



**Australian Government**

**Department of Families, Housing,  
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs**

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**A Departmental Discussion Paper**  
**Developing a Family Support Program**

**Improving the lives of Australians**

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# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The Vision for the Family Support Program</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Overview</b>	<b>3</b>
About the Family Support Program	3
The consultation process	4
<b>Program Principles</b>	<b>5</b>
Governing Principles	5
Operational Framework	6
Key Program Requirements	6
<b>Consultation context</b>	<b>8</b>
Important contextual information	8
<b>Consultation questions</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Next steps and how to respond</b>	<b>10</b>
Local forums to talk with providers	10
How to provide written feedback	10
After the consultation process	10
<b>Appendix A</b>	
The Family Support System	11

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## Foreword

On 16 February 2009, the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, announced the Australian Government was bringing together a range of families, parenting and children's services under the national Family Support Program (FSP) to streamline administrative arrangements and provide more flexibility to better assist families improve outcomes for themselves and their children.

The Minister expects the Family Support Program to build on the strengths and achievements of the individual services and to further strengthen the capacity of providers to offer more flexible, responsive and coordinated support for families and children, particularly at the local community level. This recognises the work already underway in family relationship services and Community for Children sites.

To develop the way forward the Department has prepared this discussion paper for consulting with state/territory and local governments and the FSP sector. The paper:

- acknowledges the complexity of modern family structures and day to day life
- cements the principles of strengthening family resilience and working in the best interests of children across a broader suite of family and children's programs
- embraces tailored and coordinated service delivery as a recognised means of better meeting the needs of families and children
- takes forward the Commonwealth's new emphasis that vulnerable families, domestic violence and child protection are everybody's business
- recognises that new ways of working require further changes in program design and delivery
- seeks the views of the sector and services in the spirit of collaboration.

The consultation process values all feedback, written and face to face. In particular we are interested in hearing:

- whether the operating environment as set out in this paper reflects what you consider should be in place to deliver an effective program
- what practical changes need to be made or considered together to create this environment
  - what are the priorities that need to be in place by July 2011
  - what are the longer term activities required to enhance the program and its operating environment
- about the challenges you see in better linking services and organisations at the local level to improve outcomes for families and children.

The Department is also keen to hear from you about how well the draft FSP vision will meet the needs of families and children, particularly those that are disadvantaged and vulnerable.

Through this consultation process, the Department will gather your views to present an outcomes paper to the Minister that articulates a proposed program operating environment for her consideration.

Please take the time to contribute to the development of a program where children and families can benefit from more coordinated and responsive services and be better equipped to manage life challenges in the future.



Glenys Beauchamp  
Deputy Secretary  
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services  
and Indigenous Affairs  
22 May 2009

### Vision Statement

*The Family Support Program will work with and support families and nurture children to enable them to better manage life's transitions and contribute to building stronger, more resilient communities*

## The Vision for the Family Support Program

*The Family Support Program (FSP) provides a new opportunity for Government and the community sector to change the way they work together to deliver high quality, coordinated services that will better meet the needs of children and families.*

*By mid-2011 we will, together, have changed the way families and children receive services for relationship, parenting and/or separation issues. Families, either as individual members or as a family, can expect to:*

- *receive tailored and coordinated support through FSP services, and/or*
- *be better linked to other appropriate service providers (Commonwealth, state/territory or local).*

*People accessing FSP services will only need to tell their story once through the appropriate sharing of information between providers and families, with relevant consents in place. Clients will be confident that they will receive services from an FSP provider that is quality assured, sensitive to their circumstances and committed to continuous improvement. FSP providers will be confident in referring families and children to other FSP services and providers will have processes to link clients to other services including legal services and the courts and to follow up with local community services and other government provided services at the state/territory and local level.*

*Providers will work together with families and children in a strength-based, child focussed and non-threatening environment, where clients can be assured that they will be offered relevant support that will work to strengthen their resilience to better meet life transitions and challenges and ongoing parenting responsibilities. FSP services available in a service region will be based on the identified needs of the area.*

*All FSP services will operate from suitable sites that are easy for local people to locate and access. In areas identified as disadvantaged, specific services will work actively with the community to overcome locational disadvantage.*

*Families in each community will have access to information on the range of services available in their local areas. Information will be provided in ways that effectively reach local families needing assistance and support. The broader role of communities in working with families and children to help build family resilience is acknowledged and supported.*

*Service providers will have greater flexibility in delivering a range of services to meet agreed needs and outcomes in local areas and greater capacity to focus on meeting their client's needs as a result of reduced administrative requirements of Government. Providers will also be given greater opportunity to influence Government's policy directions for the program through the sharing of information, research and data. Providers will be consulted and engaged in the development of programs, new initiatives and service models to ensure services best meet the needs of families and children.*

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## Overview

On 16 February 2009, the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, announced the formation of the Family Support Program.

