

Appendix 6: Tasmania—Department of Health and Human Services

The information provided during the discussions is outlined below, under the following topic areas:

- approach to family support services
- services provided or funded
- service delivery mechanisms
- data currently being collected or planned to be collected;
- developments or initiatives which are planned in relation to family support

Approach to family support services

Approach to planning

Family support services in Tasmania are provided or funded through two main Divisions—Health Advancement and Child, Youth and Family Support.

The Health Advancement Division provides a focus in the department on the improvement of the Tasmanian community's health and wellbeing outcomes. The division provides a diverse range of services dedicated to the protection and advancement of Tasmanian's health and wellbeing through screening, prevention and promotion services, and services which contribute to harm minimisation. Family, Child and Youth Health Services within the Health Advancement Division is a key provider of support services for families.

Functions in the Child, Youth and Family Support Division are directed at improving the safety and wellbeing of children, individuals, families and communities. They comprise both preventative and statutory intervention services with a focus on support services.

The division provides services to communities, families and individuals. The primary goal of this division is to improve the capacity of families and the community to care for and meet the needs of their children and young people with reduced reliance on government assistance.

The division works closely with the broader community and non-government organisations to deliver a range of preventative and supportive services for families in need of support, families in crisis, women escaping violence and people who are homeless. An increased focus on working in partnership to support communities and peak interest groups will achieve the best possible outcomes for clients.

Families in crisis and families with children in need of care and protection are strengthened and supported to assist them in meeting their responsibilities for the safety and wellbeing of their children.

Through its Community Support Program, the division funds a range of services including family support, personal and family counselling, neighbourhood houses, back up and

occasional child care backup, financial counselling, out of home care, domestic violence services, and peak body funding. A number of non-government agencies are funded for more than one type of service under this program.

The division is currently reviewing the Family Support Services Program and the Financial and Family Support Services Program. There is a need to review the program objectives so that they are more clearly defined. Other changes, such as in child protection, have necessitated a re-evaluation of the nature of the services needed. The review is expected to set directions for the program, outline clear objectives, develop a performance framework and assist with coordination of family support services with other services currently provided by both the department and non-government agencies. The need for the program to deliver sustainable, tangible results is a major factor in the review. Other areas to be considered in the review include increasing the capacity of communities to support their families, being responsive to community needs through coordination of services, recognition of changes occurring in communities and identification of communities at risk. Outcomes need to be from the client and community perspective, and it is these outcomes which government should use to inform funding decisions.

The department has established an information management group to look at the information required to implement and monitor performance in departmental programs, including performance of funded agencies. Benchmarking, implementation of best practice, and quality issues are important considerations.

With the implementation of the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997* from 1 July 2000, family support services funded by the division will move away from the statutory end of child protection work, to focus on support for families. A partnership approach between the Child, Youth and Family Support Division, service providers and local councils will be a key focus of the implementation. The small size of many communities presents a challenge for some organisations, with many services needing to be multifaceted, and referrals needing to be better coordinated. Coordination with SAAP services in some areas was noted as being particularly problematic, with a family being the subject of multiple referrals to other agencies.

The department provides a wide range of services designed to assist families from the time of the birth of a child. In common with most other jurisdictions, early childhood intervention and preventive services are seen as key to developing family and community capacity.

From the non-government sector viewpoint, funded family support services organisations recognise the need to become more accountable for what they are achieving, and more professional in their approach to service delivery. Services are keen to embrace these changes, but will need the department to lead the change. Organisations are working with the department to develop new models of organisation to best meet the needs of the communities in which they operate. There is an expectation of increased funding as services grow and develop.

Approach to funding

The department is moving from annual funding to triennial funding to provide organisations with certainty in funding arrangements. The formal service agreement between the department and funded agencies will be extended to include the potential for performance outcomes to be identified, and service standards to be developed and implemented where they do not currently exist. To date, most funding is recurrent, and

based on historical allocations to organisations. Within the Community Support Funding Program, funding is on a contribution basis and is generally related to staffing.

Across the department as a whole, there is a need to identify communities at risk in relation to a wide range of issues, including economic and social factors, and to focus funding in these communities.

Services provided or funded

Services provided

The Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services is active in delivery of services in the family support area. The department includes health services, and consequently a wide range of maternal and child health services are 'in scope' of the Family Support Services Scoping Study.

