

Scope of family support services

How the scope was defined

The definition of family support services is the central concern of this scoping study. The *Resource Document*, described above, outlined the problems in defining family support services; it concentrated on the need to develop a clear, shared, view of what family support services are and to develop a shared phrase to describe these 'true' or 'core' family support services. Following feedback from all jurisdictions and discussions with the Steering Group, a revised definition of family support services for the purposes of this study was developed:

Services that seek to benefit families by improving their capacity to care for children and/or strengthening family relationships.

The appropriateness of this definition was confirmed during the visits to community services departments. Although there are some variations between this definition and ones which are in use by departments, there is a clear, shared view that family support services cover the key elements outlined in the definition—of improving the capacity of families to care for children, and/or to strengthen the relationships between family members. All departments recognised, and agreed with, the view that while family support is an important element of many programs, for the purposes of the study, the above definition was both workable and sufficiently contained to enable relevant services to be identified.

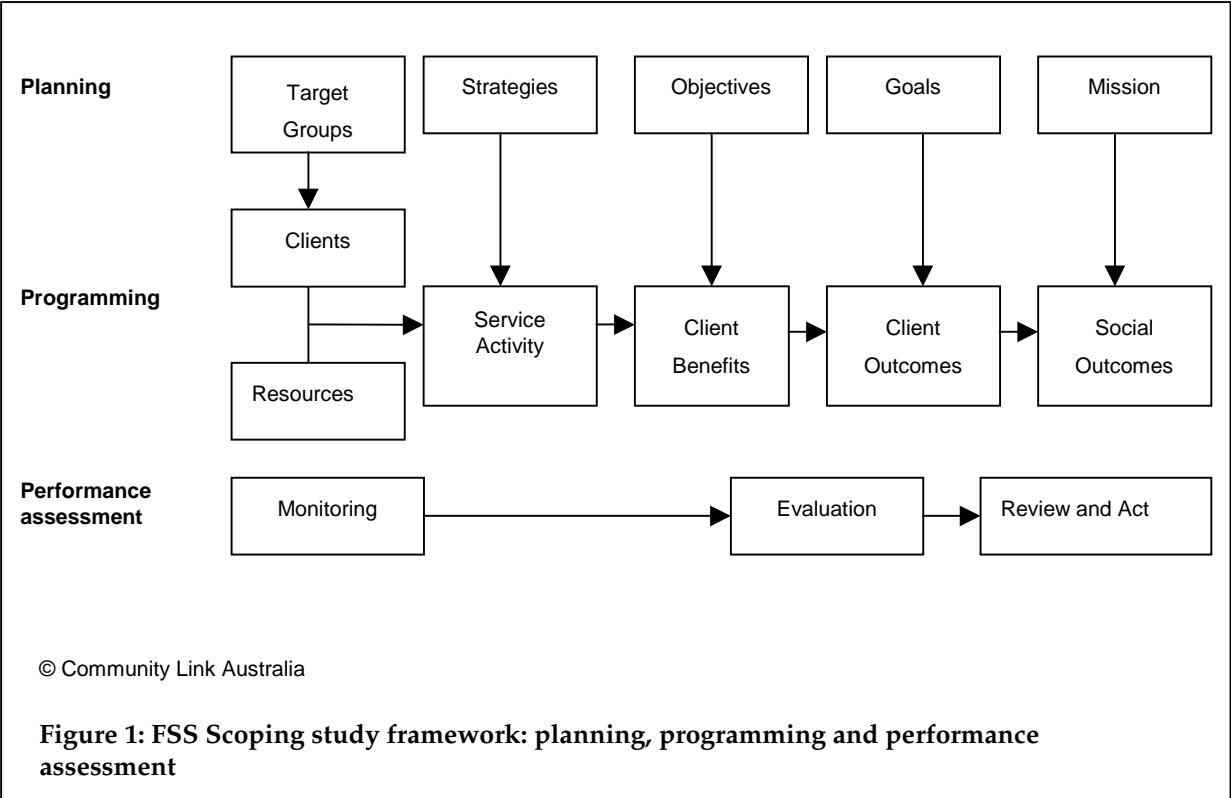
Two further scope issues were identified. These relate firstly to the funding (purchasing) or providing organisation; and secondly, to the overriding definitional qualification that services should be specifically directed to people seeking to address issues relating to caring for children or strengthening family relationships.

In relation to the purchaser/provider issue, it was agreed to limit services to those which are either delivered directly by community services departments, or which are funded by those departments—i.e. services which are purchased by those departments from non-government or local government agencies. While noting the limitations this placed on the study, it was agreed by all parties that this scope boundary was necessary to enable the study to remain manageable.