The Family Support Program is a key element of the Government's investment in supporting families and children. Together with financial support provided through payments such as the Family Tax Benefit and a range of community based programs such as the Financial Management Program, the Government is working to deliver, in collaboration with other levels of government and non-government organisations, better coordinated and more flexible support services for children and families.

The Government is committed to:

- enhancing the safety and wellbeing of children
- promoting social inclusion and overcoming disadvantage
- working with the community sector through a National Compact (an agreement between the Australian Government and the not-for-profit sector that outlines how the two will work together to improve and strengthen their relationship).

## About the Family Support Program

The FSP brings together a number of community based families, parenting and children's services:

- Family Relationship Services Program
- Strengthening Families Program funded under the National Illicit Drug Strategy
- Communities for Children Initiative
- Invest to Grow program
- Child Care Links
- Indigenous Children Program
- Indigenous Parenting Support Services
- Playgroup Program
- Responding Early Assisting Children Program.

The Minister has brought these services together under a single umbrella program to join up a series of key policy and service delivery approaches that have been developed over time to address specific family and/or social issues. In bringing these services together, the FSP will build on the strengths and achievements of each of these individual initiatives to provide a more coordinated and flexible approach to delivering support to families and children. Bringing these services together provides the opportunity to remove service and policy silos and facilitate greater links across the FSP service system and strengthen links with the broader community service sector and other levels of government.

The FSP comprises three core service streams:

- *Family and Parenting Services*: provides early intervention and prevention services and tools to families to build and strengthen relationships, develop skills and support parents and children navigating life's transitions.
- *Community and Family Partnerships*: provides intensive and coordinated support targeted at significantly disadvantaged communities and families and especially vulnerable and at risk families and children.
- *Family Law Services* (Attorney-General's Department responsibility): provides assistance to families to manage the process and impacts of separation in the best interests of children.

While many families seeking support may receive all the assistance they need from a single service stream, an increasing number of families and children present with multiple and complex needs. These children and families will benefit from bringing together the broad suite of FSP services in a tailored and coordinated way. Improved flexibility and tailoring of services will primarily be within the FSP streams in the first instance, however, the longer term goal is to offer families and children access to tailored and coordinated services across the FSP streams and with other FaHCSIA programs and other levels of government.

The services offered through the core FSP service streams will work to build the resilience of:

- parents and children navigating life transitions
- vulnerable and at risk families and children in highly disadvantaged communities
- families and children experiencing separation and divorce.

FSP services will offer a range of support and assistance for children of all ages. For example: Communities for Children focuses on 0-12 years while other services such as family relationship services can support children who are older. In addition, FSP service delivery will reflect critical elements of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020, particularly by providing child focussed services and enhancing services and support for vulnerable children, families and children at risk. The diagram at Appendix A illustrates the operation of the FSP within the broader system of services for families and children.

## The consultation process

The Minister stated in her speech on 16 February 2009 that the Department would talk with service providers and seek input on how to make the transition to a new FSP. The Department is therefore conducting a consultation process to explore with the sector the changes needed to transition to the FSP.

The consultation process will provide the sector with the opportunity to:

- contribute to the development of the FSP around how it will operate
- respond to a series of questions provided on key program areas to focus discussions to improve the administration and delivery of the program in the future.

This consultation process is concerned with seeking the views of the sector around the design of the FSP to ensure services in local areas better support families and children.

The Department also expects to have further consultations with the sector on specific program design elements including:

- an overarching outcomes framework
- implementing service standards for the program.

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# Program Principles

In announcing the Family Support Program to improve child development, safety and family functioning, the Minister expressed her commitment to supporting the most vulnerable in the community and to building stronger, more resilient families with earlier interventions for children at risk of abuse or neglect.

The Minister is resolute in her expectation that services in any or all of the core service streams will continue to:

- strengthen family relationships
- foster more resilience within families and communities
- work in the best interests of children to create supportive family environments where children can grow – safe, well and happy.

The Minister expects that services delivered under the FSP will build on the existing strengths of individuals, families and communities to develop positive and sustainable change.

