

Family support services in Australia 2000

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**A project sponsored by the
Community Services Ministers'
Advisory Council (CSMAC)**

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
Canberra

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Preface

The Scoping study of Family Support Services Project was commissioned by the National Community Services Information Management Group (NSCIMG) and funded by the Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CSMAC) and the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). A Steering Group chaired by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) was responsible for overseeing the project on behalf of the NCSIMG. The project was conducted by Barbara Wilkins and David James of Community Link Australia, who were responsible for writing this report.

This report of the project contains a description of the family support services funded and/or delivered by each jurisdiction, outlines the various philosophies and approaches to family support and gives a broad description of the current and/or planned data collections. The report thus provides very useful information about an important area of community services and will be of particular interest to those seeking information in the areas of early intervention and crisis prevention services.

National Community Services Information Management Group
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Acknowledgments

This project has been a rewarding and challenging one. Community Link would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance provided during the course of the study by State, Territory and Commonwealth representatives of community services departments. Many thanks for your time and efforts.

Thanks are also extended to the Steering Group overseeing the study, for their advice and feedback. Special thanks go to the Chair, Helen Moyle, for her assistance, encouragement and patience.

Any opinions expressed are those of Community Link, and any errors of fact are the sole responsibility of the authors. Comments and corrections on this report are actively sought.

David James and Barbara Wilkins
Community Link Australia

Executive summary

The aim of the Family Support Services Scoping study was to assess the scope of 'family support services' funded by State, Territory and Commonwealth community service departments and to provide an overview of the current data collection efforts in relation to these services. The 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 and an area in which further data development was required. Community Link Australia was contracted to undertake this study and worked to a Steering Group chaired by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

'Community services departments' were defined as those departments or components of departments that fund or deliver community services for children and families. 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 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.

An agreed definition of 'family support services' was developed for the purposes of this study:

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

This 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. It is one step in a long and ongoing process to provide meaningful, useful and beneficial information about an important area of community services.

The complexity of services and service activities was evident in defining 'in scope' family support services for this study. Family support services provided in Australia cover a wide range of service delivery types, ranging from large-scale media campaigns for the general public, to volunteer help for families in their own homes. The major categories of family support services identified were:

- information and referral
- education/skills development
- counselling, mediation or therapy
- residential and in-home support
- advocacy
- other family support services

More detail about the service activities in each of these categories is provided in the report.

Many similarities in approach to family support services were noted, with a number of issues being evident in most jurisdictions.

- Family support services are becoming more publicly visible and politically (and financially) recognised. Child protection and family violence services are still extremely important, and receive considerable funding from government, but are now increasingly complemented by services which build on the strengths which exist in families, rather than focussing on the dysfunctional aspects of family life.
- Building and strengthening the capacity of families and communities to manage their own needs is critical in developing strong, responsible families and communities.
- Local perspectives are becoming more important, with generic, whole of jurisdiction service delivery models being complemented by innovative, locally designed and delivered services to meet the needs of the families and communities for whom the services are provided.
- Integration or ‘seamlessness’ of service delivery is a key aim, with jurisdictions actively involved in fostering partnerships between the varied departments, local government and non-government agencies and in assisting with coordination of services and sharing of resources.
- Professionalism in providing family support services is increasing, with resourcing, training and support for both professional staff and volunteers receiving greater attention and funding.
- Clients are seen in the context of their family, and the family in the context of their community. Strengthening families and communities is a prime driver for many of the services.
- Early childhood services are crucial—support for families with children in the youngest age groups is essential if stronger, self-reliant families and communities are to thrive. Early support and intervention are clearly seen as highly effective in preventing or reducing the level of more intrusive interventions at later stages.
- Services are designed to meet the specific needs of the people they are seeking to assist—whether these are recent migrants, families with young children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, or isolated families.
- Understanding and measuring outcomes are essential factors in delivering effective services, with a sustained move towards identifying outcomes for individuals, families and communities. Knowing and understanding ‘what works’ is a major issue for all jurisdictions.
- Clearer objectives in funding services in the local government and non-government sector are evident—funding arrangements are formalised, and specify the outcome and performance measures expected.
- Commitment to good, consistent information about services being delivered is evident, with enhancements to existing data collections or plans for new data collections on the agenda for many jurisdictions.

Data collections relating to family support services are in place, at least in part, in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and the Commonwealth in relation to services provided or funded. Plans exist to commence collections in other jurisdictions, and to extend or review existing collections in most States, Territories and the Commonwealth. Data systems vary from detailed unit record collections

about activities, to 6-monthly aggregates of information on key outputs and performance measures. Many activity collections are supplemented by consumer feedback or client satisfaction surveys. Longitudinal studies are becoming more common with several under way or planned. Information collected in the various systems is not identical, but there are several core pieces of information collected, such as client numbers, instances of service, hours of effort and the like.

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.

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.

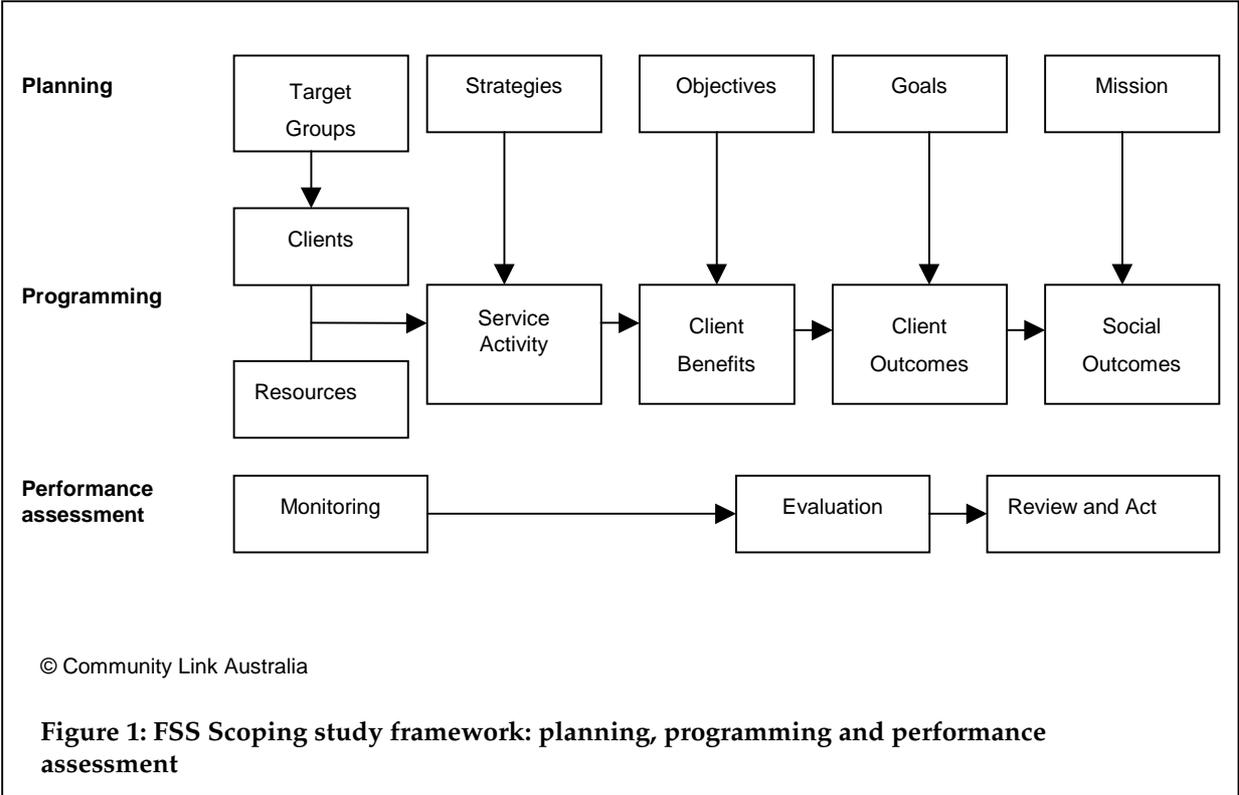
Two further scope issues were identified. These relate firstly to the funding (purchasing) or providing organisation; and secondly, to the overriding definitional qualification that services should be specifically directed to people seeking to address issues relating to caring for children or strengthening 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	Families, regardless of income, geographic location, living arrangements and linguistic and cultural diversity. Families with children are a particular focus of the study.

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.

Approach to family support services

Planning

The focus on family support services has sharpened in recent years, with most jurisdictions reviewing programs and, in some cases, substantially increasing funding available for services which support and strengthen families.

A number of key issues are apparent in the approach of family support services in most, if not all, jurisdictions. Many family initiatives—the Commonwealth’s ‘Stronger Families and Communities Strategy’, New South Wales’ “Families First Strategy”, the Australian Capital Territory’s ‘Family Support Plan’, Victoria’s ‘Strengthening Families’, South Australia’s ‘Together with Families for Children’, the Northern Territory’s ‘Action Plan for Families and Children’, Queensland’s ‘Putting Families First’, Western Australia’s Outcome Based Management strategy, and Tasmania’s reform process—all include the same basic approaches as outlined below.

The main issues identified in the approach to the provision and funding of family support services across jurisdictions are:

- Family support services are becoming more publicly visible and politically (and financially) recognised. Concentration on child protection, family violence or other ‘hard core problems’ of family life is changing. These issues are still extremely important, and receive considerable funding by government, but are now increasingly complemented by services which build on the strengths which exist in families, rather than focussing on the dysfunctional aspects of family life.
- Building and strengthening the capacity of families and communities to manage their own needs is critical in developing strong, responsible families and communities. Sometimes referred to as developing ‘social capital’, this focus is about equipping families and communities with the information, skills and resources to meet their current and emerging needs.
- Local perspectives are becoming more important, with generic, whole of jurisdiction service delivery models being complemented by innovative, locally designed and delivered services to meet the needs of the families and communities for whom the services are provided.
- Integration or ‘seamlessness’ of service delivery is a key aim, with jurisdictions actively involved in fostering partnerships between the varied departments, local government and non-government agencies and in assisting with coordination of services and sharing of resources.
- Professionalism in providing family support services is increasing, with resourcing, training and support for both professional staff and volunteers receiving greater attention and funding.
- Clients are seen in the context of their family, and the family in the context of their community. Strengthening families and communities, rather than a sole focus on the

needs of an individual, is a prime driver for many of the services, even if these services only directly engage with an individual client.

- Early childhood services are crucial—support for families with children in the youngest age groups is essential if stronger, self-reliant families and communities are to thrive. Early support and intervention are clearly seen as highly effective in preventing or reducing the level of more intrusive interventions at later stages.
- Services are designed to meet the specific needs of the people they are seeking to assist whether these are recent migrants, families with young children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, or isolated families. Services are respectful of clients, and seek to involve people in the decisions about their own lives. Building on strengths, rather than focusing on weaknesses, is the direction for most services.
- Understanding and measuring outcomes are essential factors in delivering effective services, with a sustained move towards identifying outcomes for individuals, families and communities. Knowing and understanding ‘what works’ is a major issue for all jurisdictions.
- Clearer objectives in funding services in the local government and non-government sector are evident, with historical, recurrent submission-based funding giving way to open tendering for services. Funding arrangements may include formal Service Agreements or contracts, which specify the outcome and performance measures expected. Services are funded to meet key program outcomes or goals.
- Commitment to good, consistent information about services being delivered is evident, with enhancements to existing data collections or plans for new data collections on the agenda for many jurisdictions. Using the information gained from data collections contributes to a knowledge base for service providers to tap into for planning, developing, implementing and evaluating services and for providing accountability to government and the Australian community.

The main divergence from this approach occurs in the Northern Territory, where the focus is strongly on the child, with other benefits obtained by other family members seen as a bonus, rather than a particular outcome of the service.

Funding

As noted above, funding of services now reflects a purchaser/provider model, or is moving towards that model. Historical, submission-based funding is being phased out, with reviews of traditional funding programs and models having been completed or under way in community services departments.

Most departments are now identifying a small number of key outcome or output areas, into which both departmental and funded service provision are grouped. Funded agencies are encouraged to position their services within these outcome or output groups, and to ensure that services are working towards the achievement of the goals specified. Performance measures, output targets and other measures of accountability are becoming routine within service agreements or contracts. Funding is increasingly on a triennial basis, providing security of funding to agencies. Work or service plans are often used to assist agencies and departments to set expectations for service delivery, and to measure workloads, outputs and outcomes.

New monies are generally subject to tender, with coordination, co-location or networking with existing services being an important determinant of allocations. Capacity building in communities which have few services is also important in ensuring that funds are directed to the communities which most need them. Accountability and transparency in funding decisions are a fundamental part of funding programs for all departments.

Family support services in Australia

These approaches to the provision of family support help shape the current and planned family support services which are within the scope of this study. The high-level description of services provided or funded by community services departments describes:

- 'in scope' services which are common to all jurisdictions
- 'in scope' services which are (apparently) unique to a particular jurisdiction or jurisdictions
- 'in scope' services which are planned or which are in the process of being established
- primarily where each 'in scope' service activity sits on the 'continuum of care' scale, noting that these may contain services operating at more than one point of this scale
- services which are 'on the borderline' in that they contain strong elements of family support, but may also have a specific issue focus

In outlining the services provided, the scope boundary relating to definition of 'community services departments' should be kept in mind. This is critical to any assessment of the services available to Australian families. Because of the diverse nature of the community services portfolios in each jurisdiction, some services are included as 'family support services' in some jurisdictions, but not in others. This situation can be illustrated in the area of initial support services for new mothers. These services exist in many jurisdictions but, because they are often delivered through maternal and child health workers, they are included in this scoping study where community services and health are in the same department, but are not included for those jurisdictions where health is in a separate department.

The services described below are either provided directly by community services departments, or by agencies funded under specific programs. A summary of the funding programs as at June 2000 is shown below.

Jurisdiction	Funding Programs
New South Wales	Community Services Grants Program Families First
Victoria	Victorian Parenting Services Family Support Program Strengthening Families
Queensland	Child Protection and Family Support Community Support Services Child Care
Western Australia	Family Support and Neighbourhood Houses Home Visiting Services Parenting Services
South Australia	Family and Community Development
Tasmania	Community Services Program
Australian Capital Territory	Children's Services Program Family, Individual and Community Support Program
Northern Territory	Family and Children's Services
Commonwealth	Family Relationships Services Program Former Department of Health and Family Services funded agencies services Stronger Families and Communities

It is important to note that not all services funded under these programs provide 'in scope' family support services. Often, a single funding program may cover a wide range of services, including domestic violence, emergency relief, child abuse prevention and the like. Family support services can usually be isolated to a certain degree, but there is considerable overlap in the services provided. Certain pragmatic funding decisions and historical anomalies may also impact on services funded under particular programs.

In addition, other government departments provide a wide range of family support services. These are not considered in this report. Examples include the parenting education programs run by Queensland Health, and the counselling programs which are operated in rural areas by primary industry departments or their equivalent. Education departments in the States and Territories also run programs which could be within the definition of family support services, and these programs are also not examined in this phase.

'In scope' family support services

As outlined in the Program Logic Statement on pages 4–6, for this report family support services are grouped into six categories: information and referral; education/skills development; counselling, mediation and therapy; residential and in-home support; advocacy; and 'other'.

Information and referral

Media information campaigns—parenting

Most of the jurisdictions visited undertake a range of media campaigns designed to raise awareness of particular issues and to provide information about services and resources available to the public and to professional staff. These campaigns may be associated with particular budget initiatives, such as the Commonwealth's Strengthening Families and Communities Strategy which involved wide dissemination of kits containing information on the strategy, as well as information sessions.

Media campaigns are conducted regularly by States and Territories, and tend to focus on parenting—often with an emphasis on tips for good parenting. Promotion of parenting information and resources forms an important part of such campaigns. The program of campaigns may be a regular one, such as is the case in Western Australia, which conducts regular corporate communications activities, or campaigns which are linked to particular initiatives, such as the launch of parenting resources.

Media campaigns are universal in nature, and work at the primary, preventive end of the continuum of care.

