

## Virus crippling childcare sector with centres facing closure

Emily Toxward, Gold Coast Bulletin

THE coronavirus pandemic is crippling Gold Coast childcare providers, with dozens on the brink of closing as out-of-work parents can't afford to pay their fees so are pulling kids out.

"Childcare centres aren't going to exist and there's going to be a huge childcare crisis on the Gold Coast at the other end of this virus crisis unless there's some support for families to continue to maintain their place at the centres," Lucy Cook said.

Mrs Cook, the owner of Amaze Education, runs 11 childcare centres including three on the Gold Coast. She's calling on the Federal Government to allow providers to waive gap fees for parents.



Amaze Education owner Lucy Cook says the coronavirus pandemic is crippling childcare centres. Picture: Supplied

"Families who have lost their jobs and can no longer afford care or want to keep their kids home because they are worried are either cancelling their spots, and risking not being able to get them back, or paying full fees for a service they aren't getting," she said.

"A large percentage of our families at our Gaven centre work at Gold Coast University Hospital, and during this crazy time we're pleased to be able to provide consistency, not only for their children, but for every child in our care."

Australian Childcare Alliance head Brent Stokes estimates a reduction in attendance of between 40-60 per cent across the Gold Coast providers, with most suffering massive losses.




Australian Childcare Alliance head Brent Stoke said if childcare centres closed many wouldn't reopen and this would leave the workforce in crisis. Picture: Supplied

"If there wasn't an option for parents to put children in childcare, the government estimates they would lose 30 per cent of their health care workers, so it's crucial this industry is supported during this time," he said.

"The Government must allow providers to waive the gap fees, on average \$100-200 per week, that parents must pay and as well as continuing to fund their places with the Child Care Subsidy."

Mr Stokes said if childcare centres closed many wouldn't reopen and this would leave the workforce in crisis.



 Childcare operators on the Gold Coast are struggling.

Sparrow Early Learning has three centres across the Gold Coast, with the organisation's chief executive John Bairstow reporting a 20-30 per cent decrease in families in the past two weeks.

"If the Government allowed us to waive the gap fee, we'd be able to support our families and keep early childhood educators in jobs," he said.

Mr Cook said educators were making a lot of personal sacrifices to remain at work to ensure essential workers could do their jobs "we take our role in the fight of this terrible virus very seriously".