

4 February 2013

The Honourable Julie Collins MP
Minister for Community Services
Parliament House ACT 2600

Dear Minister Collins,

Further to our recent submission in response to the FSP Future Directions Discussion Paper I would like to provide the following information for your consideration as you engage in the 2013/14 Budget process.

In providing these suggestions, we acknowledge the fiscal environment that the Government is operating in, and in particular the significant commitment that Government has made in implementing the SACS ERO, which has been so welcomed by workers in the community sector.

While we acknowledge the fiscal environment, and the general rule regarding 'no new money', we ask that you invite the Department of Treasury & Finance to consider the significant role that organisations funded through the FSP play in contributing to the wellbeing of Australian Families, and consequently, the well-being and productivity of our nation. It is imperative that current funding levels are maintained for targeted and universal early intervention and prevention services so this vital contribution can continue.

In the context of the 2013-14 Budget we ask you to consider the following issues. In general terms, we seek a commitment from you that funding for services under the FSP will be maintained at current levels in real terms. However, where appropriate, if savings can be identified, we would also seek a commitment for funding to be delivered to particular parts of the program where increased investment on behalf of the Government will make real returns. Our intent in seeking these commitments is to assist in achieving the Government's objectives to most efficiently spend the money available, and contribute further to the well-being of Australian families by ensuring all those people who need services have access to them.

- Red tape reduction

We urge you to continue the commitment your government has shown to the micro economic reform agenda, and specifically your contribution to that agenda in the community services sector through the establishment of the streamlined and more flexible FSP. We ask that the program continue to be analysed for opportunities to reduce red-tape. This is particularly important in the inaugural year of the ACNC which has a mandate to reduce 'red tape' for charitable institutions.

- The evidence base

Related to the issue of red tape reduction is the collection and analysis of evidence, which unless appropriately designed and adequately funded can contribute significantly to the administrative burden of service providers while not providing the vital information policy makers need. Any ongoing evidence collection program in place needs to methodically and consistently analyse programs, including outcomes across the whole of the FSP in order to accurately inform policy development.

We encourage you to consider how funding provided to the FSP Data System (formerly FSP online) could be used to adopt an evidence collection program which decreases the administrative burden, does not skew service provision by the mandated use of particular evidence collection methodologies, and provides much more meaningful data for use in planning the future policy requirements of the FSP.

FRSA Members acknowledge the importance of place based and locally driven services, and in many cases these providers have been based in and responding to the needs of their local communities for many years while also providing outreach services to new growth areas despite funding constraints. The opportunity for providers to have greater contractual flexibility to develop locally identified projects and new approaches that can be trialled and evaluated would ultimately enhance the overall evidence base and create efficiencies in service delivery.

Attached to this letter is the outcomes and evaluation report of the 2012 FRSA Conference: *Positive Impact, Showcasing the Evidence*. This report demonstrates that many FRSA Members are engaged in ongoing research and evaluation to inform development of cutting edge programs that respond to local need. The provision of and strong attendance at workshops and a broad range of concurrent sessions demonstrated that some providers are leading the way in this space. Others are committed to developing greater expertise in this area, and all acknowledge the importance of formal and informal research to provide accessible and responsive services to Australian children and families.

- Implications for funding services at historical levels

Many FSP service providers have had successes in implementing strategies such as the VADCAS, or programs like CfC, which have resulted in services reaching/targeting new clients, or more complex clients. Implicit in the success of initiatives such as these is that some providers are consequently providing services to more clients, while others are providing more intensive services to some clients, which can cause result in an overall reduction in the total number of clients assisted. The impact on provider's capacity to manage a growing and increasingly complex client group without any additional funds will always require prioritisation, which will invariably result in some of those people most vulnerable to disadvantage not receiving timely family support services.

We encourage you to consider the implications of simply funding service providers at current levels and how that may impact on provider's ability to effectively engage with increasingly vulnerable and disadvantaged clients, the collection of an evidence base, their ability to adopt new programs effectively, and to train and develop a sustainable workforce into the future.

- FRSA Conference funding

As stated above the attached outcomes and evaluation report of the 2012 FRSA Conference: *Positive Impact, Showcasing the Evidence* has demonstrated the creative work being undertaken by FSP providers in addressing the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged families and communities. The conference has once again delivered significant capacity building opportunities for practitioners in FSP funded services and this report is offered to you and the Department as an important contribution to the evidence base that could further inform the Government's policy development in the FSP space.

If FRSA was able to have a clear ongoing commitment to funding for the conference, efficiencies would be able to be achieved in the development and delivery of this eagerly anticipated annual national gathering. The previous five years of successful conferences has demonstrated FRSA's capacity to consistently deliver a high quality conference with minimal cost to the Government.

We encourage you to consider whether the conference should be recognised as part of the core work of FRSA, and that the additional annual funding for this important event could form part of FRSA core funding on an ongoing basis, as part of each funding cycle in the future beginning with the recontracting period in 2014.

However, ahead of the recontracting period, we would like to take this opportunity to also ask you to commit to providing funding again on an annual basis for the 2013 Conference. In order to be able to adequately plan the event, with the most efficient use of resources, a commitment from the Government by the end of February 2013 would be welcomed. We would propose to provide you with a business case for the funding, before the end of January 2013 and would seek confirmation from you as early as possible after that date.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss all of these issues with you at your convenience, either during your FSP Consultations in the lead up to the FRSA Senior Executives Forum in March, at our Parliamentary Briefing Day and in the lead up to the Federal election in September.

Yours sincerely,



Steve Hackett
FRSA Executive Director