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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **LESS SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE SEPARATING FAMILIES**

"Family Relationship Services Australia (FRSA) is disappointed to confirm the Attorney General will proceed with severe funding cuts to services for families in 2011-12". These cuts will be implemented despite the Government's renewed focus on supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families including those with mental health issues. The cuts totalling \$44m were announced in the 2010 Budget and include:

- \$9M cut from Family Relationship Centres (FRCs) - delayed for six months and then applied as a 4% reduction across all FRCs from 1 Jan 2012 ;
- \$4.5M cut from Family Counselling services over 3 years - applied as a 9% reduction to all Attorney-General's funded counselling services from 1 July 2011;
- \$3.9M cut from Post Separation Support services which include programs for children and young people and intensive support for parents in high conflict, applied as a 3% reduction from 1 July 2011.

In addition, \$12.9M will be taken from research, evaluation and training.

"The implementation of these cuts will have a severe impact on the capacity of family relationship services to respond to the increasingly complex needs of separating and separated families at a time when demand for support is increasing and waiting lists are already too long. In consultations with services over the past year the Government appeared to be taking on board the impact these cuts will have and we were hoping for a reversal. These funding cuts cannot be absorbed by services that spend over 75% of every dollar received on wages to directly support families. A conservative estimate is around 100 jobs will be lost or unfilled and over 2,500 families will either receive no service or wait up to 12 weeks for an initial assessment." said Samantha Page, Executive Director, FRSA.

At a time when the Government is acknowledging the need for increased investment in mental health services FRSA believe these cuts to post separation services are counter-productive. Providing psycho-social support to children and parents during separation is a cost-effective process for reducing the debilitating impact of poor mental health in the long-term.

As reported in the Evaluation of the 2006 Family Law Reforms by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, there is evidence of a significant 'cultural shift' away from adversarial, legal disputes over post-separation parenting arrangements with reductions in the number of families needing Family Court interventions. This has led to a reduction in the extent to which children are exposed to ongoing parental conflict and in some cases family violence.

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Contact: Samantha Page 0448 883 687