Media information campaigns—'Weeks' and 'Days'

Several topic-specific 'weeks' are celebrated throughout the year. While most are State-specific, others are national. Some topics of focus are clearly out of scope for this study—such as Domestic Violence Prevention Week, Child Protection Week, etc. Others have strong claims to be considered within the scope, such as weeks focussing on particular age groups, such as 'Under 8's week' which, in addition to activities for children, involves information for parents as well. These 'weeks' seek to bring important issues relating to families to public attention, and provide information, resources and activities for parents and children.

Similarly, international 'days' are often used by jurisdictions to focus attention on family issues. An example in recent years was the launch of the departmental web site, including new parenting guides, in Queensland on International Families Day, followed by a family 'picnic in the park', partly sponsored by the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care Queensland.

'Weeks' and 'Days' are universal in nature, and work at the primary, preventive end of the continuum of care.

Commonwealth Communication Strategy

The Communication Strategy under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy will, amongst other initiatives, promote and reinforce the significance of good parenting and strong family relationships to children, communities and Australia's future. A range of media will be used to promote the strategies, with \$8 million committed over 4 years.

Departments are increasingly using the Internet as a medium for dissemination of information to the public, with web sites often containing information about departmental family support initiatives, and online access to information about services and resources available.

Parenting centres

Several jurisdictions have parenting centres. These centres may be central, statewide services or regional or local centres, or a combination of both. Some may be provided from mobile resource libraries or similar.

Parenting centres provide a venue or service for parents to access resources, and to find information about parenting topics of relevance to their circumstances. Parenting centres may also provide some 'on the spot' advice or counselling to parents, and will provide referrals to appropriate services.

Parenting centres also operate, or are planned, in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania. In the Australian Capital Territory, this service is provided by the Regional Community Services. Many of the resources have been shared in some sense across the States, and initiatives in one State may have been adapted on occasions by others to meet local needs and conditions.

Parenting centres are generally developed, staffed and operated by departmental officers. In Victoria, some regional parenting centres are funded by the department and operated by the non-government agency. These are the Parent Link services.

Family centres

These centres are similar to parenting centres, but are not limited to parenting issues. Examples include the family centres to be funded under the New South Wales Families First strategy. These are 'one stop shops' for families and provide information and a focal point for other family support services. They will negotiate with service providers to conduct parenting information or other sessions, such as parent skills workshops, networking or other identified service needs. A similar centre, with a broader range of services, has been planned in Queensland.

Parent Lines (or Family Lines)

These are generally 24-hour telephone services which offer information, advice, referrals and brief counselling and support to parents and families. In most cases they are departmentally managed and operated, although the Queensland service is provided by a non-government agency. Staff may come from a variety of backgrounds, including health, education, child protection or other community services.

These services have a universal focus, and are widely used by parents from all backgrounds, and with children of all ages.

Parent Line services may produce their own resources, or use those of the parenting centres. Parenting SA provides an example of integration of the development and production of resource materials, and the delivery of the telephone service. This service is highly regarded throughout the community.

The only jurisdiction without a specific Parent Line service is the Northern Territory, which is considering either establishing one, or partnering with another State to provide services.

Information and referral activities generally fall within the primary or universal category along the continuum of care.

Education/skills development

Research, development and production of resources and education programs

An important facet of the work of parenting or family centres, and of individual departments, is the development of resources, particularly in relation to parenting.

Centres in most State and Territory jurisdictions, including centres such as Parenting SA, the Victorian Parenting Centre, and the Queensland Positive Parenting Coordination Section, all produce comprehensive parenting guides. These may be in the form of 'tip sheets' such as in South Australia, magazines such as in New South Wales and Western Australia or age-specific booklets such as in Queensland. Many of the resources are also available on departmental web sites.

Statewide parenting or family centres also take a lead role in development of parenting education. For example, the Victorian Parenting Centre is a statewide service established in 1997. It is engaged in research and evaluation of parenting education strategies and resource materials, and produces a range of multimedia culturally sensitive resource materials and proactive strategies relating to parenting and family development for providers of local multidisciplinary family services and for families. It delivers training to parenting professionals, provides statewide coordination of parenting skills development services and supports, develops and promotes empirically validated models of parenting education. It has a best practice focus, and ensures that professionals working with children and families have access to high quality resources and training in the delivery of parenting education.

Parenting centres in most jurisdictions use the 'Positive Parenting Program' developed by the University of Queensland in the education and skills building courses they conduct. The Northern Territory, which does not have a parenting centre, is soon to fund a non-government agency to deliver this program for families in the Territory.

Under the Commonwealth's planned Stronger Families Fund, a national clearing house will be established for local communities to access information and research on successful projects.

Family relationships education

Family relationships education is largely provided by the Commonwealth, under the Family Relationships Services Program. The program is a universal, preventive service which aims to provide skills to enable people to develop stable and positive relationships. Courses are directed at people throughout the relationship cycle, from pre-marriage, during marriage, when re-partnering, divorcing, parenting—from birth of children to adolescents, children moving from home (empty nest)—and retirement. Course materials may be set or negotiated with participants, to address particular issues.

Some other jurisdictions fund organisations which provide relationships education as part of an overall parenting or family education program. However, the majority of services providing specific relationships education are funded by the Commonwealth. Specialist services are directed to Indigenous communities, men, and young women.

In addition, relationships education will be provided in new and responsive ways through the Early Intervention, Parenting and Family Relationship Support agenda of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy.

Parenting education

Most jurisdictions provide or fund organisations which provide parenting and/or family skills education programs for parents. Some of these are provided through parenting centres, as noted above. These services may be delivered as group programs, or as individualised programs for families. Some services focus on particular parenting issues, while others may focus on particular parenting circumstances, such as sole parenting or fatherhood. Services are designed to provide participants with practical skills, resources and support to assist them to more effectively fulfil their role as parents or family members.

Skills development programs are generally formalised, and will often run for several sessions.

Examples of these programs include the Commonwealth's Family Relationships Skills Training program, which provides structured group and individual skills training for families, with specialist services directed to Indigenous families and to men; the parenting courses conducted by the Western Australian Parenting Help Centre, the Victorian Parenting Centre, and in most jurisdictions by either parenting or family centres or non-government agencies or both.

Services are generally universal, but may also be directed to selected groups of people. As with other universal services, participants may have particular issues or concerns, or simply be seeking to enhance their existing skills and to develop their ideas on parenting or family issues.

New services in this area will be provided under the Commonwealth's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, with the Early Intervention, Parenting and Family Relationship Support initiative earmarking funds for education programs.

Education and resource services for family support workers

These services are focussed not on the clients of family support services, but on the workers who undertake the direct service planning and delivery. In some jurisdictions, such as the Australian Capital Territory, these services may be funded specifically in the area of family support. In other jurisdictions, these activities may form part of a larger community services worker strategy, and be provided through peak organisations, such as the Councils of Social Services, Family Support (Services) Associations, and also by volunteer centres and other networks.

Another important means of providing support, resources and supervision for workers are the programs which are provided for volunteers, including volunteers who undertake home visiting. An example of this type of service is the Family Support Workers service type within the New South Wales Families First Strategy, where qualified family support workers are responsible for recruiting, training and supervising home volunteers. They match volunteers to families needing home visits, and develop other ways to support families, including development of parenting groups.

Although these types of services are not client focussed, they play an important part in delivering services to strengthen and support families in their parenting and relationship roles.

The Commonwealth will provide funds under the Early Intervention, Parenting and Family Relationship Support initiative of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy to

develop and provide training resources for legal, medical and other professionals to help them identify, assist and refer individuals and families to needed support.

Education—ACT ‘unique’ services

A unique feature of the Australian Capital Territory is the community services department’s link with the school system. Education services and community services are in the same department, and close links have been developed by organisations funded under the Family, Individual and Community Support Program and local schools. The approach taken centres around looking at the student’s issues in the context of their family—the student is not seen as the sole client of the service being offered. Examples of these programs include the Woden School SASH (Schools Agencies Student Home) Program, which was developed to strengthen the links between the school, students and their families and the service providers involved with students at the school. Similarly, the Tuggeranong SupportLink community referral system, which allows teachers and school counsellors to refer people for assistance to a central information and referral coordination centre, has delivered anger management sessions in high schools in the local area as part of normal coursework.

- Services in other States and Territories may also provide similar programs within schools. Other education departments will also undertake (or fund) programs of this nature for students and their families. However, within the scope boundary of the study—services funded or provided by community services departments—the direct connection with schools programs as an integral part of family support services is not replicated in other jurisdictions.
- Education services and skills training may be at any point on the continuum of care, from the primary or universal end for broadly based parenting programs, through to the tertiary end, with intensive family skills work for individual families.

Counselling, mediation and therapy

Services falling into this category are generally selective or secondary services, in that they are directed to individuals or families who have particular issues, concerns or problems relating to their ability to care for their children, or their management of family relationships. All jurisdictions provide or fund services within this category. Services are usually centre-based, but may also be provided via telephone or during visits to the family’s home. A counselling service may often be the first point of referral from information and referral services. The nature of the counselling, mediation or therapy may vary widely, from ‘one-off’ telephone counselling sessions to ongoing, intensive counselling and therapy. Mediation services may be very intensive, with ongoing involvement of the separating parents of children or of young people and their parents or carers.

States and Territories fund counselling services under their general family support or similar programs. In the Northern Territory, departmental officers, particularly those providing services outside the main towns, provide counselling in relation to parenting issues and marriage guidance. In Tasmania, South Australia, Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales and Western Australia, counselling services are part of many funded agencies’ services, and relate to both individuals and family groups.

The approach taken to counselling is illustrated in the Victorian family counselling program. This program is run by professional staff who offer structured guidance and support to

individual family members or groups of families. Family counsellors encourage and support families with difficulties such as partner relationships and parent-child relationships. Some family counselling agencies offer in-home support in addition to centre-based or telephone counselling. Some agencies will provide services to any person or family referred to them, while others are more targeted, particularly in relation to families with child protection concerns. Similar approaches are taken by services in other States and Territories.

The Commonwealth funds family relationships counselling services, family mediation services, and adolescent mediation and family therapy services. Specialist services are provided for men and young women. Most services are centre-based, and aim to assist couples to develop conflict resolution and negotiation skills to enable them to manage and resolve relationship issues.

Mediation services seek to assist parents to resolve issues during separation and divorce, including parenting responsibilities. Adolescent mediation programs assist participants to resolve conflict between the young people and their parents or carers. Therapy services work with the young person and their family to strengthen family relationships, in order to keep the young person in touch with their family.

These Adolescent Mediation and Family Therapy services have a focus on preventing youth homelessness, and hence could be considered to be 'issue-based' and thus out of scope. However, departmental staff considered these services to be primarily related to strengthening family relationships, and thus, on balance, they have been included as 'in scope' for this study.

Residential and in-home support

In all jurisdictions, there are family support services which are provided in residential settings—sometimes specialist residential facilities, but most commonly in the family's own home.

Professional home visiting

Several State and Territories provide initial home visiting services as part of a universal child health and support program. In many States and Territories, these initial visits are by a child health nurse, operating from community health centres, hospitals or maternal and child health centres. Where health services are part of the community services department, these visits may be considered to be in scope for this study. Where responsibility for health is with another department, they will be excluded due to the scope boundary of this study.

These visits, which initially were primarily related to child health surveillance, are increasingly becoming more broadly based, with the aim of providing all new mothers with an initial visit by a professional worker to identify any problems or concerns which may exist in relation to the parents' ability to care for the child. The extent to which this shift has taken place varies.

In some States, an initial visit may be by a specialist Family Support Worker, such as is the case under the New South Wales Families First program. For families with specific needs, or where there is risk of harm to children, ongoing home visiting and casework may be undertaken, with weekly or fortnightly visits from appropriate professional staff. The aim of these services is to strengthen the family's capacity to care for their children. Modelling of positive parenting strategies by the in-home worker is a key service strategy. These families

may also access other services such as counselling services, parent education groups and the like, in addition to home visits.

In Western Australia, a new program of universal visiting of new mothers will be run as a joint initiative with the health department.

Volunteer home visiting

- Volunteers also provide in-home support. Generally, an agency is funded to recruit, train, supervise and match volunteers with families needing extra support. The in-home support programs focus on providing practical 'hands on' help and advice to families, often in their own homes. Volunteers provide friendship, and contacts with other families in the local community and assist with day to day tasks such as child minding, cooking and household cleaning. Part of the role of the volunteer is also to model positive parenting behaviour. Workers also assist families in learning about and accessing relevant community services. The program, in common with family counselling, is broadly targeted to families with support needs.
- In States and Territories, in-home visiting is part of larger funding programs. The Commonwealth's 'Good Beginnings' program, which has been implemented in a number of areas around the country, is an example of a specific program in its own right.

Good Beginnings is a family-centred program based on volunteer home visiting of families with new babies. Four pilot sites were established in 1997, with each project managed by a professional who is responsible for recruitment, screening and training of 'community parents'. These parents are matched with families who have been referred by local services or who have asked for home visiting. The program is voluntary, and is designed to provide practical assistance to families with babies and young children, particularly those who do not have other support systems.

The program is managed by Good Beginnings Australia Ltd, and includes on its Board of Directors representatives of NAPCAN and the Lions Club of Sydney who have been key players in the establishment of the program.

The program was developed by researching, developing and testing a number of family centred programs and initiatives. The project aims to develop strong family and community links necessary to strengthen families and neighbourhoods. This has been achieved partly by consultation with families in their home or local neighbourhood, identifying needs and building on existing strengths.

- In addition to family-focussed activities, the program is engaged in providing training and support for volunteer and professional staff; development of best practice guidelines; community information packages; and sharing of resources with local health, welfare and community agencies.
- Volunteer home visiting programs are placed primarily at the preventative end of the continuum of care. Formal training for workers has been developed in several States and Territories. In Victoria, a Certificate in Family Support Work is offered to provide a professional training opportunity in this field.

Residential programs

A number of jurisdictions provide residential services for families experiencing particular difficulties which cannot be adequately addressed by home visiting alone.

In Western Australia, for example, there is a centre providing intensive residential support for new mothers. The department and funded agencies also run programs at family camps venues, where families participate in a range of activities designed to enhance parenting skills and family relationships.

Early parenting centres are located in three areas of Victoria, and cover the State. These centres are primarily for mothers with new babies or children aged up to 3 years. Referrals are primarily from Maternal and Child Health nurses. The centres provide residential services up to 5 days, day stays, and some outreach services. In-home support is also provided.

Services may be on any point of the continuum of care, from the universal home visits from child health or family support workers, to the tertiary end for the intensive residential services.

Advocacy services

Family support services funded by various jurisdictions will advocate on behalf of clients as required. These advocacy activities are generally incorporated with other forms of family support. Some agencies are, however, funded specifically to provide individual advocacy services for people. These services, which may be run from neighbourhood centres or private houses or other community service venues, will assist individuals and families to access particular entitlements, such as government pensions or benefits, or will negotiate on behalf of the person with service providers.

Advocacy services are generally regarded as secondary services on the continuum of care.

Other family support services

Playgroups

Most jurisdictions fund agencies to provide playgroup services. These may be run by a coordinator, who will assist parents to provide playgroup activities for children and who will provide a non-threatening or non-stigmatising means of positive parenting behaviour modelling, as well as networking and referral for parents.

Playgroups and related activities may be provided in parents' homes, at community venues or in informal settings. A mobile crèche service operates in a number of States, including South Australia, and playgroups are run in caravan parks in Queensland.

Funding for additional playgroup services will be provided under the Commonwealth's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy.

Self-help groups and networks

These services may be separately funded under one of the State, Territory or Commonwealth programs, or be provided as part of the operations of a neighbourhood house or centre. Facilitation, coordination and support for these groups may be provided by family support workers attached to other community services agencies, or the group may have a funded coordinator position or worker.

Self-help groups and networks cover a wide range of issues, and may operate through regular meetings or group work sessions, drop in centres, specific activities or some combination of these.

Children's contact services

These services, which are funded by the Commonwealth under the Family Relationships Services Program, provide supervised handover of children between custodial and non-custodial parents. They may also provide supervised contacts where there is risk of harm to the child, or risk of the child not being returned to the custodial parent.