## Governing Principles

The FSP is underpinned by the following three principles. These principles provide the foundation on which an overarching outcome framework will be developed for the program. The principles are of equal importance and capture the purpose of the core service streams (singularly and as a whole) and are expressed as:

### *Building the capability and resilience of Australian families and children in their communities.*

- Ensure relevant services are available to the broad population to assist children and adults to strengthen their abilities as families to support themselves – whether they remain as a single family unit, separate or whether the parents/carers of children are in different locations.
- Offer services that focus on equipping people to better manage life transitions.
- Provide services that facilitate greater social engagement of families and children.
- Support the role of communities in working with families and children to help build family resilience.

### *Working in the best interests of children.*

- Enhance family capacity to improve the well-being and safety of children.
- Enhance children's development and skills in a way that facilitates and builds on the role of parents and carers.
- Provide child focussed and/or child inclusive services that enable children's voices to be heard.
- Deliver well targeted services to reduce intergenerational disadvantage.
- Improve outcomes for children by working with families to build supportive home environments.
- Ensure that all families take account of the best interests of their children in making parenting arrangements.

### *Responding to the vulnerabilities of families and children in their communities.*

- Provide intensive early intervention and prevention services and activities for vulnerable children and families at risk of harm, neglect and/or social exclusion.
- Improve targeting of services to overcome long term disadvantage/s in identified locations.
- Work with families and children with complex needs and/or multiple disadvantages to improve their outcomes.
- Enhance the connectivity between services provided by state/territory and local government services that provide interventions to children and families at risk.

## Operational Framework

The Minister is also clear in her intention that the Family Support Program should deliver accessible and coordinated support services without unnecessary red-tape. By working with the not-for profit sector and by cutting red-tape, the Government is seeking to reform and improve the business environment for service providers. It is expected this will provide the opportunity to redirect resources to the delivery of services, while retaining a rigorous performance and evaluative framework to ensure the most appropriate and effective service interventions are delivered to families and children.

The Minister also recognises that while not replicating existing state, territory or local services, there is scope to implement a consistent approach, particularly in early intervention services - to work more effectively together to achieve a common goal of improving outcomes for children and families.

The Department has identified six Key Program Requirements that are critical to achieving an effective operating environment for the program. Feedback and discussion is invited on the program's proposed operating framework.

## Key Program Requirements

The FSP will operate in an environment where outcomes for families and children are enhanced by:

### *1. Strengthening collaboration between and amongst providers and Government and community.*

- Foster an environment of collaboration and co-operation between the Government, FSP providers, families and communities and other relevant stakeholders.
- Provide service providers with greater capacity to participate in and influence the ongoing evolution of the FSP.
- Enable service providers and communities to participate in determining the specific services that need to be delivered in individual locations.
- Recognise shared responsibility and accountability.
- Through appropriate mechanisms, improve the Commonwealth's capacity to work collaboratively with state and territory governments in recognition that FSP services are part of a wider community service network.

### *2. Improving access to relevant services.*

- Offer services and activities that meet the identified needs of the local population.
- Deliver services from suitable sites that are accessible to identified client group/s.
- Actively work to reach those clients who typically don't access services and/or who experience barriers to participation.
- Provide people with relevant information so they can make informed choices about services to use in their region.
- Ensure providers have access to relevant information and data to deliver services that meet local needs and to refer clients to relevant services.

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### *3. Ensuring services link families and children with other relevant community support services.*

- ▶ Move towards a ‘no wrong door’ seamless approach so clients requiring FSP services can enter through any FSP service.
- ▶ Improve service pathways with:
  - Australian Government services
  - state and territory government services
  - local government services
  - other community services.
- ▶ Enhance referral and linking systems between relevant FSP services and other related activities.
- ▶ Develop processes that enable sharing of client information without compromising the privacy and confidentiality of clients, consistent with legal obligations.

### *4. Offering more flexible and responsive service delivery approaches.*

- ▶ Enable FSP services to work together flexibly to meet the different needs of families and children.
- ▶ Encourage innovation that can respond to the diversity of families and communities needs.
- ▶ Enable flexibility to work across diverse policy agendas that impact on families and children such as family law, child protection, homelessness etc.
- ▶ Provide services and activities in a way that maximises outcomes for the diverse range of target groups that may access FSP services.
- ▶ Ensure providers have access to relevant information and data to deliver appropriate services.

