

19 January 2017

Budget Policy Division Department of the Treasury
Langton Crescent
PARKES ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Federal Government's pre-Budget submission process. This submission outlines a number of priority issues for Family and Relationship Services Australia's (FRSA) we ask be taken into consideration in the 2017-2018 Federal Budget.

While it is understood that the Government's priority is to bring the Budget back to surplus, in doing so the wellbeing of children, families and communities must not be compromised.

It is FRSA's position that any savings made should go into what should ideally be a key priority for Government: improving the safety and wellbeing of children, families and communities. Family and relationship services have an essential role in realising such outcomes, including for the most vulnerable of Australians.

It is essential that long-term benefits be given priority over expenditure cuts for short-term savings, as it has been demonstrated that longer term economic and social benefits to the whole community are realised when an investment is made in prevention and early intervention services. FRSA has been exploring how to apply a greater prevention and early intervention approach across our sector and has commissioned Deakin University to produce the research report *Strengthening prevention and early intervention services for families into the future*.

This focus on investing on what will ensure meaningful and long-term outcomes for children, families and communities shapes our first recommendation for budget allocation. The other recommendations made relate to:

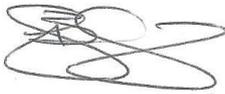
- Funding extensions and indexation;
- Funding for Family Law Services to meet the anticipated real costs for delivering services
- Support for the Co-ordinated Family Dispute Resolution model of service delivery

- Support for a further round of scholarships for people of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds in post separation services (FRSA has a project management/administrative function in previous rounds)
- The potential impact on families by extending freezes on Family Payments Threshold and ceasing Family Tax Benefits Part A end-of-year supplement
- Our support for funding for Family Matters: Strong communities. Strong culture. Strong children, to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 2040

It is essential our not-for-profit sector is fully supported and funded by government to deliver family and relationship services across Australia. These services make a critical difference in the lives of people our network of members work with, helping them to realise greater independence and self-determination in life.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on 02 6162 1811 to discuss the content of this Submission, including the requested Budget allocation to invest in the prevention and early intervention approaches to better delivery family and relationship services and achieving better outcomes for children, families and communities.

Yours sincerely



Jackie Brady

Greater funding for prevention and early intervention approaches in the delivery of family and relationship services

Our sector is accordingly exploring how more of a prevention and early intervention approach can be taken in our service delivery, with FRSA commissioning Deakin University to produce the research report *Strengthening prevention and early intervention services for families into the future*, to be released for discussion across our sector in early 2017.

The report will also provide a sector wide opportunity to look at the longer term benefits of intervening early with a view to achieving a range of social and health outcomes. The intention of this work will be to have a broader reach across family and relationship services that makes it distinct from the Government's own Try, Test & Learn policy initiative focused on specific cohorts (potentially within specific geographical areas).

We anticipate there will be opportunities to explore with our sector, as well as a range of stakeholders, a range of recommendations that stem from this report and look forward to discussing these with the Government into the future.

Funding extensions and indexation

While we welcome the Government's announcement at MYEFO of 12 month funding extensions (through until end of June 2018) for Kids in Focus, Specialised Family Violence services, as well as \$10 million for *Children and Parenting Support Services* (additional services after 71 services had received 'gap' funding in 2015), the preference is for the surety that a minimum 5 year funding provides.

In this vein, FRSA welcomes the following allocation of funds by the government but also wishes to highlight that the 5 year objective for funding was not achieved:

- \$5.7 million over four years from 2017-18 (including \$1.5 million in 2020-21) to continue the delivery of *Forced Adoption Support Services*, which provide specialist services to support people adversely affected by past forced adoption practices and policies.
- \$15.0 million over three years from 2016-17 to protect the rights of older Australians from all forms of abuse. This measure delivers on the Government's election commitment and includes funding for a study into the prevalence of elder abuse, a national awareness campaign to educate and improve attitudes toward older Australians, developing and implementing a national elder abuse hotline and developing and implementing a pilot training program for frontline staff.

Indexation Pause – AGD Family Law Services

The Indexation Pause imposed on Commonwealth Family Law Services over three years was an unfortunate decision taken by the Government in the Federal Budget of 2014 – especially given that demand for services is increasing as is the complexity of cases being dealt with in the Family Law Services system.

Even if a very conservative indexation rate of 1.6% was awarded to Family Law Services over the past three years, services have needed to cut costs by nearly 5% in an environment that is increasingly complex and in demand.

Whilst acknowledging that the indexation pause on these services is to be lifted as of the end of June 2017, services still operate with waiting lists. In efforts to assist services meet the demands of clients on waitlists, FRSA is seeking an injection of funds to compensate for the loss of capacity resulting from the indexation pause so that services are better able to meet the demands of the Australian community.