Best Start—a 'unique' Western Australian program

In Western Australia, Best Start focuses on Aboriginal parents and children, and provides extensive services throughout Perth, regional towns and remote areas of the State. It is targeted at parents or other carers with children aged from birth to 5 years, and provides a range of parenting skills and modelling services for parents and carers. Workshops, activities and playgroups are run by local coordinators to help improve the life opportunities for young children. Culturally appropriate materials and coordinator training conferences support the service delivery arm of the program. The program is a cross-departmental one, with involvement of the health and education departments.

These other support services may be located at the primary or secondary point along the continuum of care.

'Borderline' family support services

Children's/young people's/men's telephone services

A national Kids HelpLine provides telephone information, advice and assistance to children and young people and refers them to other services. These services can be considered to be 'borderline' family support, in that their focus is not solely on family issues, but may cover a range of other issues which the child or young person has. Similar telephone services and some Internet services for young people are provided in some jurisdictions, but usually through specific youth programs. Men's Info Lines and similar are also in operation in many areas. These services are primarily targeted at men as perpetrators or victims of domestic violence, but, due to lack of other available services, cover parenting, relationship and health issues as well.

Neighbourhood centres or houses

Neighbourhood centres or houses are a difficult area. In some jurisdictions, funding is provided to a neighbourhood house 'in scope' in some jurisdictions, such as Tasmania where they provide counselling, home visiting or similar services described above. In Western Australia, these services offer support to families, individuals and community groups in the form of practical assistance, informal counselling or advice, arranging group activities and linking to other community resources and support networks. The Community Link and Network (CLAN) services funded under this program recruit, train, supervise and support volunteers who go into homes to offer friendship, support and advice regarding

daily living matters especially with regard to raising and caring for children. Neighbourhood houses are moving away from their traditional role of offering a venue for recreation-based activities, and are moving towards providing social networking, knowledge and skills programs. Neighbourhood houses do not simply offer a venue for provision of services, but the actual services themselves.

In most States, however, neighbourhood houses are generally funded by community services departments for coordination of services only, not for service provision. Individual neighbourhood houses may develop services, which are then funded under other programs such as family support, disability, child care and the like. When separately funded for these activities, these activities are in scope for this study. When funded solely to coordinate these activities which are provided by other agencies they are outside the scope of this study.

Residential services for new mothers

Some centre-based facilities are designed to assist new mothers to cope with child behaviour problems such as sleeplessness, constant crying or feeding difficulties. These centres are often operated by the health services areas of departments where health and community services are in the same department, or by separate health departments. These services are considered as borderline for this study, due to a perceived health surveillance focus.

Aboriginal and Islander child care agencies

These services are generally jointly funded by the Commonwealth and States, and are focussed on child protection and family welfare and support. Much of their work is involved in the tertiary sector, with particular focus on children and families in contact with the child protection system. While these activities are generally considered to be out of scope of the Family Support Services Scoping study, the agencies also provide a range of support activities for families, and seek to work in ways to prevent families from entering the statutory child protection system, which would be in scope.

Reconnect

Family support is also provided under a number of targeted services, such as the Reconnect Program, an early intervention program for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and for their families. Services assist young people and their families through counselling, family mediation and practical support. The primary objective is to improve the level of engagement of homeless young people or those at risk of homelessness, in family, work, education, training and the community. Although much of the work undertaken within this program is out for this study, some activities, particularly with young people and their families prior to the young person becoming homeless, could be considered within the broad framework of family support for the study.

Domestic violence and child abuse prevention

A number of agencies funded by community services departments are involved in development and delivery of services relating to people experiencing domestic violence and child abuse. These services are often undertaken by agencies funded under the Commonwealth Family Relationships Services Program, and seek to support families experiencing violence or abuse. State-funded services are usually funded under specific

programs, or can be readily identified, However, the services provided by domestic violence and child protection-funded agencies can often be considered to be general family support. Many agencies funded under these programs are multi-faceted, and some of their services will be in scope while others are not.

Other borderline services

Family support is an element of many Northern Territory departmental and funded services, such as the Living with Alcohol program, disability services and the like. Many service providers are multi-faceted, 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.

The Australian Capital Territory Child Health and Development Service, which focusses on children with attention deficit disorder and other developmental difficulties, would normally be out of scope, but is not exclusive to children with these problems, and so could be considered borderline.

The Western Australian Department of Family and Community Services funds a number of services which have strong elements of family support. These include the Family Tracing and Reunion services, which provide people with links to their birth families. Services are provided to Aboriginal people who have been removed from their family or community, former children in care, United Kingdom child migrants and adopted people. These services, however, tend to be 'issue-based' and so would largely fall out of scope of the current study. Similar services are provided by most jurisdictions, although not exclusively by community services departments.

Family Court counselling, funded by the Commonwealth, is also provided by departmental staff in some States. This involves mandatory counselling prior to progressing further with Family Court matters. Once again, these services tend to be issue-based.

Intensive psychiatric services in Western Australia may fall into the study scope. Although primarily for clients with a domestic violence or child protection issue, there is some relationship counselling involved. Departmental officers provide some services, and others are purchased from non-government agencies.

The Victorian Families First services operate towards the tertiary end of care, at points just prior to the removal of children or at reunification of children in care with their families. Family Preservation services are child protection funded, and provide intensive support for families where child protection concerns exist. These services are more likely to be out of scope, as child protection is the main criterion for service access.

Emergency 24-Hour Care Operational Grants in Queensland are provided to licensed Family Day Care schemes and other approved organisations towards the operational costs associated with the provision of emergency 24-hour care for children at risk of abuse or neglect. These could generally be considered to be issue-based and hence, on balance, out of scope.

A small number of services are funded by Disability Services Queensland (now a separate department) to provide early intervention and support for families where a child has a disability. These services may be considered borderline, but, due to new organisational

arrangements, would be out of scope as they are provided by another department, although in the broader sense they are in scope for family support.

Current data collections relating to family support services

This section outlines the existing data collections jurisdiction by jurisdiction, along with what plans are in place in those jurisdictions which do not currently collect information about family support services. At present, there are collections in place for New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and some Commonwealth programs, with others planning for a data collection.

The type of collection varies—some are 6-monthly paper-based forms, some are ongoing; some are conducted by the funding department and some are conducted by the non-government sector; some collect from all funded agencies and some collect only from agencies receiving funds above a certain level. Where no collections exist, there are plans to commence collection of information, but mostly these are still in the early stages. In several jurisdictions, information systems are currently being redeveloped, and this may affect the detail and frequency with which data are collected.

The descriptions are high level, and do not cover specific details such as software used, processing arrangements, or the range of information produced from the systems. Some brief comments in relation to data dictionaries are included. More details about each data collection are contained in the State, Territory and Commonwealth summaries included as Appendixes to this report.

Assessing the quality of information provided is difficult, and jurisdictions were not specifically asked to comment on this aspect. A number of evaluations have been undertaken in various States and Territories and in Commonwealth programs, which have provided some evaluation of the quality of information obtained from the data collections. Generally, where data collections are managed by the department, the collection forms part of the service agreement or work or service plan, and regional/zone or local office staff are generally in close contact with agencies to ensure that information is accurate and timely. Where collections are external to the department, issues of quality are harder for departments to assess.

Excluded from the descriptions below are the purely 'contract management' or financial systems used by most jurisdictions to account for program funds. Most of these systems contain information about the service being funded, and may include, as well as financial payments and budget information, some information about the broad nature of the services provided by the agency, the target groups they service and the locations from which they operate. These items are, of course, of considerable interest and of value in obtaining a picture of family support services. Further discussion is included in the next section.

Existing data collections

New South Wales

Family Support Services Association (FSSA) data collection

At present, the Department of Community Services does not undertake a data collection in relation to the Community Services Grants Program. It does, however, fund the Family Support Services Association for their data collection, and receives aggregated information in relation to their clients and activities. This data collection, which is undertaken by a private consultancy firm, covers a 2-week census period each year.

Data are collected in relation to:

- service overview (staffing, resources, client numbers, etc.—completed by the service)
- completed family worker cases, client details (individual client information, including goals and outcomes—completed by the workers)
- group participants and clients receiving family worker services (questions relating to participation, client characteristics, assessment of services, a series of questions about how the person sees things, a series of questions relating to the social fabric of the person and their local community—completed by the clients)
- staff profile (position, specialisation, hours, characteristics, qualifications, experience of abuse or violence, length of experience, training—completed by service staff)
- volunteer profile (role, hours, characteristics, qualifications, experience of abuse or violence, length of experience, training—completed by volunteers)

Neighbourhood centres

Neighbourhood centres participate in data collections run every 2 years by the Local Government and Shires Association. The collection covers all activities of neighbourhood centres, including family support. The classification of service types, service users, user characteristics and activity codes are based on Department of Community Services, AIHW, ABS and the Board of Adult and Community Education classifications. Family support services are identified as a single service type. The code lists and definitions are an attachment to the data collection forms.

It should be noted that much of the data included in this collection is out of scope of this study. It has been included here, however, as some neighbourhood centres deliver family support programs themselves, rather than simply providing a venue, or a coordination function for other services.

Victoria

The Department of Human Services initially contracted an external agency to conduct the data collection. This arrangement has now ended. The department has spent considerable resources in consultation with the non-government sector in relation to a new data collection for the Family Support Program. The new collection is being implemented from 2000–2001, and will collect information on clients in accordance with new service plans. Information is

collected quarterly. The collection is part of a wide-ranging Information Management Strategy being implemented throughout the Community Care Division of the department.

The data collection is currently paper forms based, with the intention to move to an electronic collection in the near future. The information is collected in relation to both casework, and short service activities.

Casework activities involve the collection of comprehensive information about the agency's intervention with the client, and covers items such as:

- agency location
- client characteristics—demographic and social
- case contact details including referrals, intake outcomes, reason for closure, etc.

Short service activities cover work where an activity does not proceed beyond intake; no formal assessment is done; telephone contact with no further appointment; crisis intervention; activities of 1–2 hours where few details are gained about the presenting person or family; one-off service activities where no further service is expected; and referrals which are deemed ineligible. Data items collected are:

- date of activity
- sex of person
- type of service (in person, telephone)
- duration of service
- service outcome
- use of professional interpreter

This data collection covers agencies funded under the Family Support Program. Strengthening Families currently has a separate data collection system as part of its evaluation. It is anticipated that the agencies funded under the Strengthening Families program will move to the Family Support Data Collection in 2001.

Statistical information is collected from Parentline, including number of calls; location of caller; sex of caller; age of child/ren; and issues raised.

Western Australia

The Department of Family and Children's Services has a number of integrated data collections which cover both departmental and funded services.

Departmental services

The departmental system, which is completed by individual workers in zones, produces the same statistical outputs as the collections for funded agencies in relation to family support services. This allows a seamless integration of information about these services, regardless of which sector provides the service. Other services, such as Parenting Services, have their own data systems which collect similar information to that for the non-government parenting services, although integration is more difficult. Some specialist departmental services use paper forms rather than the main system.

The department's Client and Community Services System (CCSS) is primarily a casework system. For family support services, the combination of appropriate 'service' and 'reasons'

fields provides the information in relation to the services within family support which are provided by departmental staff. Basically the system records a number of generic services such as mediation or counselling or advocacy, and, to find if they would fall within the domain of family support or another area such as crisis support, the service type is placed in a matrix with the reasons for contacting the department. Hence people who receive advocacy services when contacting for reasons such as a family problem or psychiatric issues would be counted as family support. If the reason for contact is financial problems, the service would be counted in another output area.

The department surveys its own customers on a regular basis, and has done so for several years. The survey is a large-scale 'market research' telephone collection which is outsourced to external consultants. It endeavours to contact each client with whom the department has had contact over the past 3 months (excluding child protection and domestic violence clients where it is not safe to contact). Questions include recall of the most recent contact, whether the consumer has noticed any difference in their circumstances, whether they learned anything from the contact, and whether the contact helped. Results are aggregated into the major output groups.

Similar surveys are undertaken from visitors to the department's parenting information centres. In addition, the department commissioned a wide range of research projects into particular family support services issues. These have been used as input to service development, planning and enhancement. Examples of projects include a review of the department's 'new directions' approach, which showed the department is in tune with international trends; a Family Week awareness survey; market research into parenting styles and attitudes; and a stocktake of Aboriginal parenting information materials.

Non-government services

The non-government data collection includes specific data items depending on the program—separate data collection forms exist for counselling, family support and neighbourhood houses, home visiting services and parenting services. A number of data items are common across all these data collection forms, which are obtained in paper format each 6 months. Data are entered to the Service Provision Management System (SPMS). Topics covered include:

- service availability (hours of operation, number of weeks of operation)
- service workload (number of contacts, number of cases, number of sessions)
- individual consumer characteristics
- referrals
- service provision (people involved and activities and hours for group activities)
- outcome measures (consumer feedback)
- quality indicator (consumer satisfaction with service)

Data items are tailored to the particular service type. The data collection forms are accompanied by detailed instructions and definitions.

In addition to these regular data collections, the department undertakes a survey of consumers. Bulk supplies of forms are provided to agencies each 6 months, and clients are requested to complete these forms either at the completion of a case, or within a period of 2 weeks. All forms are sent to the department for processing, and an *Agency Report* is

provided to the agency via the Zone Manager. Information from the *Agency Report* is transcribed to the data collection forms for input to the SPMS system.

A feature of the data collections is the concept of 'case equivalents'. This in effect converts activities of different types, such as group sessions, telephone counselling sessions, etc., to a single, comparable output measure. This allows for calculation of unit costs, for example. It is also designed to remove some of the difficulties inherent in comparing costs and performance of different service delivery models.

South Australia

Agencies funded under the Family Development Program are required to provide data at 6-monthly intervals, as part of the service agreement with the Department of Human Services.

Information collected includes:

- counselling and family support (clients, contact hours, etc.)
- groups/workshops (number held, participants, hours, etc.)
- information/referrals (hours, clients)
- volunteers (hours, numbers)
- issues/presenting problems during the reporting period which have impacted on service delivery and/or other relevant information (text description)
- individual clients receiving case managed service (aggregated counts by sex, age group, region, major presenting problem and referral source)

Information is collected on paper forms and aggregated to regional and State level by the department. Consultation was undertaken with agencies in relation to the data collection. Treasury requirements, including the need to account for funds, were major drivers of the collection. A simple way for agencies to report was discussed, and counts of clients/individuals receiving services and direct and indirect hours were considered to be the best measures of activities, and also practical for agencies to collect. Activities are compared against the output levels negotiated under the service agreement.

In addition to the 6-monthly activities data collection, quarterly financial information is provided to the department.

Data items are relatively straightforward, and no 'formal' data dictionary exists.

Northern Territory

Territory Health Services has a data collection system, primarily for child protection, which can be used by departmental staff for recording the 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 have a strong element of family support as part of their overall service strategy, such as domestic violence services, problem gambling services, etc., 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.

Commonwealth

Family Relationships Services Program

There is a data collection system, FAMnet, in place. The system has been operational since early 1999, and collects information from services funded under the program on an ongoing basis. The data collection covers information about clients and activities engaged in by the clients of the service provider, as well as information about community education, training and other support activities. Service activities are categorised as 'Cases', 'Courses' or 'Support Activities'. Definitions of these are included in the data dictionary for the system.

The system contains a program management component which enables the department and agencies to manage contract arrangements, through online access to contract details, financial schedules, and electronic submission of financial data and accountability information. The system is Internet-based, with all information stored centrally. Service providers access the system through a secure browser-based interface.

Reports on service activities, client characteristics and performance measures can be obtained from the system, and further reports are constructed by the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) using a Crystal Reports tool.

The system has recently been transferred from the software developer to in-house management. Work continues on fine-tuning of the system, including the transfer of some data items from 'mandatory' to 'optional' status.

A comprehensive data dictionary forms part of the FAMnet system. The data dictionary is in two parts:

- Service Activity, covering information on the services provided to clients by service providers
- Supply Side, covering items concerned with the relationship between service providers and the department, such as contract and budget information, etc.

The data dictionary is updated as new items are added or items are amended. It is accessible directly from within the system via a 'Help' button, and can also be downloaded by individual system users.