### *5. Operating within an outcome based accountability framework*

- ▶ Establish an outcome based accountability framework for the FSP with measurable performance indicators.
- ▶ Ensure quality services are delivered that maximise outcomes for clients.
- ▶ Facilitate sharing of data and evidence to achieve common program goals.

### *6. Improving the business environment for providers*

The Department will:

- ▶ Reduce red-tape requirements to enable providers to achieve service delivery outcomes without being burdened by unnecessary red-tape:
  - streamline financial management practices, including funding acquittal requirements
  - streamline data requirements based on the collect once/use many times principle and
  - standardise reporting tools.
- ▶ Support providers through the provision of consistent procedures and policies that are supported by a common program language.
- ▶ Work with providers consistent with the Australian Government’s National Compact.

# Consultation context

## Important contextual information

In undertaking the consultation process, it is important that the current context from which the FSP is being implemented is recognised.

Key points to note are:

- The Government has provided a two year period, to June 2011, to transition to the FSP. This acknowledges that changing the different business rules currently applying to the three core service streams in respect of funding, standards of operation, data collection, reporting obligations and catchment areas will take time.
- FSP services are part of a wider service system that clients experience that connects with services funded by state, territory and local governments and the community sector. Developing a strong collaborative relationship across all sectors and levels of government will be important to establishing better service connections at the local level.
- The community sector and all levels of government benefit by working together to support children and families and bring a range of different strengths. There are however challenges in this relationship which should be acknowledged so that they can be addressed in program design and through processes such as the National Compact.
- The program is and will continue to be built on evidence around service delivery coming through independent research and evaluations such as the Evaluation of the New Family Law Reforms, National Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, and the Stronger Families in Australia Study, as well as information collected from providers on individual services.
- An overarching FSP Outcomes Framework with identified and measurable short, intermediate and long term outcomes will be developed building on current good practice and in consultation with the FSP sector.
- The Attorney-General's Department has policy responsibility for the family law system, including Post Separation Services and Family Relationship Centres, to support the Government's family law policy goals.
- With the current tight fiscal environment, the consultation is concerned with ideas and ways to better use existing resources.
- Streamlining Government administrative requirements and reducing red-tape through initiatives such implementing a common business model for reporting and performance will enable providers to have more time and resources to focus on service delivery for clients.

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# Consultation questions

## **Theme 1: Program Operational Framework**

1. Does the draft program operational framework and six key requirements identify all the key factors that will support the more effective delivery of FSP services?

## **Theme 2: Program Design**

2. How can we build flexible service models with improved service pathways that are consistent with the FSP principles and operational framework?
3. How can we ensure the service system is able to adequately support and engage both universal and targeted client groups in a region?

## **Theme 3: Service Delivery and Innovation**

4. How can we improve service delivery so that clients requiring services in any of the core FSP streams can enter through any FSP service (ie a 'no wrong door' approach)?
5. How can we better link with other community services (eg FaHCSIA and other Commonwealth programs, state /territory services such as child protection services and mental health)?
6. Should we have a set of standards for staff delivering any FSP service?
7. What service quality standards do you think the FSP should have and are there existing standards that might apply?
8. In what circumstances would providers benefit from sharing information/data/resources (including offices, administrative processes, workers, products) and how could this be facilitated?

## **Theme 4: Needs and Location**

9. What factors should be taken into account in determining the range of FSP services required for a region or community?
10. What is the best way to specify service catchments/service delivery areas? For example: In delivering services should your delivery area be defined by statistical sub-divisions, local government regions, postcodes or by other means?

## **Theme 5: Selection and Retention of Providers**

11. How should a balance be achieved between giving providers funding security, managing performance and ensuring services are located in areas of need?
12. How should good performance in the FSP be identified?
13. How should outcomes in the FSP be measured?
14. What systems and processes could we use to support this?

## **Theme 6: Funding**

15. What are the key features that providers consider essential in building a rational and transparent system for distributing available resources?

## Next steps and how to respond

### Local forums to talk with providers and stakeholders

During June, the Department will be conducting a series of forums in each state and territory to enable face to face discussion with providers and other stakeholders on the development of the Family Support Program. Organisations will be advised of these forums through a number of mechanisms including newsletters sent to all currently funded families, children and parenting providers.

The questions set out in this discussion paper will provide the basis for discussions at these forums, however, forum participants will have the opportunity to raise other issues of concern in implementing the FSP.

### How to provide written feedback

Further information is available at [www.fahcsia.gov.au](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au) for providers and other interested stakeholders who wish to send us their views.