The Health Advancement Division has a number of preventive programs, and provides parenting support to new mothers on a universal basis. These services commence with the birth of a baby, with the child having a numerical identifier which they carry with them throughout their life. All new mothers have automatic contact with a support worker. There are strong links between the maternity and prenatal services with services delivered through hospitals, child health centres, community organisations and in homes.

Hospitals are a key referral point for families, with early identification of mothers with problems, such as substance abuse and family violence. These families are referred to appropriate services.

The Health Advancement Division also operates the Parent Information Telephone Assistance Service which provides 24-hour access to information, advice and referrals. Parenting Centres provide a range of assistance and resources for families covering parenting skills and family issues. Some centres offer an outreach service of home visits to provide counselling, advice and support, telephone counselling services, and a network of volunteers providing after-hours support.

Services funded

The Department funds a range of organisations through the Community Support Program. The Family Support Services Program funding covers approximately 30 services with annual funding of \$1.7 million. Personal and Family Counselling grants cover 9 services for \$0.5 million annually.

Many of these programs are run from neighbourhood houses, which also receive neighbourhood house grants. Approximately half of all family services workers funded under the Family Support Services Program are located in neighbourhood houses.

Tasmania has a number of services which are funded by the Commonwealth under the Good Beginnings program, including a Prison Parenting Program. The Department takes an interest in these services, particularly from a coordination point of view.

Services ‘on the borderline’

There are no organisations specifically funded to provide support for families to deal with a member’s disability or addiction, or for parents with an addiction or disability to care for children. Some organisations will provide this assistance within their overall family support service.

Family support is an element of other departmental and funded services, such as support services provided by child health nurses, youth services and other health preventative services. In addition, some of the work being undertaken in the child protection area by departmental staff, particularly early intervention work, may be seen as general family support, rather than specific child protection intervention.

Neighbourhood houses provide a range of services, some of which are family support in nature. In addition, some neighbourhood houses operate a family support service funded from the Community Support Program.

Service delivery mechanisms

There are a number of regional community services covering the State, which act as a major focus for family support. Although these organisations may provide statewide services, their main focus is on their local area. The regional services are key identifiers of trends in family support and in the identification of needs. Other organisations operate independently, although coordination of services is important. Achieving the objective of ‘seamless’ service delivery for families is a key driver for the regional services.

The funded agencies provide a range of services, using a variety of strategies:

- individual and family counselling
- home visiting
- centre-based support programs and activities for families
- information and referral
- self-help groups
- advocacy
- linking family members
- support for young parents and pregnant women

In addition, peak agencies such as Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TAS COSS) and the Family Support Services Association receive funding, some of which is directed to providing support, resources and training for family support workers.

Data collection

The department does not currently collect data from funded family support or personal and family counselling services. Some non-government organisations collect data within their own organisations. Part of the Child, Youth and Family Support Division’s Review of Family Support Services will include the exploration of developing a data collection system

and identifying relevant data items and outputs which are required for managing the funding program.

The data collection will be generic, covering all services funded under the division's Community Support Program rather than specific to the Family Support Services Program.

The department is looking at options for the data collection, including 'off the shelf' products. The data warehousing model is favoured, as it will provide the greatest flexibility for providing information for operational management, program performance, and research and evaluation studies.

Funded family support services will be involved in the process of defining data items and collection methodologies. The Family Support Services Association advised that some organisations do collect data on clients and activities, including name, address, relationships, ages of children, where seen, presenting issues, referral source and the like. Other organisations do not collect any information. An issue for small services is to ensure that any data collection effort is commensurate with the size of the agency and the amount of funding it receives.

Some issues in relation to the data collection include:

- existing collections which organisations may have
- information technology infrastructure and administrative systems in place within agencies
- sensitivity of certain data items such as turnover, volunteer information
- change management, and the need for collaborative processes so that all stakeholders are involved and aware of the proposed collection

The Health Advancement Division has some data collections in place, but these are mainly related to health surveillance services. The department collects and supplies information to meet health-related data sets in the ABS and AIHW collections.

Developments and initiatives

The main developments in Tasmania relate to a number of key areas:

- the review of the Community Support Program
- the move to 3-yearly funding, incorporating service agreements
- development of performance frameworks for both department delivered and funded services
- working with the Commonwealth in relation to new initiatives under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy

In common with many community services departments, the Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services is committed to working with the non-government sector to enhance services to families. The collaborative approach to the introduction of changes in policy, program, funding and data collection is actively pursued, with shared understanding about these changes being critical to their success.