Customer surveys and longitudinal studies

The department has a comprehensive and detailed program of customer surveys and longitudinal studies to provide information on a range of departmental programs. Key among these studies are the Customer Participation Survey; the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey (see the section on Planned Data Collections over the page); and the General Customer Survey.

The Customer Participation Survey involved a telephone survey of 2,027 recipients of social security payments for people of workforce age and covered areas which are related to family support, including participation in voluntary or community activities. Analysis of the data from this survey is continuing.

The General Customer Survey involves a sample of FaCS customers (pension, benefit and allowance recipients, people receiving family payments and holders of Health Care Cards), who are followed up each year to provide information on the impact of income support payments. Analysis of the data from the survey is ongoing.

Planned data collections

A number of jurisdictions, including those with existing collections, have plans to introduce or enhance existing collections. A brief summary is outlined below, and further details are contained in the Appendixes to this report.

New South Wales

Families First

As part of the Families First strategy, funding and performance agreements specify a comprehensive range of data items which services collect to provide information on activities and performance to the department. There is a range of items relating to the service (e.g. number of families by length of involvement, number of groups provided by type, etc) and demographic and social characteristics of parents using the service (e.g.. gender, ethnicity, age group, employment, family structure, etc.). In addition, items relate to social supports which the parent has, reasons for referral, child health issues, measure of parental and family functioning at start of program and after 6 months, and benefits for children and parents. Information on the volunteers providing home visiting services is also included (demographic and social indicators, numbers visited, reasons for termination of service, benefits for volunteer, supervision).

At present, the data items are the subject of a consultation project with funded services to assess the individual items.

An important part of the Families First strategy is a 15-year research consortium which will undertake a number of research projects, including full evaluation of the various aspects of the strategy. A longitudinal study of families receiving services will provide a rich picture of the effectiveness of the services, as well as an assessment of the way in which integration of services has improved outcomes for families.

Queensland

Data collected from agencies that provide family support is limited to financial information obtained through the service agreement process. Limited activity information is collected on a manual basis, along with occasional snapshots of particular activities and one-off evaluations.

The department is planning to commence automated data collection around the key outcome areas which will involve agencies providing information on activities, clients, service agreement performance indicators and contract management issues such as budgets.

Development of the pilots is currently in the early stages, with specifications being written prior to commencement of system design.

Western Australia

There are major plans to overhaul both the departmental and non-government information systems. This will involve capturing all departmental data electronically, and 'fitting' it into the three outcome groups, while still maintaining relevance to staff in zone offices. The separate data collections for parenting services, child protection, etc., will be integrated into a cohesive system.

The SPMS system for non-government agencies is being rewritten with provision for interlinking of service specifications, contract management, financial reporting, data collection, and reporting by the outcome groups. Electronic transmission of data from agencies to the department is under consideration, with provision for Internet transfer at a later stage. The system is being rewritten around existing service specifications and data collections.

Information from both systems will be put in a data warehouse, along with departmental financial and staff resources information to provide a complete picture of inputs, outputs and outcomes.

South Australia

In relation to data collections, the department is looking at reviewing the data set currently collected to ensure it is flexible enough for both large and small agencies, particularly in the area of measuring outcomes. A package of tools for measuring outcomes is considered necessary for agencies to implement performance measurement strategies in relation to this program.

Tasmania

There is currently no data collection in place in relation to the agencies funded under the Family Support or Personal and Family Counselling Services programs. The department is looking at developing a data collection system, and is engaged in identifying data items and outputs which are required for managing the funding programs.

The data collection will be generic, covering all services funded under the department's programs, rather than being specific to any one program.

The department is looking at options for the data collection, including 'off the shelf' products. A 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 agencies will be involved in the process of defining data items and collection methodologies. The Family Support Services Association advised that some agencies collect data on clients and activities, including name, address, relationships, ages of children, location of service, presenting issues, referral source and the like. Other agencies do not collect any information. An issue for small services is 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 agencies 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 Output Group 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.

Australian Capital Territory

There is currently no data collection in place. The department is working on developing a data collection system, and is engaged in identifying data items and outputs which are required for managing the funding program.

The data collection will be generic, covering all services funded under the department's programs, rather than specific to family support services.

The process being followed is to discuss data collection issues with service providers, including what data they currently collect, how it is collected and the impact of new collections on the agency. To date, responses from the sector have been supportive of the approach.

The data collection plans centre on quantitative and qualitative performance indicators. The quantitative indicators are in the nature of non-negotiable targets, covering hours of operation, service capacity, service activity data and client profile data. A further set of negotiable indicators, including intensive support clients, volunteer hours, support hours and more detailed information relating to activities and clients, is included. The qualitative indicators cover the non-negotiable areas of quality, including client feedback, client outcomes, access, appropriateness and service system development. A further set of negotiable indicators, covering client, staff and referring agency satisfaction, unmet needs and efficiency, is included.

The department's main focus in the early stages of the data collection project is to get some idea of the numbers of clients seen by agencies, and to obtain some performance and budgetary information.

It is planned to implement the basic client profile and service activity data by May 2001. These timeframes will be subject to review depending on the development process.

Some issues in relation to the data collection include:

- existing collections which agencies may have
- information technology infrastructure and administrative systems in place within agencies
- nature of the collection—a system is the aim, but a paper forms collection may be more feasible
- possibility of linked client records with an online system, especially for referrals
- sensitivity of certain data items such as turnover, volunteer information
- policy issues—the department is keen to resist the notion that data collection will in any sense drive policy or service delivery decisions

- change management, and the need for collaborative processes so that all stakeholders are involved and aware of the proposed collection

Northern Territory

There is currently no data collection in place for non-government agencies, other than financial acquittal of funds.

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 efforts to date have 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.

Commonwealth

Parenting Program

Some data are collected about the Good Beginnings program, particularly in relation to costings and outcomes, as input to evaluations. Good Beginnings Australia is developing a new database to enable it to report more accurately on the program's outcomes. The 2-year evaluation of Good Beginnings revealed inadequacies in its existing database. The department has not developed particular data collection forms, but relies on the funding agreement as the means by which program information is obtained.

Other funded services

As part of the review of the agencies funded by the former Department of Health and Family Services, a new data collection system is planned, along with new service agreements to bring funding into line with other Commonwealth funding programs.

Longitudinal study of Australian children

Information from this study will address a major gap in knowledge and information about early childhood experiences and their impact on education, health, employment, crime and social problems. The study will complement the HILDA Survey and other studies being undertaken by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and the Australian National University (ANU) (see below). \$6.1 million has been committed over 4 years to the study under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy.

Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey

The HILDA Survey is a long-term panel survey focussing on the links between labour market, income dynamics and family structures, as well as retirement issues. Although primarily related to economic determinants of behaviour, there is an inter-related objective relating to family dynamics, focussing on separation/divorce and social/economic status and on links between income support and family formation and breakdown. The survey is currently in the late stages of design, and an organisation has been contracted to finalise the design and commence implementation. The survey will provide valuable information in the area of family support, especially due to the planned linkages with the anticipated AIFS Australian Family Panel Survey, and the ANU Negotiating the Life Course Survey.

Conclusion

Family support services are like families themselves—a concept everyone understands, but one in which there are many types and many definitions.

Defining what family support services are without being tied to notions of funding programs, specific target groups or particular policy directions has been a challenging process, and one which may never be totally 'final'. Just as families change, so do the services which are developed to meet their particular needs. This study has attempted to describe what services currently exist in this area, within a set of boundaries, and what is collected about what these services do. It is one more step in a long and ongoing process to provide meaningful, useful and beneficial information about an important area of community services.

Appendix 1: New South Wales— Department of Community Services (DoCS)

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 department's approach to planning for family support services is affected by a number of current initiatives. Firstly, a new Act—the *Children's and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*—came into effect November 2000. Under the Act, the department is required to make due efforts to provide alternative forms of support prior to taking children into care. This will influence the referral of families where child protection concerns exist to services.

Secondly, Family Support Services are funded through the department's Community Services Grants Program (CSGP). The department is presently undertaking a re-focussing of CSGP to better align it with DoCS' legislative obligations and with the New South Wales Government's views on strengthening communities. A Roundtable Group comprising government and community sector representatives is preparing a draft program framework and will shortly develop draft sub-program descriptions (i.e. logical groupings of similar service types). Ultimately service specifications will be prepared for all funded services. Under the refocus process, service providers will not be required to change the nature of their service delivery unless they agree to do so.

Lastly, the New South Wales Government has introduced Families First in NSW, a \$54.2m whole-of-government strategy, to support parents/carers raising children aged 0–8 through the provision of an integrated network of prevention/early intervention services.

The initiative is coordinated by the Cabinet Office but the Department of Community Services is responsible for the allocation of \$39.8m in community funding over 4 years. In 1999–20000, 34 new services were funded—18 of which are to be auspiced by existing family support services.

Planning of the Families First service network emphasises the critical importance of a coordinated, interagency approach to service planning and delivery. Links between early intervention and prevention services and community development programs will form a comprehensive service network capable of providing wide-ranging support to families raising children. This will be achieved by:

- building on and broadening existing service structures so that a wider range of needs may be met
- changing the practices of some services
- coordinated service planning and the establishment of new services where gaps have been identified and which have been proven to work for families

The strategy is grounded in research which shows that early intervention services can produce a sustained improvement in children's health, education and welfare, and that early intervention programs which are designed to reduce the risk of child neglect have an important role to play in long-term crime prevention. Services have the greatest impact when they are capable of addressing a broad range of issues and are provided as part of a coordinated network.

Outcomes for the strategy are:

- healthier children and parents
- better functioning families who are able to enjoy and learn from one another
- children who are better prepared to learn and develop when they start school
- reduction in the conditions that lead to mental health problems in children (such as conduct disorder)
- improved recognition and early intervention for post-natal depression and other mental health problems in parents and new babies
- greater parental participation in education and training
- communities whose members interact more positively and which are friendly places to bring up children
- reduction in the conditions that lead to child abuse and neglect
- reduction in juvenile and adult crime

The strategy will be rolled out progressively. In 2000–2001 it covers the North Coast, Hunter, Inner Western Sydney, Orana Far West and South West Sydney. It will cover the whole State by 2003–2004. Local planning and implementation is the responsibility of Regional Officers Groups consisting of senior representatives from the participating government agencies, with input from families, community forums, non-government services, local government and other stakeholders.

Approach to funding

Funding for most services funded under the CSGP is on the basis of an agreed work plan submitted by agencies each year. This plan is negotiated with the department. In 2000–2001 3-year funding and performance agreements have been introduced for family support services. Performance is measured against each agency's work plan. This system is relatively recent, with previous funding being a historical submission-based process.

Families First is an administrative component of the CSGP. However, service specifications have already been developed for all Families First-funded services. Families First Funding and Performance Agreements therefore include the relevant service specifications and relevant performance targets which are negotiated between the DoCS Area Director and individual agencies.

Services provided or funded

Services provided

The Department of Community Services does not provide any direct services which are in scope of the study. District officers working throughout the State will refer people to other family support services which are funded by the department.

The department produces a range of parenting magazines, which are widely distributed through departmental offices, non-government agencies and the Internet. Public education campaigns on parenting are run frequently, often in conjunction with other agencies such as the health and police departments.

Services funded

Community Services Grants Program

Family support services are funded under the CSGP which has been in operation for approximately 25 years. Services funded under this program cover a wide range of community services, including family support. Funded agencies providing family support could be isolated from other services on a reasonably accurate basis.

There are approximately 135 family support services operating in New South Wales. These services have an active Family Support Services Association, which provides a focal point for individual services. Many of the referrals to these services are for families where the department has had some contact with the family in relation to child protection concerns—up to 50% of all referrals are in this category,

Many services operate only in the area of family support, while others provide additional services such as financial counselling, emergency relief and child care. The Family Support Services Association provides training, support and resources for family support workers.

In addition to these services Parent Line provides advice and information for parents with children aged 0–18 years. Many other services provide telephone information, advice or counselling as part of their family support work.

Families First in NSW

Under the Families First initiative, these service types will be strengthened, and a range of new universal service types will be funded. These include:

- Family Centres—these are ‘one stop shops’ for families and will provide information and a focal point for other family support services. They will negotiate with service providers

to conduct parenting information or other sessions, such as parent skills workshops, networking or other identified service needs.

- Supported Playgroups—qualified workers will provide playgroup activities for children and parenting skills, networking and referral for parents.
- Family Worker Services—this predominantly home-based service model will provide workers to model parenting behaviour/skills in client’s homes to maximise support to parents/carers at stressful times such as during the early evening.
- Volunteer Home Visiting Services—professional workers are responsible for recruiting, training and supervising home volunteers who in turn will provide practical parenting advice and support and social contact for families with young children. These services will receive referrals from, and make them to, support agencies. They will match volunteers to families needing home visiting, and develop other ways to support families, including development of parenting groups. They will participate in networks and provide links with other service providers to meet the families needs.

Services ‘on the borderline’

Some neighbourhood centres undertake counselling activities, but the majority are involved in community development activities.

Service delivery mechanisms

Family support services undertake a wide range of activities, including:

- counselling for individuals and families
- group activities designed to provide support and networking for families in their local area
- groups for children
- parenting groups
- personal development groups
- education groups, focussing on family skills development
- playgroups for children
- centre-based family support worker services for individual support and assistance
- home visiting for families by family support workers and volunteers
- information and referral services
- centre-based information, referral, groupwork and networking
- mobile services

Many services are integrated with community development or targeted services for people with domestic violence issues, problem gambling or financial counselling needs.

Data collection

Family Support Services Association (FSSA) data collection

The department funds the FSSA data collection, and receives aggregated information in relation to their clients and activities. This data collection, which is undertaken by a private consultancy firm, covers a 2-week census period each year:

Service overview (completed by service)

- staffing
- paid staff hours
- unpaid staff hours
- number of volunteers
- number of volunteer hours
- proportion of resources devoted to each service type
- information on waiting lists
- number of additional worker hours needed to meet demand
- client numbers by category
- client characteristics, including ethnicity, Indigenous status, children at risk (notified to DoCS); special learning needs
- types of specific services provided (e.g. parenting groups for men)
- training of staff
- group activities—type, number of sessions, number of adult and child participants
- approach to service provision—use of theoretical frameworks or therapeutic models
- priorities for additional resources
- evaluation of the work of the FSSA

Completed family worker client details (completed by worker)

- client code
- living arrangements
- age of adult male and adult female in client family
- special learning needs of parents
- number and age ranges of children
- special learning needs of children
- support networks for the family
- demographic and social indicators —language, Indigenous status, income source, housing arrangements, etc.
- child/ren's and parent/s interaction with the statutory child protection system
- frequency of contact
- hours per contact
- travel time per contact

- group work attendance
- clients seen at contacts
- length of time in contact with the service
- other issues, e.g. gambling, domestic violence
- goals set (3), who identified and achievement level
- linkage of goals to economic and social factors
- how services were completed
- change in family since initial referral/intake interview
- contribution of agency to the level of change
- total direct service hours
- total travel hours
- other services provided—group sessions and child care
- worker needs to work more effectively with this client

Group participants and clients receiving family worker services (completed by client)

- a range of questions relating to the person's participation in groupwork, and service support are asked, along with demographic and social questions
- assessment of the particular services provided to the participant/client
- overall assessment of the centre or service
- series of questions about how the person sees things—13 topics
- series of questions relating to the social fabric of the person and their local community—31 topics

Staff profile (completed by service staff)

- position
- specialisation
- basis of employment
- contracted hours
- paid hours spent in direct service delivery, management and administration and travel
- unpaid hours spent as above
- demographic and social characteristics
- qualifications
- experience of abuse/threats
- years worked in family support
- length of tenure of current position
- training days
- supervision and frequency of supervision

Volunteer profile

- principal role
- other roles

- hours volunteered each week
- demographic and social characteristics
- qualifications
- experience of abuse/threats
- years worked in family support
- length of time spent as a volunteer
- training days
- supervision and frequency of supervision

No formal data dictionary exists—codes and explanations are incorporated in the data collection forms. DoCS has recently provided additional funding to the FSSA for the development of a client database—an enhancement of their FAMDAT collection—and an outcome tool.

