

Introduction

This study arose in the context of the *National Community Services Information Development Plan* adopted by the Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CSMAC).

Family support services are identified within the plan as one core component of the community services sector. As noted in the plan,

while a number of State, Territory and Commonwealth government departments have well developed data collections relating to [family support services within] their jurisdiction ... there has not been an attempt to develop a national data collection. This is an important priority, particularly given the interrelationship between these services and others, such as child protection and crisis accommodation and services. (*National Community Services Information Development Plan, 1999, page 20*)

In 1999, the then Standing Committee of the Community Services and Income Security Administrators (now CSMAC) granted funding to the National Community Services Information Management Group (NCSIMG) for a scoping study for family support services statistics. Community Link Australia was selected through a tender process in February 2000.

For the purposes of this study, 'community services departments' were defined as those departments or components of departments that fund or deliver community services for families and children. The various departments that contributed to the study were as follows: New South Wales Department of Community Services; the Victorian Department of Human Services; Families, Youth and Community Care Queensland; Western Australian Department of Family and Children's Services; South Australian Department of Human Services; Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services; Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Department of Education and Community Services; Territory Health Services, Northern Territory; and the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. As of March 2001, the Queensland Department is now called the Department of Families Queensland.

State, Territory and Commonwealth community services departments were invited to comment on the Scoping Study in March–April 2000. A *Resource Document* and *Feedback Sheet* were developed and distributed to departments to assist in this regard. The *Resource Document* outlined a possible framework in which the scoping of family support services could be defined, and outlined the components of the framework. Feedback was sought on both the framework and its component parts. This feedback formed the basis for the *Interim Report*. The *Interim Report* considered the suggestions put to departments; the feedback received; a discussion of the feedback; and proposals for the next phase of the study. The *Interim Report* was revised following input from the NCSIMG.

A brief paper outlining the definitional and other issues was prepared for jurisdictions prior to face-to-face visits by the consultant to each department. Departmental officers were also provided with a copy of the *Interim Report*. Face-to-face discussions were undertaken with each government community services department, and, additionally in Tasmania, with a representative from the non-government agencies, about family support services they deliver or fund. The discussions also canvassed the existing data collections which cover

family support services. At these meetings, the consultant sought to gather information and advice on the range of services provided, as well as any documentation or other supporting materials which are relevant to the identified services. A guide to the nature of the information sought was provided to each department representative prior to each meeting.

The discussions with, and information gained from, each department formed a key input to this report, and the time and effort which jurisdictions gave to the process have been greatly appreciated. A summary of each visit is attached as an Appendix. All jurisdictions have commented on the presentation of their own information to ensure accuracy and completeness.

The report describes, at a high level, the programs which each jurisdiction funds or delivers; broadly outlines the philosophies and approaches taken by each jurisdiction in relation to family support; and gives a broad description of the data collection systems in place or planned.