

5 Next steps

5.1 NCSIMG bid to the Community and Disability Services Ministerial Advisory Council to fund implementation of the CSNMDS

In August 2006, the NCSIMG, in cooperation with the Children's Services Committee, submitted a budget bid for 2006–07 to the Community and Disability Services Ministerial Advisory Council (CDSMAC) for the project 'Cost Benefit Analysis of the Children's Services National Minimum Dataset'. The purpose of the project is to explore options for national implementation of the CSNMDS and examine the costs and benefits of each option. The results will be a basis for future decision making about implementation. The objectives are to:

- describe the different options for implementation of the CSNMDS
- examine the costs and benefits of each option
- present the most feasible option(s) for consideration by CDSMAC.

It is intended that the report will present in conclusion a limited number of the most feasible options in sufficient detail to guide future decision making.

The submission was considered out of session by CDSMAC and formally endorsed at their August 2006 meeting.

5.2 Impact of implementation of the CSNMDS

Implementation of the CSNMDS will bring many benefits for policy makers, service providers and users. It will increase the range of information which is available on a regular basis – encompassing not only child care but also preschool services. It will provide the type of information needed for the national planning of children's services and, in doing so, contribute to the National Agenda for Early Childhood. It will also enhance the accountability of the sector through such mechanisms as expanded reporting in the Report of Government Services.

Children's services have always been recognised as important, but in recent years they have received increasing political attention as a vital community resource. The well-publicised trend towards corporatisation of child care has also raised the profile of children's services as a commercial consideration. The CSNMDS will provide an expanded understanding of children's services, for the first time providing a focus on the children and their families who use these services.

It is difficult at this stage to determine what impact implementation of the CSNMDS will have on existing data collections. Of particular interest to all stakeholders is the possibility of reducing the number and frequency of current data collections relating to children's services. Now that a minimum data set has been identified, the process of mapping this to existing collections can begin. This and other issues, such as cost effectiveness of the data collection,

whether timely analysis and reporting can be taken, and data accessibility, will be considered as part of the implementation analysis.

Regardless of the implementation approach decided, there will be a strong desire by CDSMAC for existing data collections to incorporate the standard definitions and data items defined by the CSNMDS. Improving the consistency and comparability of children's services data on a national basis will allow for better policy making, planning and management.

In anticipation of the implementation of the CSNMDS, FaCSIA has trialled all CSNMDS data items for use in their 2006 Australian Government Census of Child Care Services. Whilst this data collection does not include preschools or child care services not funded with Australian Government funds (e.g. those that only receive state/territory government assistance), it is a very important step towards the development of nationally consistent data on children's services.