Families First in NSW

As part of the Families First strategy, funding and performance agreements specify that funded agencies will collect data items to provide information on activities and performance to the department. There will be a range of items relating to the service (e.g. number of families by length of involvement, number of groups provided by type, etc.) and demographic and social characteristics of parents using the service (e.g. gender, ethnicity, age group, employment, family structure, etc.). In addition, items relate to social supports which the parent has, reasons for referral, child health issues, measure of parental and family functioning at start of program and after 6 months, and benefits for children and parents. Information on the volunteers providing home visiting services is also included (demographic and social indicators, numbers visited, reasons for termination of service, benefits for volunteer, supervision).

At present, the data items are the subject of a consultation project with funded services to develop draft minimum data sets for each service type.

Community Partners system

The Community Partners system will replace the department's current Grants Administration System, and will provide information on funding for services, and some information about services provided under the service agreement. It is not a client-based system. This system will also provide some links with a new Client Information System for child protection.

Neighbourhood centres

Neighbourhood centres participate in data collections run every 2 years by the Local Community Services Association. The collection covers all activities of neighbourhood centres, including family support. The classification of service types, service users, user characteristics and activity codes are based on DoCS, AIHW, ABS and the Board of Adult and Community Education classifications. Family support services are identified as a single service type. The codes list and definitions form an attachment to the data collection forms.

Developments and initiatives

The main developments in New South Wales relate to the Families First initiative. Developing service agreements with a wide range of service providers, and working with other government agencies which are partners in the initiative will constitute a major effort in the family support area. Coupled with this is the review of the CSGP, which will seek to more clearly identify the services provided by funded agencies. Both initiatives will involve the development of new information systems, for both administration of service agreements and provision of performance information.

An important part of the Families First strategy is a 15-year research consortium which will undertake a number of research projects, including full evaluation of the various aspects of the strategy. A longitudinal study of families receiving services will provide a rich picture of the effectiveness of the services, as well as an assessment of the way in which integration of services has improved outcomes for families.

Appendix 2: Victoria—Department of 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 Victoria are largely provided and funded through the Community Care Division of the department.

Family support services provide assistance, counselling and support to families exhibiting risk indicators, to promote, maintain and strengthen their independence and wellbeing.

The services target families with children. These families have significant needs and require support to strengthen their capacity to adequately function and care for their children. The importance of prioritising service delivery to those families with greatest needs is integral to the strategic directions for family support services.

The objective of family support services is to strengthen the capacity of families with significant needs to adequately function and provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. Services aim to work with families to enhance the family's capacity to provide a nurturing relationship, safe environment and access to opportunities.

The department funds agencies to deliver family support services within defined geographic areas. Ensuring services are accessible by all Victorians is a key element in service delivery, as is providing services which are accessible to all groups within the community, including Koori families and families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds who are recent arrivals and/or have significant parenting and/or relationship issues relating to their cultural background.

The department does not directly deliver family support services but funds a large number of agencies to provide family support services throughout the State. Cooperative partnerships between the department, the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, local agencies and local government are important to the success of the family support programs.

A major initiative in the area of family support is the Strengthening Families program, which aims to link families with welfare concerns to social supports and services which

enhance their functioning and wellbeing, thus reducing the need for more intrusive intervention such as child protection.

This initiative is consistent with both international research, and work undertaken by the department, which has identified that profiles of families where child abuse is not substantiated are similar to families where the abuse of children is substantiated. Early intervention and preventive services are thus an important part of the approach to providing support to families to meet their needs—when they need the support, before child abuse or family violence becomes entrenched.

In common with other jurisdictions, Victoria uses a participative approach, with families encouraged to participate in the decision making process, with a focus on building on strengths.

Integration of service delivery is important, to provide a mix of services which will meet the varying needs of families throughout their lifecycle.

Approach to funding

The department funds most family support services on an ongoing basis. Some programs are funded for limited periods of 1–2 years, depending on the program. Each funded agency has a single service agreement with the department, with a separate service plan for each distinct funding program. The service plans cover service aims, objectives, service standards and guidelines and performance measures for each funding program. Most service funding is recurrent.

New services are subject to open tender processes. Tenders may be called for specific service delivery models or for specific geographic areas of the State, although this may change for future funding processes.

Services provided or funded

Services provided

Parentline is a statewide telephone information, advice and referral service for parents of children aged from birth to 18 years. It is staffed by professionals from a range of backgrounds including psychology, social work and nursing. Advisers have online access to a wide range of information to meet parenting needs. A resource database allows telephone advisers to provide parents with information about services in their local area.

Services funded

Victorian parenting services

These services were reviewed at the end of 2000. The final report is not yet released.

Services include the Victorian Parenting Centre (VPC); Regional Parenting Resource Services; the Positive Parenting Program; Family Intervention Services; and Parentline.

The Victorian Parenting Centre is a statewide service established in 1997. It is engaged in research and evaluation of parenting education strategies and resource materials, and produces a range of multimedia culturally sensitive resource materials and proactive strategies relating to parenting and family development for providers of local multi-disciplinary family services and for families. It delivers training to parenting professionals, provides statewide coordination of parenting skills development services and supports, and develops and promotes empirically validated models of parenting education. It has a best practice focus, and ensures that professionals working with children and families have access to high quality resources and training in the delivery of parenting education.

The statewide service is complemented by a number of Regional Parenting Resource Services—one per departmental region. These regional services provide information, resources and education to parents and professionals. They are engaged in networking, coordination and linkages of universal and specialist services to strengthen the supportive service networks available to families. In terms of information provision, the services disseminate parenting information and resources to enhance family functioning to both parents and professionals. An advice service puts parents in touch with the range of services available in the community to meet their needs, and refers families to relevant and appropriate services. The regional services take part in an interactive partnership with the Victorian Parenting Centre and provide a means for dissemination of research findings, resource materials and training programs produced by the centre. Regional services also identify, promote and consult on training options for professionals involved in parenting education in their regional area.

A major focus of the Victorian Parenting Centre, and the regional services, is the development and dissemination of the Positive Parenting Program (PPP)—a multilevel model of prevention and treatment of behaviour problems in children. A range of parent information products, professional resources and training programs are designed to address family issues from those requiring provision of brief information through to intensive family intervention for high needs families.

The more intense intervention services of the PPP are the Family Intervention Services. Three services have been established to target families where the need for parent support coexists with other issues such as relationship difficulties and stress. Services are located in Barwon South Western region, Hume region and Northern Metropolitan region. Services provided include group and individual intervention for parents of children aged from birth to 10 years. The isolated project in the Hume region is a telephone intervention service.

Occasional care

The Children's Services Program funds occasional care (as well as other child care programs) to enable parents to participate in short-term education and other activities.

Family support services

The family counselling program is run by professional staff who offer structured guidance and support to individual family members or groups of families. Family counsellors encourage and support families with difficulties such as partner relationships and parent-child relationships. Some family counselling agencies offer in-home support in addition to centre-based or telephone counselling. Some agencies will provide services to any person or family referred to them, while others are more targeted, particularly in relation to families

with child protection concerns, with these referrals varying from 30% to 70% of all referrals. Demand on these services is increasing, as other access points for services are reduced because of Citizen's Advice Bureaux closures and reduction in local government services following competitive compulsory tendering (CCT). Many agencies also receive funding from other sources, including local government. In some instances, services are 100% funded by the department.

The in-home support program focuses on providing practical 'hands on' advice to families, often in their own homes. Workers also assist families in learning about and accessing relevant community services. The program, in common with family counselling, is broadly targeted to families with 'needs'. It works primarily at the preventative end of the continuum of care. Formal training for workers has been developed with a Certificate in Family Support Work offered to provide a professional training opportunity in this field.

Family support services undertake a range of local activities, including running parenting groups in local schools.

Strengthening Families

Strengthening Families is an initiative which has been in place for about 2.5 years. The aim of the program is to divert families from the child protection system—to link families with welfare concerns to social supports and services which enhance their functioning and wellbeing, thus reducing the need for more intrusive intervention such as child protection. Children are not considered to be at risk of serious harm, but the family may be struggling with psychiatric illness, substance abuse, domestic violence, disability or chronic illness.

It works at the interface with the child protection system—both pre- and post- intervention. Agencies do not provide services to families where children are considered to be at risk of serious harm as these children are notified to Child Protection for assessment and appropriate action agencies may also receive referrals from the department following child protection intervention.

The service provides case management, including assessment, planning and monitoring to ensure families engage with other services; assertive outreach services to actively engage families in their own environment; in-home support comprising both practical, hands-on assistance and more structured support in areas such as parenting skills development; and purchase of services through a flexi-fund, which provides material aid for families. Services cover approximately 60% of the State, and are concentrated in high need areas.

Strengthening Families and family support services work in conjunction to provide a single service system for families in Victoria.

Early parenting centres

Early parenting centres are located in three areas, and cover the State. These centres are primarily for mothers with new babies or children aged up to 3 years. Referrals are primarily from Maternal and Child Health nurses. The centres provide residential services up to 5 days, day stays, and some outreach services. In-home support is also provided.

Services ‘on the borderline’

Maternal and Child Health services

These services provide primarily health-related services, but also include maternal wellbeing, home visiting services targeting families with high needs, and a statewide telephone advisory service. These services are moving into generalist areas of family support, while still providing a health service.

Neighbourhood houses

In Victoria, neighbourhood houses provide elements of family support. Funding is provided for coordinators and services include linking families with family support services in their area. Skills development is also provided.

Other services

Families First services operate towards the tertiary end of care, at points just prior to the removal of children or at reunification of children in care with their families. Family Preservation services are child protection funded, and provide intensive support for families where child protection concerns exist. These services are more likely to be out of scope, as child protection is the main criterion for service access.

Service delivery mechanisms

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

- research and development of parenting resources, education and training
- individual and family counselling
- home visiting
- centre-based support programs and activities for families
- information and referral
- self-help groups
- outreach services
- advocacy
- linking family members

In addition, peak agencies such as Victorian Council of Social Service (VIC COSS), and volunteer centres receive funding, some of which is directed to providing support, resources and training for family support workers.

Data collection

The department initially contracted an external data collection which has now ended. The department has spent considerable resources in consultation with the non-government

sector in relation to a new data collection for the Family Support Program. The new collection is being implemented from 2000–2001, and will collect information on clients in accordance with new service plans. Information is collected quarterly. The collection is part of a wide-ranging Information Management Strategy being implemented throughout the Community Care Division of the department.

The data collection is currently paper forms based, with the intention to move to an electronic collection in the near future. The information is collected in relation to both casework, and short service activities.

Casework items include:

Agency details

- agency number
- suburb/town of the outlet

Client details

- client code
- suburb/town of the client's usual residence
- country of birth
- Indigenous status
- language spoken at home
- proficiency in English
- interpreter required for effective service delivery
- housing status
- income sources
- household members and family members living elsewhere involved in the case—sex, age, relationship to client and whether living with client

Case details

- date of referral
- referral source
- intake outcome
- date of intake outcome
- date of first attempt to contact family post intake outcome
- date of first meeting with family
- client issues identified—covering a wide range such as access to child care, behaviour, disability, family violence, isolation
- service activities—date, type, duration, travel time, participants, interpreter usage
- reason for case closure
- whether family had telephone or face to face contact with departmental protective services team in the past 2 years
- date of closure

Short service activities cover work where an activity does not proceed beyond intake; no formal assessment is done; telephone contact with no further appointment; crisis

intervention; activities of 1–2 hours where few details are gained about the presenting person or family; one-off service activities where no further service is expected; referrals which are deemed ineligible. Data items collected are:

- date of activity
- sex of person
- type of service (in person, telephone)
- duration of service
- service outcome
- use of professional interpreter

This data collection covers agencies funded under the Family Support Program. Strengthening Families currently has a separate data collection system as part of its evaluation. It is anticipated that the Strengthening Families program will move to the Family Support Data Collection in 2001.

The department also collects financial information from funded agencies through the service agreement management system (SAMS).

Statistical information is collected from Parentline, including number of calls; location of caller; sex of caller; age of child/ren; and issues raised.

Developments and initiatives

The new data collection system is a major development in the Family Support Program. It will provide information for monitoring of the effectiveness and efficiency of funding programs; provide planners with information on the effectiveness of allocating funds for specific issues and assist in evaluating the extent and nature of any changes which need to be implemented; provide client service and business managers and agency managers with information about their individual agency performance against their peers; and provide valuable input to research into what works and what does not in the delivery of family support services.

Appendix 3: Queensland—Families, Youth and Community Care

Queensland

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

Planning of family support services in Queensland is based on a partnership with community sector agencies. The department aims to ensure that services are integrated with those delivered by other agencies, to provide seamless, client-centred solutions.

The department considers that integration of service delivery is important, to provide a mix of services which will meet the varying needs of families throughout their lifecycle, and which meet the needs of people at a local community level.

A place planning approach is being implemented across 12 regions.

There are a number of current initiatives affecting the development of family support services.

New child protection legislation proclaimed in March 2000 places emphasis on the principle of supporting families in their care of children, in the context of children's safety and best interests being paramount. This policy and legislative framework emphasises the use of family support services as an integral part of the broader system for protecting children, evident in the Child Protection Strategic Plan.

The Putting Families First draft policy has been released in which the focus is on giving children the best start possible (early intervention); valuing and supporting the nurturing role of families (promoting resiliency); and creating safe, supportive communities for families (social capital).

Access to good quality child care and early education services are important for both social and economic reasons, and the Queensland Government has developed the Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan to ensure a responsive, high quality and sustainable child care system.

Approach to funding

Family support services in Queensland are mainly funded by Families, Youth and Community Care Queensland (FYCCQ) and delivered by community sector agencies.

Family support services are predominantly funded through the Child Protection and Family Support funding area. This program was created in February 2000 through the consolidation of five funding programs, including those providing funds to child abuse prevention, family support services and alternative care agencies. Some organisations may previously have been receiving funds through a number of funding programs to provide very similar services. The vast majority of funding is provided on a recurrent basis.

The creation of the Child Protection and Family Support funding area was prompted by the department's Funding Reform Strategy which seeks to implement a more contemporary approach to the funding of non-government community services, focussing on the achievement of quality client outcomes. Funded agencies will continue to submit financial information as well as reporting against agreed activity and outcome indicators. Key elements of the strategy are:

- a single set of generic funding guidelines for the whole department
- 'bundling' of the current 48 funding programs (including those described below) into eight key funding areas
- implementation of triennial funding
- moving to organisation-level funding agreements as distinct from service outlet-level agreements as a step towards implementing whole-of-government funding agreements
- implementing a performance management framework that measures service delivery and service outcomes
- implementing a needs-based planning framework which informs resource allocation processes
- implementing a place management approach to meeting the needs of individuals, families and communities.

Family support services may also be funded through Community Support Services and Child Care areas.

Services provided or funded

Services provided

A limited range of family support services is provided directly by FYCCQ. Brief counselling and support services may be provided to prevent the need for statutory child protection intervention. These are short-term, goal-oriented supportive counselling services to address the welfare-related needs of children, young people and families. Respite placements may be provided for children at risk of harm. Information and referrals are provided to other family support services that are provided by community agencies.

The Positive Parenting Coordination Section offers an information and resource service including a collection of books, videos and brochures on parenting, teenagers and general family themes. The resources are available for loan and/or purchase.

FYCCQ has also established an extended hours family and adolescent support service in Brisbane, which will commence in May 2001. This will help families and young people to respond to conflict or crisis. Although some services will be targeted to particular groups, such as young offenders, some services will be within the broad scope of family support.

Queensland Health directly delivers parent education programs (called Positive Parenting Programs) from 15 locations across the State.

Services funded

FYCCQ's Funding Reform Strategy includes bundling of funding programs into eight key funding areas. Family support services are mainly funded through the Child Protection and Family Support area, and also through the Community Support Services and Child Care areas. Disability Services Queensland, within the same portfolio as FYCCQ, also provides funds for family support services.

