for our Queensland families, who are already doing it tough."

The plan will be implemented by

July 1 next year, following consultation with the industry, and be fully in place by January 2012.

Childcare Queensland will make submissions to the Government by August 31.

Under the planned changes, one carer would be responsible for five children aged between 2½ and 3, rather than the current eight children, and one carer would look after 11 children aged between 3 and 5, rather than the current one staff to 12 children ratio.

The current Queensland baby ratio is one to four aged up to 15 months, but this would change to one to three for up to 2 years.

Childcare workers would also be required to have one staff member with a four-year teaching qualification at a tertiary level.

Child Care National Association president Chris Buck said families had been kept in the dark about the extra costs involved.

"If perceived quality goes up, so do the costs," he said.

"The risk being run by the Government is that fewer families will be able to afford child care."

Teachers' pay bid >> P2

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Fine

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Fine

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WEATHER P611

