



PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST

THE PENANG CHILDCARE POLICY AND ACTION PLAN



MARCH 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Preamble

The Penang state government recognizes the need to protect the rights of children as embodied in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and takes cognizance of the problems face by families in caring for their children in the current socio-economic situation.

The **Penang Childcare Policy** will strive to provide universal right and access to quality, safe and affordable childcare in order to ensure the well-being of every child 12 years old and below.¹ In addition, the Policy will help uplift the economy of Penang by enabling the increase in women's participation in the workforce as well as encourage a healthy balance between work and family-life as part of the State Government's programme for holistic and sustainable social and economic development.

Objectives

The Policy is formulated to achieve the following objectives:

- Children's well-being and safety
- Women's increased participation in the workforce
- Work and family-life balance

The Penang Context

In order to meet the childcare needs of the community effectively, the Penang Childcare Policy and Action Plan takes cognizance of the relevant prevailing conditions in the state, viz.:

- Age structure of the Penang population
- Mismatch between supply and demand
- Private sector-led childcare service
- Lack of quality care and inclusive environment for children with special needs

¹ Although the legal definition of "children" according the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Malaysian Child Act 2001 applies to those aged 0-18 years, this Childcare Policy is targeted at children aged from 0-12 years because they are a more vulnerable and dependent group, and their needs more urgent. In addition, it has become increasingly difficult to access quality care for them due to problems associated with obtaining domestic help and the rising cost of childcare, especially for those under the age of four. This Policy also limits its scope to childcare, to the exclusion of educational institutions like kindergartens, because the latter present a different set of issues and are best dealt with separately.

Principal Policy Thrusts

With a view to achieving its designated objectives and taking due cognizance of the prevailing context in the state, the following have been identified as the principal thrusts of the Penang Childcare Policy:

1. Ensuring Equitable Access to Safe and Quality Childcare
2. Increasing Workplace Childcare Centres
3. Establishing Community-based Childcare Centres
4. Improving Home-based Care
5. Assisting the Private Childcare Service Sector

An institutional framework will be put in place to ensure the achievement of the policy thrusts through successful implementation of the Action Plan.

Action Plan

An action plan has been drawn up in order to achieve the policy thrusts, and thus meet the objectives of the policy. Key items under each thrust are enumerated below:

1. Ensuring Equitable Access to Safe and Quality Childcare:

A mapping of the childcare centres in the state will be conducted and incentives will be offered to encourage operators to establish childcare centres in underserved areas. It is recommended that a childcare allowance be provided to low-income families who enrol their children in registered childcare centres.

Subsidized training will be organized for childcare providers in order to upgrade quality of care. The training will incorporate modules on inclusiveness for children with special needs and protocols to ensure the safety of children. Separate teams of early childhood care and education (ECCE) professionals, professional therapists and Home Visitors will be constituted to provide support to childcare centres and home-based childcare providers.

To facilitate inclusive care for special children, awareness campaigns on the positive outcomes of inclusiveness will be held and a reward system developed for childcare centres that practise inclusiveness. Training and other support mechanisms, such as itinerant therapists, will be introduced to facilitate the effective practice of inclusiveness.

2. Increasing Workplace Childcare Centres:

Regulations and guidelines will be reviewed to facilitate the setting up of workplace childcare centres of various modalities. Sector-based roadshows will be organized to showcase existing workplace childcare centres and to encourage new champions to take up the challenge. A shared facility for the manufacturing sector will be set up in one of the industrial areas in the state as a showcase for emulation.

3. Establishing Community-based Childcare Centres:

Pilot Taskom will be established in three low-income communities as test cases of community-operated childcare centres, which will also serve as an income-generating activity for the local community. Professional support in the form of training, periodic reviews and monitoring will be provided to ensure sustainability of the community childcare centres. The provision of custom-designed childcare

centres will be included as a requirement for planning approval of low-cost housing schemes.

4. Improving Home-based Care:

Training, certification and registration will be introduced to rationalize the home-based care sector. Professional support and upgrading of skills will be provided through a team of Home Visitors who are trained in ECCE.

5. Assisting the Private Childcare Sector:

In order to improve the quality of care in private childcare centres, an improved training programme will be introduced to ensure the availability of better childcare providers to the sector. Regulations and guidelines will be harmonized to facilitate the licensing of childcare centres. In addition, implementation of the revised guidelines proposed by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government will be expedited in order to speed up licensing. An online mechanism will be introduced to further facilitate the process.