Child Protection and Family Support

The Child Protection and Family Support Program seeks to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people by preventing and responding to harm and risk of harm through the provision of a range of services that are responsive to needs and build on family, community and cultural strengths. Early intervention, family support, child abuse prevention and alternative care services are funded through the program. Activities for which funds are provided are family support including parent education, community awareness about child abuse prevention, counselling and support, practical assistance, family counselling and mediation, in-home family support and intensive work with families to improve parenting.

Financial assistance is provided to eligible community organisations to meet salary and operating costs associated with service delivery of funded activities.

The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services and the department in Queensland will jointly fund two Good Beginnings programs from 2000–2001.

Child Care

The Child Care area provides funds for a highly flexible and innovative network of integrated child care, family support and child protection services in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in north Queensland.

Also through the Child Care area funds have been allocated to pilot one-stop community service centres ('hubs') improving access to child and family support in a number of communities. They will have a cross-agency focus and be located in a variety of agencies, including child care centres.

Community Support Services

The Community Support Services area provides funds for some family support services, which may be out of the scope of the study as the programs are very general in nature and not specifically concerned with family support.

Personal histories

In common with several other jurisdictions, the FYCCQ provides services to help former children in care to learn more about their family history. Specialist services in the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development perform a similar role for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were removed from their land and families.

Disability Services

A small number of services are funded by Disability Services Queensland (now a separate department) to provide early intervention and support for families where a child has a disability.

Service delivery mechanisms

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

- research and development of parenting resources, education and training
- individual and family counselling
- home visiting
- centre-based support programs and activities for families
- information and referral
- self-help groups
- outreach services
- advocacy
- linking family members
- caravan park play schemes
- mobile services for remote communities

In addition, peak agencies such as Queensland Council of Social Service (QLD COSS), volunteer centres and peak organisations receive funding, some of which is directed to providing support, resources and training for family support workers.

Data collection

Data collected from agencies to provide family support is limited to financial information obtained through the service agreement process. Limited activity information is collected on a manual basis, along with occasional snapshots of particular activities and one-off evaluations.

The department is planning to commence automated data collection around the key outcome areas which will involve agencies providing information on activities, clients, service agreement performance indicators and contract management issues such as budgets.

Developments and initiatives

A range of new initiatives has been announced as part of Putting Families First, including multi-function 'hubs' (mentioned above) and a survey of Queensland families to investigate issues that are of most importance to them, and their expectations of government. Funds of \$500,000 were allocated in 1999–2000 for media and information about services and support available for families, such as the Parentline telephone support service.

Appendix 4: Western Australia— Department of Family and Children’s 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 vision of the department is that it will ‘be an innovative, effective and responsive leader in contributing to the quality of family life in Western Australia’. It aims to promote caring, responsible families and communities and to contribute to the protection and care of children and young people.

The department does not provide health or disability services, unlike several other jurisdictions.

The department has moved towards early assessment and ‘filtering’ of people out of the child protection system if there is not clear evidence of child abuse. These people are referred to family support services, and this is a growth area. In particular, a number of Parent Link services have been funded under the Parenting program to provide casework services and other activities to parents.

Under the department’s Strategic Plan 2005, three outcomes are identified, which cover all departmental activities:

- Outcome 1—Families and individuals achieve self-reliance and are skilled to care for their children.
- Outcome 2—Individuals and children are protected from abuse in families, supported through crisis and, where possible, children remain with their families.
- Outcome 3—Children whose placement has been approved by the department or are under the guardianship of the Director-General or are in child care, receive quality care.

Outcome 1 is the area of particular interest for the Family Support Services Scoping Study. This outcome has been developed in the context that early intervention and prevention are significant parts of the department’s work. Services cover a wide range, aimed at skilling

families to care for their members, meet their needs and prevent intrusive involvement in their lives. Services assist families to become empowered through providing information and linkages to supports in the community. Services delivered as part of this outcome are universal and accessible to all families. Some services target vulnerable groups and communities. Services are promoted to attract the broadest customer base and include support to those who may not achieve self-reliance. Target groups are parents, families, young people, individual adults and communities.

Two major strategies are pursued in relation to this outcome:

- improving the provision of prevention and early intervention services—with emphasis in the next 2 years on further developing and implementing universal and targeted services for families of children aged under 3 years, and on developing such services for those with children aged 2–4 years; and
- examining new ways of bringing services to targeted groups—with emphasis in the next 2 years on assessing parenting approaches and developing models of parenting services for Aboriginal communities and families; identifying, developing and implementing approaches to working with men as parents; reviewing, redeveloping and implementing services for young people; and reviewing family support and parenting services.

Family support and parenting services are targeted for review in 2001–2002, with redevelopment and implementation of new service models in the following year. The next review will then be undertaken in 2004–2005, under the 3-year rolling review program.

Outcome 1 has a series of outputs which relate to family and individual support. Services assist community members, including disadvantaged and socially isolated families and individuals to achieve self-reliance and to develop knowledge and skills about parenting. A key focus of measuring the outcomes which result from the service outputs relates to the client's perception of the effectiveness of the service by measuring factors such as increased knowledge, skills, confidence to manage well in the future and increased links to community resources and support. Effectiveness measures vary according to the nature of the service.

Developing self-reliance and skills is a key aim of the family support services. The department seeks to foster strong partnerships with other government agencies and the non-government sector to achieve the desired outcomes. Development of culturally appropriate services and responses to issues is another key driver of departmental policy in the area of family support.

Outcome 2 primarily addresses services focussing on crisis intervention, family violence or other specific issues such as homelessness, drug use, children who are carers, financial problems or gambling addictions. Services responding to disasters are also covered by this outcome. The majority of services under this outcome are out of scope of the Family Support Services Scoping study.

Outcome 3 is at the tertiary end of the continuum of care, with a focus on child protection, with the primary aim being the best quality care for children and young people who are not able to live with their families. Also included under this outcome is child care, with the aim to provide quality choices in child care. These services are also out of scope of the study.

Approach to funding

Services are funded under a tender process. Service specifications are developed, and public advertisements are placed inviting proposals from organisations to provide services. Briefings are held, and proposals are reviewed by a selection panel which provides recommendations to the minister. Contracts are for three years and funds are guaranteed if agencies meet the requirements. A data collection each 6 months is loosely tied to the contract. Agencies funded for less than \$20,000 are not required to provide 6-monthly data, but there is still a need for some information on their activities and outcomes. This is being examined. The community development officer in each zone manages contracts, with accountability ultimately to the minister for the funds expended.

Outcomes are specified in the contracts, and strategies are specified by agencies, with some suggested strategies outlined. There is an opportunity for agencies to input to the development of new service specifications, although this has not yet occurred in practice.

Internal funding is based on a budget allocation process, which is not yet using data collected on activities or outcomes to allocate funds. Zone managers are responsible for their budgets.

Services provided or funded

Services provided

The department provides a number of family support services through zone offices. These services aim to help families and individuals to develop skills and self-reliance to enable them to live independently.

Parenting

Parenting Information centres are located in a number of areas. These centres provide information and referral services. Parent Link services provide home visiting. A number of these services are now being contracted out to the non-government sector.

The Parent Help Centre runs parenting skills courses, provides information on a wide range of parenting topics to parents and runs the Parenting Line, a telephone counselling, information and referral service. The centre provides an outreach service and conducts seminars on parenting. The Positive Parenting Program is used in seminars and courses. Some of these are delivered in conjunction with the Department of Health. Groupwork activities for parents of children up to 2 years old are also conducted, aimed at providing parents with an increase in skills, knowledge and confidence in parenting.

The Parent Help Centre distributes the *Living with ...* series of magazines, which are written by departmental staff. These have recently been updated following a formal evaluation. A *Living with Teenagers Training Manual* has also been produced to assist parents struggling with the dilemmas they face with adolescent children.

Early Education Service works with parents and carers in their homes and community groups. The service assists parents and carers to improve their skills and knowledge on child development. Parents and carers are also encouraged to develop linkages to other services in their local area.

Best Start focuses on Aboriginal parents and children, and provides extensive services throughout Perth, regional towns and remote areas of the State. It is targeted at parents or other carers with children aged from birth to 5 years, and provides a range of parenting skills and modelling services for parents and carers. Workshops, activities and playgroups are run by local coordinators to help improve the life opportunities for young children. Culturally appropriate materials and coordinator training conferences support the service delivery arm of the program. The program is a cross-departmental one, with involvement of the health and education departments.

The Lifeskills Teams located in zone offices provide generic services to families, involving short-term work in relation to parenting skills, homemaker skills and the like.

The Intake and Assessment Teams will provide initial advice, information and referral services for families contacting the department, or about whom a 'child concern report' has been received. Some referrals are to the child protection staff where more intensive work will be undertaken with families at risk.

The department undertakes regular universal corporate communications activities—these 'media blitzes' on parenting issues are an integral part of family support. Campaigns provide tips for good parenting, and publicise the parenting programs available for families to access.

Other family and individual support services

The department runs a Family Help Line, which provides telephone counselling, support and information and referral services on a broader range of issues than the Parent Help Line. The Family Help Line will assist with relationship issues between family members, and seeks to link families with other services as required.

The department's Under 10s program undertakes work with families to assist them to care for children with persistent behavioural problems. Zone offices can run programs as Family Camp venues, where families participate in a range of activities designed to enhance parenting skills and family relationships.

Services funded

Under Outcome 1, the department funds eight generic counselling services, approximately 56 family support and community and neighbourhood houses services, six home visiting services and approximately ten parenting services. Funds vary, but average approximately \$50,000 to \$60,000 annually. The services cover a wide range of areas, and offer a number of service delivery options. Service specifications include:

- a target group description
- core outcome objectives
- additional outcome objectives, including agency-specific outcome objectives
- service strategies which are tailored for individual agencies
- core output measures
- additional output measures
- core outcome measures
- additional outcome measures—often narrative descriptions

- a generic quality measure based around satisfaction with services as reported by consumers

Counselling services

Counselling services are funded to help individuals and families to assess their circumstances and relationships, to make choices, decisions and plans and to develop skills and confidence to enable them to put their plans into effect. Counselling may be in group or individual sessions, at face-to-face meetings or by telephone.

Services funded under this program include parent–adolescent conflict counselling, parent–teen link, and general child, youth and family counselling. Services specific to young people are funded separately.

Family Support and Neighbourhood Houses

These services offer support to families, individuals and community groups in the form of practical assistance, informal counselling or advice, arranging group activities and linking to other community resources and support networks. The Community Link and Network (CLAN) services funded under this program recruit, train, supervise and support volunteers who go into homes to offer friendship, support and advice regarding daily living matters especially with regard to raising and caring for children. Neighbourhood Houses are moving away from their traditional role of offering a venue for recreation-based activities, and towards providing social networking, knowledge and skills programs. Neighbourhood Houses do not simply offer a venue for provision of services, but the actual services themselves.

Services funded under this program include generic family support services, as well as services for lone fathers, lone parents, women’s groups, a migrant resource centre and Aboriginal services. An alcohol and substance abuse service is also funded to provide family support services.

Home visiting services

These services are similar in nature to the Family Support and Neighbourhood Houses services described above, but generally provide a more intensive level of casework within the service delivery.

Parenting services

These services complement, and in some cases developed from, the parenting services offered by the department. They are preventive services aimed primarily at parents who require individual support to increase their parenting skills. The services are a positive approach to strengthening the parent–child relationship to reduce difficulties experienced by families. They are available to parents who seek to improve their ability to deal with difficulties they are experiencing in parenting their children. Parents may also access the services to improve their effectiveness as parents, and services focus on the needs and strengths of parents. Parents identify their own goals, develop strategies to achieve these goals and assist in evaluation of outcomes. Services develop knowledge of local and other appropriate services relevant to parents in order to inform, support and link parents with the community.

Services may be either centre-based or community-based. One centre for new mothers provides intensive residential support.

Services ‘on the borderline’

The department funds a number of services which have strong elements of family support. These include the Family Tracing and Reunion services, which provide people with links to their birth families. Services are provided to Aboriginal people who have been removed from their family or community, to former children in care, to United Kingdom child migrants and to adopted people. These services, however, tend to be ‘issue-based’ and so would largely fall out of scope of the current study.

Family Court counselling, funded by the Commonwealth, is also provided by departmental staff. This involves mandatory counselling prior to progressing further with Family Court matters. Once again, these services tend to be issue-based.

Intensive psychiatric services may fall into the study scope. Although primarily for clients with a domestic violence or child protection issue, there is some relationship counselling involved. Departmental officers provide some services, and others are purchased from non-government agencies.

As with other jurisdictions, youth services involve an element of family support, but tend to focus on the young person, rather than the family.

Service delivery mechanisms

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

- research and development of parenting resources, education and training
- individual, family and group counselling (formal and informal)
- community development
- coordination of community services
- parenting skills development through group education, practical skills courses, etc.
- relationship skills development
- referrals and links to other services
- practical assistance
- development of personal networks
- volunteer home visiting
- information about community resources, parenting and other topics
- case planning and intervention
- in-home skill building activities
- play and social activities in areas with few community facilities
- recruitment, selection, training, supervision, and matching of volunteers with families requiring support

Data collection

The Department of Family and Children's Services has a number of integrated data collections which cover both departmental and funded services.

Departmental services

The departmental system, which is completed by individual workers in zones, produces the same statistical outputs as the collections for funded agencies in relation to family support services. This allows a seamless integration of information about these services, regardless of which sector provides the service. Other services, such as Parenting Services, have their own data systems which collect similar information to that for the non-government parenting services, although integration is more difficult. Some specialist departmental services use paper forms rather than the main system.

The department's Client and Community Services System (CCSS) is primarily a casework system. For family support services, the combination of appropriate 'service' and 'reasons' fields provides the information in relation to the services within family support which are provided by departmental staff. Basically the system records a number of generic services such as mediation or counselling or advocacy, and, to find if they would fall within the domain of family support or another area such as crisis support, the service type is placed in a matrix with the reasons for contacting the department. Hence people who receive advocacy services when contacting for reasons such as a family problem or psychiatric issues would be counted as family support. If the reason for contact is financial problems, the service would be counted in another output area.

The department surveys its own customers on a regular basis, and has done so for several years. The survey is a large-scale 'market research' telephone collection which is out-sourced to external consultants. It endeavours to contact each client with whom the department has had contact over the previous 3 months (excluding child protection and domestic violence clients where it is not safe to contact). Questions include recall of the most recent contact, whether the consumer has noticed any difference in their circumstances, whether they learned anything from the contact, and whether the contact helped. Results are aggregated into the major output groups.

Similar surveys are undertaken of visitors to the department's parenting information centres. In addition, the department commissioned a wide range of research projects into particular family support services issues, which have been used as input to service development, planning and enhancement. Examples of projects include a review of the department's 'new directions' approach which showed that it is in tune with international trends; a Family Week awareness survey; market research into parenting styles and attitudes; and a stocktake of Aboriginal parenting information materials.

Non-government services

The non-government data collection includes specific data items depending on the program—separate data collection forms exist for counselling, family support and neighbourhood houses, home visiting services and parenting services. A number of data items are common across all these data collection forms, which are obtained in paper format each 6 months. Data are entered into the Service Provision Management Information System (SPMS). Some common items are:

Service availability

- hours of operation each week
- number of weeks operating

Service workload

- number of contacts
- number of cases
- number of sessions

Individual consumers

- sex
- ethnicity
- family composition
- number of children by age

Referrals

- sources of referrals

Service provision

- number of people involved in activities (consumer reports)
- number of activities and hours involved in group activities (service reports)

Outcome measures

- number of consumer feedback forms distributed and returned
- consumer feedback on outcome measures specified for program

Quality indicator

- consumer satisfaction with service

Data items are tailored to the particular service type and the data collection forms are accompanied by detailed instructions and definitions.

In addition to these regular data collections, the department undertakes a survey of consumers. Bulk supplies are provided to agencies each 6 months, and clients are requested to complete these forms at the completion of a case, or for a period of 2 weeks each 6 months. All forms are sent to the department for processing, and an *Agency Report* is provided to the agency via the zone manager. Information from the Agency Report is transcribed to the data collection forms for input to the SPMS system.