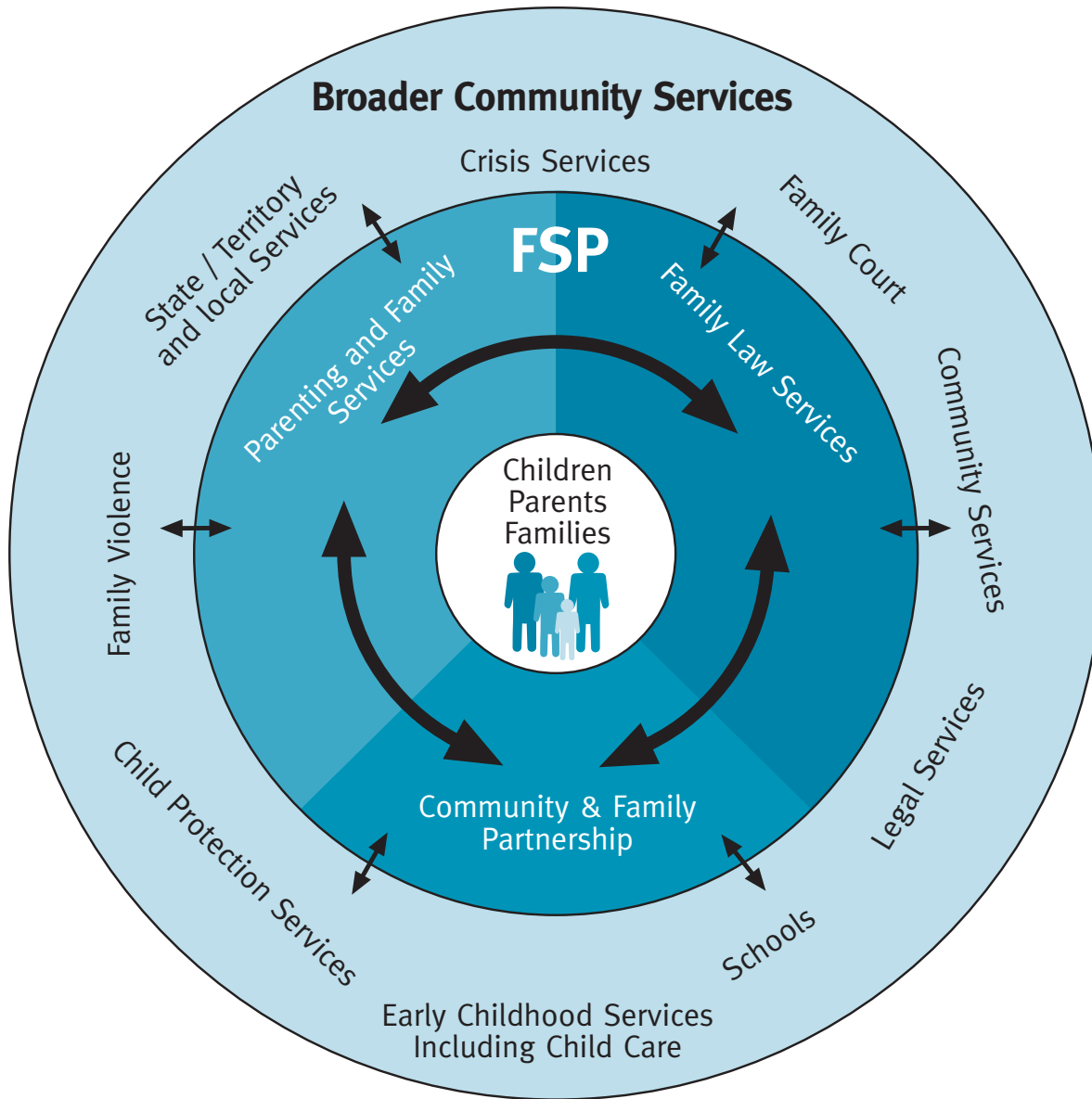
The discussion paper will be available on this site during May and June together with a template for framing and focusing written comments around the key questions set out in this paper. The period for receiving written feedback will close on 30 June 2009.

### After the consultation process

The Department will consider the information gathered through the consultation process and will prepare an outcomes paper to identify the future direction for the FSP. The Department will provide feedback to the sector during the second half of 2009.

# Appendix A

## Family Support System



### The Family Support Program

The Family Support Program is a national program that aims to improve child development, safety and family functioning through the provision of support services to help build stronger, more resilient families and communities.