FRSA requests that the Federal Government adopt a whole-of-Government approach to indexation and that a fair, equitable and transparent process be implemented that keeps pace with the increasing cost of service provision.

Funding for Family Law Services to meet the anticipated real costs in delivering services

The KPMG *Future Focus of the Family Law Services* Final Report 22 January 2016, commissioned by the Attorney-General's Department has conducted modelling that indicates that the demand for Family Law Services will increase over the forward years, through until 2025.

Based on predictions by KPMG in this report regarding growth of demand for services, the increased cost to Government would be, at a minimum, \$21.2 million through until 2025 (the KPMG Report not specifying whether this \$21.2 million factors in indexation or not).

FRSA proposes that the Federal Government appropriately fund services to meet demand.

Support for co-ordinated Family Dispute Resolution

FRSA strongly advocates for the need to explore further a co-ordinated Family Dispute Resolution model of services to better assist families who are separating. As noted previously, the complexity of clients presenting to Family Law Services is increasing and it is the view of FRSA that clients would benefit from a Co-ordinated Family Dispute Resolution model.

FRSA calls for the funding of a 2012 pilot for co-ordinated Family Dispute Resolution, which had been withdrawn, to be reinstated. This model was trialled with a specific emphasis on Family Dispute Resolution in families where family violence was present.

The process applied a multiagency, multidisciplinary setting to provide parents with a safe, non-adversarial and child sensitive approach to resolving post separation parenting disputes. An evaluation of a coordinated family dispute resolution pilot (by AIFS) highlights the complexities in delivering services in multi-agency, multidisciplinary settings. The 2012 evaluation found that while coordinated family dispute resolution practice is complex, most of the professionals and clients of the service were positive about the process (Kaspiew, R., 2012, p.xi). Where mediation is handled carefully, the process can be safe and empower parents to make appropriate arrangements for their children (Kaspiew, R., 2012, p.xii). The evaluation recommended the development of practice guidelines and use of a uniform risk assessment framework (which has since been developed); as well as a further evaluation, within an appropriate time.

FRSA would welcome funding to support these recommendations.

Support for a further round of scholarships for people of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds in post separation services

FRSA has previously successfully administered two funding rounds of scholarships for people of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds in post separation services, in:

- October 2012 to September 2014; and
- March 2015 to January 2017.

Both funding rounds have resulted in just under 40 CALD and Indigenous scholarship recipients securing scholarship to aid in their post separation support services training. The scholarship funding achieves meaningful and practical outcomes in Closing the Gap and reducing disadvantage for vulnerable families and communities. Often, Indigenous children, families and communities can only be assisted by Indigenous practitioners.

The funding for the March 2015 to January 2017 round of scholarships was \$150,000 (exc GST). FRSA requests that the same or more funding be allocated to another funding round to build on the successes achieved since 2012.

The potential impact on families by extending freezes on Family Payments Threshold and ceasing Family Tax Benefits Part A end-of-year supplement

There is concern about the possible effect of freezes on Family payments threshold and Ceasing Family Tax Benefits (FTB) Part A end-of-year supplement on families that are vulnerable and/or disadvantaged.

While the Government has stated it will achieve savings of \$161.7 million over four years from 2016-17 by maintaining the higher income thresholds of family payments at their current levels until 30 June 2020, FRSA emphasises the necessity to ensure these extended freezes are not detrimental to any family.

FRSA is of the view that the raft of proposed changes to Family payments require in-depth modelling and reporting on the impact of these changes on families. Further, FRSA is of the view that this modelling be provided to the Australian community so that the impact on the families is clear and transparent.

Our support for funding for Family Matters: Strong communities. Strong culture. Strong children, to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 2040

FRSA wishes to support the proposals led by SNAICC through their *Family Matters: Strong communities. Strong culture. Strong children* national campaign to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 2040. FRSA supports the recommendations that have a budget impact contained in the Family Matters pre-budget submission, and asks the government to consider funding the proposed initiatives, to:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive, adequately resourced national strategy and target, developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care.
- Invest in a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family support program for early intervention, prevention and family reunification.
- Provide at least 20 hours of subsidised quality early learning to all children to support their development, regardless of their parents' activities.
- Undertake a trial of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community strategies to strengthen families, redress local risks of abuse and neglect for children, oversee child safety and wellbeing, and input to decision-making on the care and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The trial could be conducted in 6-7 locations in urban, regional and remote locations.

- Adequate resourcing is provided to SNAICC, National Voice for Our Children to fulfil its role as the national peak body representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

For further information about these recommendations and the budget impact please see the Family Matters pre-budget submission.