A feature of the data collections is the concept of 'case equivalents'. This in effect converts activities of different types, such as group sessions and telephone counselling sessions to a single, comparable output measure, which allows for calculation of unit costs, etc. This helps to remove some of the difficulties inherent in comparing the costs and performance of different service delivery models.

Developments and initiatives

The program of rolling evaluations of services provides regular input to service planning and development. Evaluations occur on 3–4-yearly cycles and include both government and non-government services.

Other initiatives include development work in the service system area, to assess service delivery models; and a joint initiative with the Department of Health called 'Building Blocks' which will involve intensive home visiting of new mothers. This universal screening process will then provide targeted intervention if any risk factors are identified.

Initiatives for men, both to increase men's access to and participation in services, and to increase the number of male volunteers, are being undertaken.

There are major plans to overhaul both the departmental and non-government information systems. This will involve capturing all departmental data electronically, and 'fitting' it into the three outcome groups, while still maintaining relevance to staff in zone offices. The separate data collections for parenting services, child protection, etc., will be integrated into a cohesive system.

The SPMS system for non-government agencies is being rewritten with provision for interlinking of service specifications, contract management, financial reporting, data collection, and reporting by the outcome groups. Electronic transmission of data from agencies to the department is under consideration, with provision for Internet transfer at a later stage. The system is being rewritten around existing service specifications and data collections.

Information from both systems will be put in a data warehouse, along with departmental financial and staff resources information to provide a complete picture of inputs, outputs and outcomes.

Appendix 5: South Australia— Department of 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 South Australia are provided and funded through the Family and Community Development Program of the department.

The Department's Together with Families for Children—Family Development Services Policy is based on a set of principles relating to children, families and society. The major objective for Family and Community Development services funding is to enable families to provide a caring environment for their children which protects them from neglect, harm, abuse and exploitation, ensures they are not disadvantaged and allows them to reach their full potential.

Services are directed to families where children are at risk of being harmed or disadvantaged to enable them to provide the care their children need. Services are targeted to families where:

- harm, abuse or neglect has occurred or where the risk exists
- children are suffering from emotional, material and physical hardship as a result of poverty or social factors or discrimination
- children are not provided with adequate care, a healthy and safe environment, reasonable standards of food, clothing, shelter, health and education
- children are subject to problems such as family violence, poverty, poor health or nutrition, inadequate housing or violent communities
- the family cannot meet children's needs because of health or disability
- the family lacks knowledge, skills or motivation to care for children or to cope with child behaviour problems
- families in short- or long-term crisis which may result in long-term deprivation, disadvantage or developmental delays for children.

Services give priority to families where the risk of harm or disadvantage for the children is greatest. Services are provided locally to take account of the special needs of each family in the context of the family's social and cultural backgrounds. The department allocates funds to services located or provided in the most disadvantaged communities as demonstrated by social and economic indicators to ensure that services are available to those who most need them.

Community support is a key element of the Family Development Services Policy. In common with other jurisdictions, the South Australian Department of Human Services encourages agencies to see families within the context of their community. Agencies develop formal services which complement the role of the extended family and encourage and assist families to develop and maintain links with friends and neighbours, and facilitate access to local community, cultural and tribal networks and social supports as a strategy for ongoing support.

Services which help families to recognise their strengths and which provide opportunities to learn new skills are important in meeting the department's policy objectives. Capacity building of families is seen as an effective means of addressing existing issues and enabling families to provide the care they need.

Services funded under the Family Development Program are part of a matrix of services and supports in the local community, working cooperatively and in a coordinated way to meet the needs of the local community.

The Family Development Services Policy provides a range of guidelines in areas relating to consumer rights, access and equity, concept of care, intervention strategies, management, staff supervision and administration and evaluation of services. These guidelines provide agencies with a sound platform for service provision.

The policy outlines a range of outcomes expected from funded agencies, with specific outcomes for parents and caregivers, children and the community.

Approach to funding

The department undertook a major review of funding and now funds family support services on a recurrent basis for periods of 3 years, with some one-off rounds for infrastructure or specific projects. Funding primarily covers workers' salaries. Service agreements have been implemented in the last 3 years, and contain:

- family development services description
- service types which may be funded
- services to be provided by the agency
- target groups, including priorities within each target group
- geographic coverage of the services provided
- outcomes expected from the agency in relation to the funding
- data reporting requirements, including service delivery and client data at 6-monthly intervals

New services are subject to open tender processes.

Services provided or funded

Services provided

Parenting SA

Services provided by the department are primarily Parenting South Australia services and parenting support through the Child and Youth Health Service. This service is universal and provides a wide range of information relating to parenting.

Parenting SA produces a series of Parent Easy Guides, which are practical easy-to-read tips which cover a wide range of topics faced by parents through early childhood and adolescence. The following list represents a very small sample of the types of topics addressed: 'Being a Parent'; 'Single Parenting'; 'Feeding Toddlers'; 'Being a Dad'; 'Family Squabbles'; 'Teenage Parents'; 'Children and the Internet'; 'Adolescent Depression'; 'Families that Work Well'.

In addition, 12 Aboriginal Parent Easy Guides have been developed, covering topics such as 'Our Children, Our Families, Our Way'; 'Role Models'; 'Grandparents'; 'Storytelling' and 'Kids Grieve Too'.

Parent Easy Guides are continually developed, with new topics being added progressively. They receive wide dissemination through community agencies, schools, direct mail-outs to families contacting the Parent Help Line, and through the Internet.

Some family support work is undertaken by departmental staff, particularly in remote regions where other non-government services do not exist. Some intake information available in the child protection system indicates that workers in local departmental offices deal with parent-adolescent conflict and other issues.

Child and Youth Health

Child and Youth Health is the largest community-based health service for children and young people in South Australia. The objectives are to:

- enhance the health status of children and young people in South Australia, focussing on the promotion of health and the prevention of ill health, and
- to support those parents and families who are the primary carers of children and young people.

Child and Youth Health serves the needs of children and young people aged 0–25 years through its two divisions Child and Family Health Service and the Second Story Youth Health Service, and also the Parent Helpline. The Child and Youth Health Parent Helpline is a 24-hour, 7-day a week telephone service providing information and support to parents on any child or youth health, parenting, development or behaviour concern.

Services funded

Family Development Services

Family support services are funded by the Department under the Family and Community Development Program. There are 60 agencies funded on a recurrent basis for \$1.2 million.

These services are designed to provide a range of support services to families who need assistance in raising their children and managing problems. Funded services are designed to complement the informal networks which families have to provide support in times of need. The services are funded in recognition that families may have difficulty in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities and providing effective and appropriate care for children. This may result from many factors, some of which are beyond the family's control. Agencies are funded for a range of activities to meet the needs of families, regardless of their particular circumstances, location or background.

Strengthening families

This program, mainly funded by the Commonwealth, has been operated through Parenting SA. The program bordered on the child protection system, and involved coordinators and volunteers who undertook home visiting to assist families at risk. There has been a change in this program, with less emphasis on child protection, and acceptance of referrals relating to other issues. The funding of this project in the future is not certain.

Services 'on the borderline'

Maternal and Child Health Services

These services are primarily health-related, but mothers may be referred to family support services if there are other issues or concerns.

Neighbourhood houses and community centres

In South Australia, neighbourhood houses and community centres provide elements of family support. Funding is provided for coordinators and services include linking families with family support services in their area. Skills development is also provided.

Service delivery mechanisms

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

- research and development of parenting resources, education and training
- individual and family counselling
- home visiting
- group work
- information and referral

- mobile crèche
- advocacy
- family education and parenting skills
- identification of supportive networks
- practical support

Some funds are set aside for training of management, staff and volunteers and for industry development, such as the provision made to the Family Support Workers Association for the networking conference . In addition, peak agencies such as the South Australian Council of Social Service (SA COSS), volunteer centres and peak organisations receive funding, some of which is directed to providing support, resources and training for family support workers.

Data collection

Agencies funded under the Family Development Program are required to provide data at 6-monthly intervals, as part of the service agreement with the department.

Information collected includes:

Counselling and family support

- total number of clients receiving a case-managed counselling and support service
- total number of direct contact hours spent in counselling and support of clients
- total number of hours spent in indirect work associated with the support of clients, e.g. advocacy, administration, supervision, travelling, etc.

Groups/workshops

- total number of workshops/group work sessions conducted
- total number of individuals attending workshops/groups
- total number of hours spent in direct contact in workshops/groups
- total number of hours in indirect work in supporting workshops and groups

Information/referrals

- total number of hours spent in providing a support service to clients who are not case managed
- total number of clients (not case managed) who receive this type of service

Volunteers

- total number of hours spent in recruiting, training and supporting volunteers
- total number of volunteers supporting the program in the data record period

Issues/presenting problems during the reporting period which have impacted on service delivery and/or other relevant information

- text description of issues, etc.

Individual clients receiving case-managed service

- aggregated counts of sex by 11 age groups
- aggregated counts of client addresses by 11 departmental regions

- aggregated counts of clients' major presenting problem by 12 categories
- aggregated counts of referral sources by 9 categories

Information is collected on paper forms and aggregated to regional and State level by the department. Consultation was undertaken with agencies in relation to the data collection. Treasury requirements, including the need to account for funds, were major drivers of the collection. A simple way for agencies to report was discussed, and counts of clients/individuals receiving services and direct and indirect hours were considered to be the best measures of activities, and also practical for agencies to collect. Activities are compared against the output levels negotiated under the service agreement.

In addition to the 6-monthly activities data collection, quarterly financial information is provided to the department.

Data items are relatively straightforward, and no 'formal' data dictionary exists.

Developments and initiatives

The department is working with the Commonwealth in relation to the national Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. It is anticipated that new Commonwealth-funded services will enhance, and complement, existing family development program-funded services, and the work of Parenting SA.

The Commonwealth Good Beginnings program is commencing in the southern region of the State, and the department will be working in conjunction with the Commonwealth and local agencies in relation to this program.

In relation to data collections, the department is looking at reviewing the data set currently collected to ensure it is flexible enough for both large and small agencies, particularly in the area of measuring outcomes. A package of tools for measuring outcomes is considered necessary for agencies to implement performance measurement strategies in relation to this program.

The department commissioned Flinders Institute of Public Policy and Management to report on performance measurement in Family Development Services. The report considers the results of a pilot project to test the practicality and usefulness of a range of performance measures in the areas of efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness. Five agencies were involved in collecting data over a period of 3 months. Key recommendations include:

- a uniform but flexible system of performance measurement be further tested with agencies funded by the Family Development Services Program
- the system include identification of client and worker goals using a generic goal framework based on the target outcomes of the program
- success in achievement of goals be identified by both clients and workers at termination of involvement of the program
- satisfaction with agency involvement be determined using a common client satisfaction questionnaire
- staff workload in organisations be measured with a breakdown of direct and indirect client contact and travelling time
- this methodology be used both for individual/family work and clients taking part in group parenting education programs

- the system be further reviewed, evaluated and modified either on an annual basis or after a period consistent with contract periods

This report is currently with the department, but recommendations have not yet been implemented or integrated into existing service agreements or data collections.

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.

Appendix 7: Australian Capital Territory—Department of Education and Community 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 Australian Capital Territory has a comprehensive and coordinated approach to family support services. The key policy document is the *Family Support Plan 2000–2002*. This plan outlines the five key goals of family support:

- to provide a coordinated family support service system for families with children
- to respond to family needs through the provision of a range of accessible and appropriate services
- to promote the importance and availability of family support services
- to develop the skills and knowledge of people delivering family support
- to engage in productive partnerships that promote community building

The plan was developed over a number of years in consultation with schools, program areas of the department, service providers and key agencies and has been used to give guidance to purchasing decisions by government. Organisations are encouraged to see themselves within the context of the plan, and to position services to meet the goals and outcomes which have been identified.

The plan provides a range of outcomes expected for each goal, together with actions and activity indicators to measure achievement of the outcomes.

A key focus of the *Family Support Plan 2000–2002* is to provide interlinked services, resources and activities for families with children. Links with services provided by Australian Capital Territory schools are a particular focus, and this plan and the *ACT Government Schools Plan 1998–2000* interrelate to provide beneficial social and educational outcomes for families, children, young people and the communities in which they live.

The coordination and interlinking of services is seen as a key goal, and funding decisions seek to build on existing services.

Approach to funding

The department has moved from a submission-based grants model over the past 2 years, with organisations now primarily on 2-year contracts. Most funding is recurrent. Some 'one-off' services or subsidies are funded on a 1-year contract. A review of the funding model is planned, with the extension of contracting to a 3-yearly cycle the likely outcome.

New program monies are subject to tender processes, but the main focus is on building on the existing infrastructure to extend and enhance the range of services available to meet needs.

Services provided or funded

Services provided

The Australian Capital Territory Government does not deliver any services which are within the scope of the study. Direct service provision falls within the broader definition of family support, with a focus on statutory intervention and other child protection focussed services.

Services funded

Organisations funded under the department's Children's Services Program include playgroups and occasional care, which are within the broad scope of the study.

The Family, Individual and Community Support program funds a range of organisations to provide family support, home visiting services, parent support services and volunteer support. The Counselling, Information and Referral program funds organisations to provide counselling for families and individuals and information and referral to other services. A number of organisations provide services which do not focus on individuals or families, but are related to promoting the availability of services and to resourcing and training family support workers.

There are over 40 organisations funded under these programs, for a total of \$5.78 million. A number of the funded organisations provide services which are partly or wholly outside the scope of the study, including domestic violence crisis services, financial counselling services, sexual assault services, counselling for gamblers emergency welfare, court assistance, and victim support services.

The Australian Capital Territory Government is working with the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services in relation to the Good Beginnings home visiting service, where volunteers visit new mothers to provide support, parenting skills modelling and other assistance as required.

A unique feature of the Australian Capital Territory is the department's link with the school system. Education services are part of the department, and close links have been developed by organisations funded under the Family, Individual and Community Support program and local schools. The approach taken centres around looking at the student's issues in the

context of their family—the student is not seen as the sole client of the service being offered. Examples of these programs include the Woden School SASH (Schools Agencies Student Home) Program, which was developed to strengthen the links between the school, students and their families and the service providers involved with students at the school. Similarly, the Tuggeranong SupportLink community referral system which allows teachers and school counsellors to refer people for assistance to a central information and referral coordination centre has delivered anger management sessions in high schools in the local area as part of normal coursework.

The new ParentLink service commenced in March 2000, and is designed to connect parents with the services which are available in the Australian Capital Territory. A key element is ParentLine, a specialised telephone help service, which operates every day and is staffed by specialist staff, social workers and registered nurses. A range of written materials has been prepared to assist parents with particular issues.

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 funded services, such as the Child Health and Development Service, which focuses on children with attention deficit disorder and other developmental difficulties, but is not exclusive to children with these problems.

Service delivery mechanisms

There are seven regional community services covering the entire Australian Capital Territory which act as a focus for family support. Although these organisations may provide Territory-wide 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 interrelationship with Australian Capital Territory schools is an important service delivery mechanism. There is a strong policy imperative for schools to see the student in the context of their family and community, rather than as their sole client. A number of innovative and successful services are run in conjunction with schools.

The services provided cover a wide range of activities for individuals and families, including:

- counselling
- skills development
- home visiting
- behaviour management services
- advocacy
- support planning

- anger management
- referrals
- information provision, including a Parentline service

Community-focussed services include:

- media activities
- community development
- coordination of service delivery
- community centre subsidies

In addition, the department funds organisations which provide services aimed at supporting workers through training and information. Staff and volunteer programs are funded, with participation encouraged for all workers. The department also funds a family support and parenting network to facilitate service linkages and sharing of resources.

Data collection

There is currently no data collection in place. The department is working on developing a data collection system, and is engaged in identifying data items and outputs which are required for managing the funding program.

The data collection will be generic, covering all services funded under the department's programs, rather than specific to family support services.

The process being followed is to discuss data collection issues with service providers, including what data they currently collect, how it is collected and the impact of new collections on the agency. To date, responses from the sector have been supportive of the approach.

