

Governance and policy priorities

Commonwealth, state and territory governments share responsibility for providing family support services in Australia. The Department of Social Services (DSS) is responsible for a diverse range of policies, payments, programmes and services that improve people and families' wellbeing, including social safety nets and access to care services. Other Commonwealth departments are responsible for education and early childcare policy. Child protection, healthcare and youth justice fall predominantly within the constitutional responsibility of the states and territories, many of which have Ministers for children and youth and Children's Commissioners.

The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 provides guidance for the provision of family support services. The National Framework concludes in June 2021 and will be replaced by another ten year Framework shortly after. The successor plan will aim to make significant and sustained progress in reducing the rates of child abuse and neglect and its intergenerational impacts and will focus on children and families experiencing disadvantage and/or vulnerability. The successor plan will have a particular focus on addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander overrepresentation in child protection systems and will align closely with the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

In 2019, the Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children 2010–2022 was established. The Fourth Action Plan outlines five national priorities for government, including:

- Key focus on Primary Prevention - prevention is the most effective way to eliminate violence against women and their children and is at the core of the Fourth Action Plan.
 - Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children

- Respect, listen and respond to the diverse experiences and knowledge of women and their children affected by violence.
- Respond to sexual violence and sexual harassment through implementing accredited training, developing national standards and specific resources, and community awareness activities (see the [National Implementation Plan](#)).
- Improve support and service system responses.



Box 1. Examples of family support service programmes

The Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY), is a two-year, home-based parenting and early childhood learning program for children aged four and five. The programme supports parents and carers to be their child's first teacher. The programme aims to create a positive learning environment to prepare children for school, and fosters local community leadership. It is an early intervention and prevention approach to assist families transition their child into school. Parents who have completed the training can be employed (often on a part-time basis) by the local HIPPY provider delivering the programme to other/new HIPPY parents in their community.

Communities for Children Facilitating Partners (CfC FPs) supports children (age 0 to 12) and families in 52 disadvantaged communities across Australia. CfC FPs fund other organizations (known as Community Partners) to provide services including parenting support, group peer support, case management, home visiting services and other supports to promote child wellbeing.

Programmes, characteristics and use

Australia's social security system provides a range of financial support for programmes supporting children and their families. These supports fall into three broad categories;

- Direct payments to individuals including family payments for people with dependent children (including children with disabilities).

- Partnerships with states and territories in shared policy areas, including housing, homelessness, disability services, concessions and children’s welfare.
- Funding organizations to deliver services that support families and individuals according to their needs.

Cost and funding

Family support services in Australia are publicly subsidized by mainly national funds. From July 2019 to June 2020, the Families and Children Activity provided more than ASD290 million (about USD210 million) in services across Australia. Providers deliver a range of services under these programmes such as parenting programmes, community and supported playgroups, school readiness programmes, and family relationship counselling services.

Monitoring and knowledge sharing

Monitoring is conducted at multiple levels. All Australian governments outsource research and evaluation to support best practice policy and programme development. Independent statutory bodies, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Australian Institute for Family Studies, collect data, carry out research and report on a range of matters relevant to children’s health and wellbeing.

A range of evaluations or research conducted by DSS helps to inform and develop the evidence base, steering current and future policy and programme directions. For example, *Growing Up in Australia* is a child longitudinal study, conducted through a partnership between DSS, the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the Australian Bureau of Statistics, with advice from academia. The study establishes an evidence base for guiding policies that promote the optimal development and wellbeing of Australian children.

Families Australia, Family and Relationship Services Australia and the Families and Communities Service Improvement (FCSI) Activity play a key role in knowledge and information sharing. The range of functions performed by FCSI funded providers include:

- Facilitating engagement between the DSS and the related sectors, such as the not-for-profit, research, business community, philanthropic organizations, and Indigenous, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, on issues about the Government’s social policy and families and communities programmes.
- Communicating information about the Government’s social policy agenda and the DSS families and communities programmes and policies.
- Organising events and conferences of relevance to the sector.
- Providing education and professional training about the DSS families and communities programmes or policies.

The [Child Family Community Australia](#) (CFCA) Information Exchange is an information hub for evidence that is funded by the DSS, which provides resources and support for professionals working in the child, family and community welfare sector. The CFCA produces a number of publications, including papers, resource sheets, practice guides and webinars, published electronically and are free.

The Australian Independent statutory bodies, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Australian Institute for Family Studies collect data, carry out research and report on a range of matters relevant to children’s health and wellbeing and generate publically available information.

Families’ opinions are taken into consideration regarding relevant policies in several ways. For example, Children and young people were consulted on the Third Action Plan under the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009-2020. DSS also has carriage of many policy areas that require communication with the Australian public and organizations. [Engage.dss.gov.au](#) is a website maintained by DSS to conduct online consultations with the Australian public. Additionally, service providers views and input are gained through regular periodic consultation regarding specific programmes.

Contact

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