

# Appendix 8: Northern Territory— Territory Health 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

The Family and Children's Services Branch approach to family support services is that the child is the primary focus of family support work. The thrust is about services being child-centred and family-focussed. The Territory takes the view that the best way of ensuring the wellbeing of children is by supporting families in their child raising responsibilities. Thus, while adult family members may be the recipients of services, the beneficiary is the child. Family support services in the Territory are those services that seek to support, strengthen and preserve families and enable them to develop and improve their capacity to care for their children.

Due to the size of the non-government infrastructure in the Northern Territory, departmental staff have for many years been the only providers of family support in many areas. The child-centred focus of the work has followed on from child protection services, and is still a driving force in relation to family support service delivery within the Territory.

In more remote areas, the department delivers a wide range of services in addition to the 'traditional' child protection services, including relationship counselling, which is rarely undertaken by other State or Territory community services departments. Some of the more remote communities have very limited, or no, local services, and rely entirely on visits by departmental officers to provide all forms of community services. The department steps in where no other services exist *to try* to ensure that all members of the community have access to at least the basic family support services.

In this sense, there is a divergence between policy—what the department aims to provide, and the practice—what it actually provides. This situation is inevitable given the nature of the Territory, with many of the client group living in remote locations. The population has a younger age profile than in other jurisdictions and a higher proportion of Aboriginal people. Among Aboriginal people, 36% are aged less than 18 years. Of these young people, 70% live on remote Aboriginal communities and speak English as a second (or third or fourth) language.

Territory Health Services are currently undertaking a review of all funding arrangements. The department is moving towards a purchaser provider model of funding and service delivery, and it is expected that over the next 1–2 years, new service agreements will be in place for delivery of a wide range of services, including family support, but excluding statutory child protection services.

Territory Health Services are about to increase the funding of the Positive Parenting Program, to enhance the range of parenting services to Territorians. Tenders have been let to four non-government agencies to accept referrals of 'high risk' families from the child protection system.

## **Approach to funding**

As noted above, the department is moving from a historical submission-based grants model to a purchaser provider model. This will cover all Territory Health Services programs, and is expected to take approximately 2 years to bed down. A collaborative approach is being taken with the non-government sector.

Three main agencies operate in the Northern Territory—Anglicare, Centacare and Summerville. These agencies provide a wide range of services and between them have offices or outreach locations in the main towns of the Territory. Although the purchaser provider model will be used, it will not use a highly competitive contestable tendering model—the infrastructure will not support this approach. Instead, the department will concentrate on assisting smaller, local agencies to develop to a point where they can undertake projects in remote communities and towns where services do not exist.

The new service agreements will be outcome oriented, with performance measures specified. At present, these measures are still being negotiated with the sector.

## **Services provided or funded**

### **Services provided**

The Northern Territory Government is a major deliverer of family support services in the Territory. As well as providing statutory child protection and out-of-home care services, departmental officers undertake family support counselling work, and provide parenting skills to individual families and communities. Many services are provided on an outreach model, with officers visiting communities to assess needs and provide support as required. Departmental staff will address any family support needs at these communities, and will provide services where possible to meet those needs. Some departmental staff are specialists in particular areas, such as sexual abuse counselling, but in remote areas will provide relationship counselling, homemaker skills and counselling on a range of issues as needed.

### **Services funded**

The department funds 58 agencies to undertake family support work in the Territory. Recurrent funds are approximately \$3 million. The services provide a wide range of family support services, including counselling, parenting skills, homemaker services, and

information and referral. The larger services are multi-funded, with a number also providing family relationships services under the Commonwealth program.

The department is soon to expand funding of the Positive Parenting Program, which will enhance the range of services available from existing sources, with both case management and information services.

The Commonwealth's Good Beginnings program operates in Katherine, and provides home visiting services for parents in and around the town. The Territory department takes a keen interest in this program and seeks to coordinate these services with other areas of family support.

## **Services 'on the borderline'**

Family support is an element of many other departmental and funded services, such as the Living with Alcohol program, disability services and the like. As noted, many service providers are multifaceted, and will provide a range of services, which may vary according to the particular needs of the local community. Specialist workers in health, family violence, sexual assault or disability will also provide generalist family support services to individual families as necessary, particularly if no other services are available. Many workers would not identify themselves as 'family support' workers, although some of their work involves supporting families to care for children.

## **Service delivery mechanisms**

The not-for-profit community services agencies and the department provide a wide range of services, according to local needs at the time. The services provided cover a wide range of activities for individuals and families, including:

- counselling
- skills development
- home visiting
- homemaker services
- case management
- referrals
- information provision

At present, some funded agencies, including Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NT COSS), may undertake community development work, training or coordination of service delivery. The department recognises this as an area for further development, and will be moving to enhance this area of family support work. The larger agencies do undertake these activities, but are not specifically funded for this type of work. departmental officers currently provide coordination and capacity building services, especially outside the five main urban areas.

## Data collection

There is currently no data collection in place for non-government agencies, other than financial acquittal of funds. The department has a data collection system, primarily for child protection, which can be used by departmental staff for recording family support cases they undertake. Due to the focus on children, only families with a child under 18 years of age can be recorded on the system. Non-case activities, such as parenting skills, information or referral, are not recorded. Services which fall within the broader definition of family support, such as domestic violence services and problem gambling services, are not recorded, even when these are provided by departmental staff.

The system, which is the same as that used in the Australian Capital Territory for child protection work, includes basic demographic characteristics of the child and other family members, as well as information on activities undertaken, and some outcome information.

There is a new Territory-wide system in development to monitor funded agencies' budgets, income and expenditure and contract arrangements. This system will be implemented in 2001.

Plans exist to gather information from funded agencies, but the main areas of effort to date has been focussed on getting consistency with the child protection reporting requirements, and on development of new service agreements. Regular data collection on clients, activities and outcomes will be considered as part of the new service agreements with funded agencies.

The process will involve discussion of data collection issues with service providers, including what data they currently collect, how it is collected and the impact of any new collections on the agency.

## Developments and initiatives

A major development in the area of family support is the 5-year Action Plan for Family and Children's Services. This plan is currently with the minister. Details will be released following formal ministerial approval. In brief, this plan will look to focus departmental services on the tertiary end of the continuum of care, with child protection the main focus. This would include a case management role where appropriate. Other services, including family support, are targeted to be undertaken by non-government agencies, with programs such as out-of-home care, counselling, home visiting and parenting skills being undertaken by locally based agencies. The department will provide capacity building resources and skills to enable agencies to develop and grow to undertake new services and to enhance existing service delivery mechanisms.

The other major development is the move to a purchaser provider funding model for non-government agencies. This will bring with it new accountability measures, an outcome focus and performance measurement. Included is likely to be a data collection mechanism to enable agencies to report on clients, activities, outcomes and performance.

The department is also looking at establishing a universal Parentline-type service to provide telephone counselling, support and information and referral services to parents. Due to the infrastructure costs in establishment of such a service, an option being considered is to contract this activity from another State which has an existing service.