In relation to the issues which services seek to address, it was agreed that, although family support is an important element in many services provided or funded by community services departments, some limitations to coverage should apply. Services included in the scope should be available to all people in the community who wish to improve their capacity to care for their children or to strengthen their family relationship, regardless of whether other personal or family issues or needs exist, such as child abuse, child care needs, domestic violence or gambling addictions. Services which are targeted only at people with these or other specific issues are not included within the scope, notwithstanding that people accessing such services might benefit by enhanced ability to care for their children or through stronger family relationships.

This definition was produced within a broad framework developed by and copyright to Community Link, which has been used to scope both the family support services

themselves, and the types of data which may be useful within a national minimum data set. The framework is as outlined in the Figure 1.



An important element in the use of this framework is the accompanying Program Logic Statement, which seeks to ‘flesh out’ the various parts. For this study a Program Logic Statement was developed, and this has informed the list of possible data items to be included in any national reporting.

Program Logic Statement	
Name	Family Support Services
Social outcome	Families are supported and strengthened.
Client outcome	Families benefit by receiving services which improve their capacity to care for children and/or strengthen family relationships, and these benefits are sustained over time.
Intended client benefit	Families benefit by receiving services which improve their capacity to care for children and/or strengthen family relationships.
Status or participation benefit	People achieve benefits from participating in family support service activities.

(continued)

Program Logic Statement

Services	Service activities	Service types/funding programs
	Information and referral	The service activities are provided by a combination of both government and funded agencies, including local governments.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • media information campaigns on parenting or family issues • parenting or family information/resource/referral centres • parenting or family telephone information/resource/referral and/or counselling services 	Services are delivered through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specific purpose centres, including residential centres • mobile centres • centres providing a number of community services
	Education/skills development	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research, development and production of resources • family relationships education • parenting or family education and skills training • education and resource services for family support workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • community health centres • neighbourhood centres or houses • by telephone • in a family's own home • in informal settings, including camps • media campaigns • special 'weeks' on particular issues, e.g. 'Under 8's week'
	Counselling, mediation and therapy	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • family relationships counselling • parent, child and family counselling and therapy services • parent, child and family mediation services 	Government-delivered services may be specific, such as departmentally provided parent information centres or parent line services, or form part of a wider program, such as child protection programs and services undertaken by staff in local offices.
	Residential and in-home support	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • residential programs for parents and children • home visiting services • in-home support 	Funding of non-government agencies and local government is undertaken through programs specifically targeting family support services, and also through programs which cover a wider range of services, of which family support is a component.
	Advocacy	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advocacy services for parents, children and families 	Details of current funding programs of each jurisdiction are included below.
	Other family support services	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • playgroups and mobile crèches • self-help groups and networks • children's contact services 	

Program Logic Statement

Resources	<p>Financial resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• government funding from Commonwealth, State and Territory community services departments• fees income and other resources contributed by funded organisations• assets and liabilities of funded organisations <p>People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• departmental staff• service staff• volunteers• management groups <p>Infrastructure resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• physical resources – buildings, furniture, information technology systems, etc.• policy and practice resources – professional standards, practice manuals, guidelines and resources
Clients	<p>Families, regardless of income, geographic location, living arrangements and linguistic and cultural diversity. Families with children are a particular focus of the study.</p>

The ‘continuum of care’

It is not the intention in this study to provide a comprehensive assessment of service activities on the continuum of care scale, or to engage in a discussion of this model of categorising services. However, as this type of idea is widely used in jurisdictions to ‘position’ services, a brief outline is included. In the discussion that follows, this report maps the approach of services along the continuum of care for the purposes of scoping the range of current services in Australia. This is not an academic treatise of this topic. Many other projects and studies have provided a great deal more background on this than is possible in this report.

Primary or universal services are those services which are directed to the whole target population—to all families, all new mothers, all parents, etc. There is no requirement, or expectation, that the users of services have specific issues, problems or concerns which need to be addressed, although some users may. It is not necessary for these problems or issues to be present, or if present to be identified, for the person or family to use the service.

Secondary or selected (or selective) services are those services which are directed to people who do have a particular issue, problem or concern and who need assistance to help them manage or resolve this. There may be some level of risk involved if issues are not addressed. People may seek out the assistance themselves, or it may be provided by way of referral from either a primary service or a tertiary service.

Tertiary or targeted services are those services where the issue, problem or concern is one which requires intensive, and often ongoing intervention. People may seek out the assistance required, be referred by another service, or be subject to statutory intervention due to the nature of the problem and/or the level of risk to children or other family members.