The data collection plans centre on quantitative performance and qualitative performance indicators. The quantitative indicators are in the nature of non-negotiable targets, covering hours of operation, service capacity, service activity data and client profile data. A further set of negotiable indicators, including intensive support clients, volunteers hours, support hours and more detailed information relating to activities and clients is included. The qualitative indicators cover the non-negotiable areas of quality, including client feedback, client outcomes, access, appropriateness and service system development. A further set of negotiable indicators, covering client, staff and referring agency satisfaction, unmet needs, and efficiency, are included.

The department's main focus in the early stages of the data collection project are to get some idea of the numbers of clients seen by agencies, and to obtain some performance and budgetary information. A range of data items was discussed with funded agencies and further refined at a workshop at the end of August 2000.

It is planned to implement the basic client profile and service activity data by May 2001. These timeframes will be subject to review depending on the development process.

Some issues in relation to the data collection include:

- existing collections which agencies may have
- information technology infrastructure and administrative systems in place within agencies

- nature of the collection—a system is the aim, but a paper forms collection may be more feasible
- possibility of linked client records with an online system, especially for referrals
- sensitivity of certain data items such as turnover, volunteer information
- policy issues—the department is keen to resist the notion that data collection will in any sense drive policy or service delivery decisions
- change management, and the need for collaborative processes so that all stakeholders are involved and aware of the proposed collection

Developments and initiatives

The main developments in the Australian Capital Territory relate to a number of key areas:

- the new data collection
- the continued integration of the Family Support and Schools Plans
- the generic quality standards which are being implemented throughout the funded agencies
- 3-year funding contracts
- a costing and needs analysis project

In common with many community services departments, the ACT Department of Education and Community 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.

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.

Appendix 9: Commonwealth Government—Department of Family and Community 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 Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) reports on indicators for their three outcomes areas—stronger families, stronger communities, and economic and social participation. For the purposes of the Family Support Services Scoping study, the policies and programs within the stronger families outcome area are the most important, as they cover family assistance, youth and student support, child support and child care support. Elements of the stronger communities outcome are relevant also, particularly in the area of community support.

The department has a key focus on families and lifecycle, and seeks to fund services to meet the needs of families in a range of areas. There are a number of key policy documents, including the various guidelines which have been developed for funding programs. The Commonwealth uses a three-part means of describing services:

- universal—primary services which are directed to all families
- selected—secondary services which are directed to families in particular groups or at particular stages of the lifecycle
- targeted—tertiary services which are directed to families with specific needs

A key new initiative of the government is the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. This strategy is strongly grounded in national and international research into family and community functioning, and together with the experiences of existing communities has led to the development of key focus areas for both families and communities. The strategy recognises that families and communities know their own needs best, and that a 'ground up' approach to service development and delivery will best meet needs at a local level, and stand the best chance of ensuring that real change occurs for both families and the communities in which they live. For families, the Strategy has three focus areas:

- early childhood and the needs of families with young children
- strengthening marriage and relationships
- balancing work and family

This initiative is heavily committed to a partnership approach, with government working with business, communities and individuals to develop strong families and communities. The strategy recognises that strong communities have:

- strong leadership
- skills and knowledge
- expanding partnerships between public and private sectors
- a solid core of committed volunteers

In delivering on the strategy, the government has outlined eight key principles which will guide the 'social coalition'—the partnerships between government, business, community agencies, families and individuals—and give clear direction to the programs being funded under the strategy. The principles are:

- working together in partnerships—involving all partners who can make a real difference to the experience of families and the strength of communities
- prevention and early intervention—investment in supporting families and communities early on, before problems occur
- life transitions—helping families and communities get help as it is needed, to provide extra support at key transition times in their lives
- more integrated and coordinated services—improving the access to services through better integration and linking of services and information at the local level
- local solutions to local problems—understanding that local communities are often the best at identifying and responding to local problems, and working in partnership with local communities in ways which are appropriate to them will develop real solutions
- capacity building—increasing personal and collective resources of individuals and communities to develop skills and capacities needed to respond to local issues
- using the evidence and looking to the future—using evidence and research to determine future policy and directions, and building on this evidence to develop good social policy
- making the investment count—encouraging families and communities to provide feedback on the effectiveness of particular initiatives, and using frameworks and data to ensure that the money goes to projects which are successful in strengthening and supporting communities

Nine new initiatives have been announced, many of which are completely or partially in scope of the study. These are discussed below.

As well as this strategy, the department continues to fund a range of services in the family support area, which have been in place for many years, and which are currently being reviewed in the light of the social policy inherent in the new Strategy. In addition, direct income support in the areas of pensions, benefits and allowances remain a key government approach to supporting families. New initiatives have been implemented from 1 July 2000 in relation to family assistance and child support. These initiatives include simplification of 12 family assistance benefits payments into three new payments. New child support initiatives include an emphasis on non-financial aspects of child support by non-custodial parents.

Approach to funding

The department generally contracts agencies for 3 years, with 12-monthly schedules for payments. Most funding is recurrent, but some newer programs are established under 'one-off' 12- or 18-month agreements. The Good Beginnings program is moving to 2-yearly contracts following a successful pilot phase.

A number of programs, including those funded by the former Department of Health and Family Services are being reviewed, with an expectation of either transfer to States and Territories, transfer to child care programs or integration into other program structures within the department. Funding arrangements for these programs will form part of this review.

Competitive tendering under the purchaser provider model is implemented, or being implemented in the department's family support programs.

Services provided or funded

Services provided

Income support is the main direct 'service' provision for families. The Family Assistance Office is responsible for delivering the three new family payments on behalf of the department:

- Family Tax Benefit Part A, which replaces the minimum family allowance, family allowance, Family Tax Payment Part A and Family Tax Assistance Part A and is directed to assisting families with the cost of raising children
- Family Tax Benefit Part B, which replaces the basic parenting payment, guardian allowance, Family Tax Payment Part B, Family Tax Assistance Part B, the Sole Parent Rebate, and the with-child Dependent Spouse Rebate and is directed to providing extra help to single income families including sole parents
- Child Care Benefit, which replaces child care assistance and the child care rebate, and is directed to helping families with the child costs of child care.

These payments are not true services in the same sense as other family support services delivered by government departments, although it could be argued that the payments are directed to assisting families to care for children, and so are within the scope of the study.

Services funded

The Commonwealth funds a range of services, including family relationships services, parenting programs, Aboriginal and Islander Child Care agencies and a mix of programs which were funded under the former Department of Health and Family Services.

Family relationships

The Family Relationships Services Program provides funds of over \$34 million to over 100 agencies to provide family relationships counselling, family mediation services, children's contact services, adolescent mediation and family therapy, family relationships education

and family skills training. Specific services are directed to men, young women and Indigenous Australians.

These services use a range of strategies to meet the needs of clients. These may involve one-to-one counselling and therapy services, family counselling, intensive counselling and support work with young people and their families, mediation, personal or group education, facilitation of child–parent contact hand–over, supervision of child–parent visits, and community education and development activities.

The services provided are directed to families at all stages of the service delivery continuum—from universal services involving community education, through selected services, which are directed to assisting couples to prepare for or enrich existing relationships, through to targeted services for families with relationship problems for which they need specific, direct assistance. Services provided may focus on any stage of the relationship or family cycle, from formation, through maintenance to dissolution. Families are assisted with all aspects of family lifecycle changes, including pre-marriage education, parenting skills from the birth of a child, through to adolescence and ‘empty nest’, relationship enrichment, remarriage or re-partnering, separation and divorce, and retirement and its effect on relationships.

Many agencies funded under this program offer other services to support families, including services for problem gamblers, information lines for men, and budget counselling and support.

Parenting Program

The Parenting Program funded by the department is Good Beginnings, a family centred-program based on volunteer home visiting of families with new babies. Four pilot sites were established in 1997, with each project managed by a professional who is responsible for recruitment, screening and training of ‘community parents’. These parents are matched with families who have been referred by local services or who have asked for home visiting. The program is voluntary, and is designed to provide practical assistance to families with babies and young children, particularly those who do not have other support systems.

The program is managed by Good Beginnings Australia Ltd, and includes on its Board of Directors representatives of National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) and the Lions Club of Sydney who have been key players in the establishment of the program.

The program was developed by researching, developing and testing a number of family-centred programs and initiatives. The project aims to develop strong family and community links necessary to strengthen families and neighbourhoods. This has been achieved partly by consultation with families in their home or local neighbourhood, and by identifying needs and building on existing strengths.

In addition to family-focussed activities, the program is engaged in providing training and support for volunteer and professional staff; development of best practice guidelines; community information packages; and sharing of resources with local health, welfare and community agencies.

The program was evaluated after 18 months, with positive results indicated for the 117 families who participated in the program, the community parents and the communities in which the four pilot projects were established (inner-south west Sydney, Katherine in the Northern Territory, Moe in Victoria, and Hobart). Following the success of the pilot, new

services have been implemented in other areas in conjunction with State and Territory departments and local agencies. These include services focussed on men's parenting, Aboriginal communities, a Prison Parenting Program in Hobart, and services for specific ethnic communities. Outreach services have been developed for isolated communities and parent group support services for high-dependency families have been established. The program is building social capital or capacity in the families involved in the program, as well as strengthening the support networks for their community.

Agencies funded by the former Department of Health and Family Services

These services have been funded recurrently and are currently the subject of a review. The services cover a range of models, some of which are within the scope of the study, and others which are more clearly identified with child care. Services include community education programs, child abuse prevention services and some school-based behaviour modification programs. The services which remain within the scope of family and community support programs will be integrated with new service programs under the government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy.

Services 'on the borderline'

Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies

These services are generally jointly funded by the Commonwealth and States, and are focussed on child protection and family welfare and support. Much of their work is involved in the tertiary sector, with particular focus on children and families in contact with the child protection system. While these activities are out of scope of the Family Support Services Scoping Study, the agencies also provide a range of support activities for families, and seek to work in ways to prevent families from entering the statutory child protection system.

Reconnect

Family support is also provided under a number of targeted services, such as the Reconnect program, an early intervention program for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and for their families. Services assist young people and their families through counselling, family mediation and practical support. The primary objective is to improve the level of engagement of homeless young people, or those at risk of homelessness, in family, work, education, training and the community. Although much of the work undertaken within this program is out of scope of the Family Support Services Scoping Study, some activities, particularly with young people and their families prior to the young person becoming homeless, could be considered within the broad framework of family support for the study.

Domestic violence and child abuse prevention

A number of agencies funded under by the department are involved in development and delivery of services relating to people experiencing domestic violence and child abuse. These services are often undertaken by agencies funded under the family relationships services program, and seek to support families experiencing violence or abuse.

Service delivery mechanisms

The services provided cover a wide range of activities for individuals and families, including:

- counselling and therapy
- mediation
- skills development and training
- supervision of child handover
- supervision of child–parent contact visits
- relationship education courses
- home visiting of families with young children
- behaviour management
- behaviour modelling
- advocacy
- referrals
- information provision

Community–focussed services include:

- media and community education
- community development

Data collection

Family Relationships

There is a data collection system, FAMnet, in place. The system has been operational since early 1999, and collects information from services funded under the program on an ongoing basis. The data collection covers information about clients and activities engaged in by the clients of the service provider, as well as information about community education, training and other support activities. Service activities are categorised as ‘Cases’, ‘Courses’ or ‘Support Activities’. Definitions of these are included in the data dictionary for the system.

The system contains a program management component which enables the department and agencies to manage contract arrangements, through online access to contract details, financial schedules, and electronic submission of financial data and accountability information. The system is Internet-based, with all information stored centrally. Service providers access the system through a secure browser-based interface.

Reports on service activities, client characteristics and performance measures can be obtained from the system, and further reports are constructed by the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) using a Crystal Reports tool.

The system has recently been transferred from the software developer to in-house management. Work continues on fine-tuning of the system, including the transfer of some data items from ‘mandatory’ to ‘optional’ status.

A comprehensive data dictionary forms part of the FAMnet system. The data dictionary is in two parts:

- Service Activity, covering information on the services provided to clients by service providers
- Supply Side, covering items concerned with the relationship between service providers and the department, such as contract and budget information etc.

The data dictionary is updated as new items are added or items are amended. It is accessible directly from within the system via a 'Help' button, and can also be downloaded by individual system users.

Parenting Program

Some data is collected about the Good Beginnings program, particularly in relation to costings and outcomes, as input to evaluations. Good Beginnings Australia is developing a new database to enable it to report more accurately on the program's outcomes. The 2-year evaluation of Good Beginnings revealed inadequacies in its existing database. The department has not developed particular data collection forms, but relies on the funding agreement as the means by which program information is obtained.

Other funded services

No data collections exist for other in-scope services. However, as part of the review of agencies funded by the former Department of Health and Family Services, a new data collection system is planned, along with new agreements. It is anticipated that this may take a few years for full implementation.

Evaluations

The department conducts regular evaluation studies of particular programs or elements of programs, each of which gather specific data sets. Recent examples of evaluations include the Good Beginnings project; and projects in the Family Relationships Services Program which focussed on family violence research and intervention; the Community Development Officer (diversity) project relating to service provision to clients from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds; children's contact services; and adolescent mediation and family therapy services. A preliminary survey of affected customers of the new Family Tax Benefit has been undertaken to identify service delivery issues, and provide baseline data for a more comprehensive survey after 12 months operation of the new payment.

Customer surveys and longitudinal studies

The department has a comprehensive and detailed program of customer surveys and longitudinal studies to provide information on a range of departmental programs. Key among these studies are the Customer Participation Survey, the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey (see below); and the General Customer Survey.

The Customer Participation Survey involved a telephone survey of 2,027 recipients of social security payments for people of workforce age and covered areas which are related to family

support, including participation in voluntary or community activities. Analysis of the data from this survey is continuing.

The General Customer Survey involves a sample of FaCS customers (pension, benefit and allowance recipients, people receiving family payments and holders of Health Care Cards), who are followed up each year to provide information on the impact of income support payments. Analysis of the data from the survey is ongoing.

Developments and initiatives

Stronger Families and Communities

A significant development in coming months will be the finalisation of guidelines for new services funded under the Stronger Families and Communities initiative. Specific services types which are expected to be within the scope of the Family Support Services Scoping study are:

- the Stronger Families Fund—this fund will establish a number of projects to support parents and families in their role of caring for young children. Projects will be developed locally and the fund will assist projects which help families with their parenting; provide young children with development opportunities; help balance the needs of work and family; and provide resources to deal with relationship difficulties. Communities will be encouraged to combine Stronger Families funds with existing community resources and infrastructure. The fund will also establish a national clearing house for local communities to access information and research on successful projects. \$40 million has been committed to this fund over 4 years.
- early intervention, parenting and family relationship support—to provide services and activities with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention through practical skills and support for families facing difficulties and whose needs are not currently met by existing approaches. Expanded family skills training will be a focus, as will playgroups in rural and regional areas, relationship education in new and responsive ways, family counselling services through the Department of Transport and Regional Services' Regional Communities Program; and developing and providing training resources for professionals to assist and refer individuals and families to support. \$47.3 million has been committed over 4 years.
- longitudinal study of Australian children—information from this study will address a major gap in knowledge and information about early childhood experiences and their impact on education, health, employment, crime and social problems. The study will complement the HILDA Survey and other studies being undertaken by the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the Australian National University (see below). \$6.1 million has been committed over 4 years to the study.
- communication strategy—this strategy will, amongst other initiatives, promote and reinforce the significance of good parenting and strong family relationships to children, communities and Australia's future. A range of media will be used to promote the Families and Communities Strategies, with \$8 million committed over 4 years.

Other initiatives in the strategy will be partly in scope of the Family Support Services Scoping study, including the Leadership in Local Communities projects; National Skills

Development for Volunteers; Local Solutions to Local Problems; and the Can Do Community Initiative.

Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey

The HILDA Survey is a long-term panel survey focussing on the links between labour market, income dynamics and family structures, as well as retirement issues. Although primarily related to economic determinants of behaviour, there is an inter-related objective relating to family dynamics, focussing on separation/divorce, and social/economic status and on links between income support and family formation and breakdown. The survey is currently in the late stages of survey instrument design. AC Nielsen has been subcontracted to carry out the fieldwork by the survey contractor, a research consortium led by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research from the University of Melbourne. Wave 1 will start in September 2001 and be completed in December 2001.