

Tuesday, 2 December 2014

Senator the Hon Kate Lundy  
Chair  
Finance and Public Administration References Committee  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Lundy

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Finance and Public Administration References Committee's Inquiry into Domestic Violence in Australia on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2014 in Canberra.

At that session we indicated that we would provide you with the reference for the evaluation of the Coordinated Family Dispute Resolution Pilot (funded by the Attorney-General's Department). Publication details are as follows:

Kaspiew, R., De Maio, J., Deblaquiere J., and Horsfall, B., (2012), *Evaluation of a pilot of legally assisted and supported family dispute resolution in family violence cases*, Melbourne, Australian Institute of Family Studies, at:  
<http://www.ag.gov.au/FamiliesAndMarriage/Families/FamilyLawSystem/Pages/Familylawpublications.aspx>.

We also recommended that if you required further information on the pilot that you contact Mr Clive Price, Director, UnitingCare Unifam Counselling and Mediation (02 8830 0799); located at Level 6, 146 Marsden Street Parramatta, New South Wales 2150.

You also asked the following questions and our replies are outlined below.

**1. How long has the Commonwealth Government funded specialised family violence services?**

It is not possible to determine, from the Department of Social Services (DSS) grants register or the website, when the Commonwealth commenced funding specialised family violence services. Instead, we have relied on feedback from member organisations and they have indicated that specialised family violence services were first funded in 2001.

**2. How many member organisations currently funded to provide specialised family violence services applied for funding under the recent Department of Social Services' (the Department) open competitive funding round? and**

We surveyed 21 member organisations that were funded to provide specialised family violence services and received 13 responses (62%). Of those that responded, three organisations (23%)

applied for family violence funding under the recent DSS open competitive funding round, with two of the three from the same state.

The reasons provided by the majority of organisations that chose not to apply for funding were similar across the country. As part of the question and answer process for the selection round, DSS advised that organisations currently in receipt of specialised family violence funding under the Family Support Program should consider applying for funding under the Children and Parenting Support sub-activity which is part of the Families and Children Activity in the Families and Communities Programme. The Children and Parenting Support sub-activity is limited to the delivery of early intervention and prevention services aimed at improving children's wellbeing as described in paragraph 2.2.4.<sup>ii</sup> :

***“The Children and Parenting Sub-Activity provides funding to early intervention and prevention services and resources that are aimed at improving children's development and wellbeing and supporting the capacity of those in a parenting role. Services have a primary focus on children aged 0-12 years, but may include children up to age 18 years.”***

The Families and Communities Programme Guidelines contain only one reference to violence as part of a defined and funded service activity as described in paragraph 2.4.4:

***“Individual Children and Parenting services may be targeted towards a specific group of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families who are at risk of poor outcomes. These groups could include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, parents/carers supporting children (including children with disability or chronic medical condition) with additional needs, families who lack social supports, and families experiencing mental illness, alcohol and other drug or domestic violence issues. Services have a primary focus on children aged 0-12 years, but may include children up to age 18 years.”***

Intensive Family Support Services (IFSS) are also described in this section in the following way:

***“IFSS is not responsible for the delivery of specialist and/or clinical interventions but will work with families who have high and complex needs and support them to access specialist services (e.g. drug and alcohol, domestic violence, mental health services).”***

Programme Guidelines were interpreted correctly to mean that only those services that directly involved children or impacted upon parenting capacity fell within the Guidelines and were eligible for funding. Specialised family violence funding is currently used to deliver men's behaviour change programs, victim recovery groups (for men and women), counselling, intensive clinical work and psycho-education on healthy relationships, breaking learned patterns of relating, and increasing awareness of impact of family violence. Members correctly interpreted this to mean that these types of specialised family violence services were outside the scope of the Guidelines and therefore did not apply for funding. This interpretation was verified in conversations with a number of DSS state offices and, in one instance, an organisation was advised that it could elect to re-direct funds from its Family and Relationships Sub-Activity funding if it wished to maintain the service. DSS has advised (Central office) that violence was intended to be included in this sub-activity as it is mentioned in the Programme Guidelines.

However, we consider and agree with our members' interpretation that the reference to violence is narrow in context and rules out the current range of services that are provided using specialised family violence funds.

Question 34 of the Question and Answer document (generated by DSS during the application phase) stated the following:

**Q: Family violence programs do not appear to be included in the sub activities. How will existing family violence activities which address the National Plan for reducing violence against women and children be included in the Children and Parenting Support funding? (Added 7 July 2014)**

**A: The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022 is funded from the National Initiatives activity and is not part of this funding round. The National Initiatives Activity funds a diverse range of service types and other activities, including 1800RESPECT, DV-alert, Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), the Foundation to Prevent Violence against Women and their Children, Personal Safety Survey and the National Community Attitudes Survey. Access to funding will be available through a variety of means and at various times throughout the life of the National Plan.**

When clarification was requested online under the Q&A section, the same wording that appeared in the Programme Guidelines was repeated, with services simply encouraged to apply as per Programme Guidelines. As one member organisation states "In the absence of any specific reference or inclusive language, we did not receive an indication that Domestic Violence work (as currently delivered) was included in the newly defined Children and Parenting Sub-activity."

The other limitation to the recent funding round was that organisations were unable to apply for funding in areas either not listed as priority areas, or where there was an existing Communities for Children service. Generally, Communities for Children services are located in disadvantaged locations where family violence services are also needed. In short, the presence of a Communities for Children service in a particular location meant that applications for funding for other service types would not be accepted.

Member organisations have indicated that they were "... acutely aware of the Commonwealth Government's focus on the funding of prevention of family violence and that the funding of response services in the family violence sector is the primary mandate of State and Local governments." This is borne out by the following statement on the Department's [website](#)<sup>iii</sup>:

**"States and Territories have the primary responsibility for providing programs and services to support women, children affected by domestic violence and to men who want to change their violent behaviour. These include specialist domestic violence services, perpetrator programs, refuges, generalist services (eg health services, family relationships services), and police and the court system."**

Given that the Programme Guidelines excluded the service models that are currently delivered using specialised family violence funding, only three out of 13 respondents applied for specialised family violence funding under the recent DSS funding round.

### **3. What will be the effect on organisations if they are no longer funded by the Commonwealth to provide specialised family violence services?**

Of the organisations that responded to our survey, 77% indicated that they would be unable to continue to provide specialised family violence services (10/13), while 23% indicated that the service level would be significantly reduced (3/13).

Specialised family violence service funding enabled organisations to provide a suite of services that dovetailed and complemented tertiary assistance funded by state governments (e.g. crisis accommodation, services to support men on Intervention orders etc). Commonwealth funding enabled a broader range of services to be provided (ie, services were not limited to those involved in the justice system). Examples of services that were funded under the Commonwealth's specialised family violence services but are now out of scope include:

- intensive clinical work with adults,
- men's behaviour change programs that included learning ways of managing family-relational issues that do not involve being violent,
- support groups for both men and women,
- Indigenous family violence services to a range of communities,
- a collaborative project with an Aboriginal child and family centre,
- male court workers delivering court based information and referral activities at two local Magistrates Courts (these services were seen as essential to reducing tensions and potential conflict in the court between parties, and the impact on the court staff and the court processes),
- an Intake and Referral Practitioner who interacted with both a large state-funded regional domestic violence service and the Commonwealth Family and Relationships sub-activity to provide an initial intake, screening and triaging service to identify need and risk and allocate clients to the appropriate service intervention and supports, and
- outreach counselling to pre-release centres for women as well as outreach counselling and group programs for women and children at women's family and domestic violence refuges.

The prevalence of family violence in presenting cases (members quote as high as 70-80%) means that a service response is necessary. Specialised family violence services were funded in recognition of this need. Our members report that demand is high and continues to outweigh the capacity of services to adequately respond to this need. Some member organisations matched Commonwealth funds with their own funds to increase service capacity. Cutting Commonwealth funds will result in an increase in waiting times as clients will continue to present with family violence and, by necessity, will be prioritised over those seeking assistance with early intervention relationship issues that do not involve violence (one organisation projects that waiting times will be around 9-12 weeks for early intervention, non-violence cases).

As evidenced by the submissions received for this Inquiry, safety concerns mean that seeking assistance is not done easily. When a client presents for assistance, builds a rapport with a practitioner and discloses violence, referral out to another service for intensive clinical work, counselling or behaviour change is a less than satisfactory service response. This also assumes that there is a suitable service to refer clients to. Our members advise that this is not the case. The few options available include private practitioners (\$230 per session), community support generalist services and crisis services, which are a potential deterrent for both victims and perpetrators seeking help, thereby potentially driving the problem back 'underground'. Members also advise that it is often through services like specialised family violence that women and children access support for the first time around their experiences of family violence.

Specialised family violence services are filling a gap and have a history of service delivery. The skill-sets, competencies and experiences of practitioners and managers have grown over time. This will be lost to the sector and will take considerable resources and many years to re-establish. Service models were developed in response to need and in consultation with other relevant networks such as the courts and law enforcement agencies. Withdrawal of this funding will fragment the service system, leaving a significant gap in referral pathways and individual responses for violent men and ex (partners) and families experiencing family violence.

Although Programme Guidelines have effectively ruled out what was previously funded by the Commonwealth, the need still exists. As one member organisation states:

"Reduction of service capacity to respond will only exacerbate these issues and leave women and children particularly vulnerable and unsafe.... (resulting in) an already over-stretched clinical service with less capacity to respond."

On the basis of feedback from our member organisations we conclude that:

- The single reference to family violence in the description of the Children and Parenting Support sub-activity means that the service model and client group are limited in scope to early intervention and prevention services, directly involving children or impacting upon parenting capacity. The majority of specialised family violence services currently assist adults through intensive clinical and group work including counselling and behaviour change programs. This means that the client group and service interventions are out of scope and, consequently, very few organisations have applied for funding.
- The service footprint will be significantly changed post February 2015; and for the small number of organisations that did apply for funding, if successful, the service type and location will most probably be quite different to what was previously provided.

If the Commonwealth Government intends to continue funding the range of specialised family violence services currently provided by organisations (to February 2015) then:

- Another funding round should be conducted.

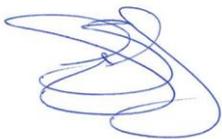
- A funding stream within the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022 should be made available, with guidelines expanded to include the funding of response service to adults in high need areas (and not limited to children or parents seeking early intervention and prevention assistance).

If the Department is unable to find a way of continuing this funding then there needs to be an acceptance that either 4576<sup>iv</sup> family violence affected clients will no longer receive a service or that a severe reduction in services will need to occur in other service types (e.g. family and child counselling) to compensate for this cut in funding.

We support the Commonwealth Government's commitment to the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022 but remain concerned about the withdrawal of funding for specialised family violence services that were previously recognised by the Commonwealth as a high need area and remain so.

I trust this responds to the outstanding matters relating to FRSA's appearance before the Committee. Please do not hesitate to call on 0417 220 779 if you wish to discuss further.

Yours sincerely



Jackie Brady  
Executive Director

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<sup>i</sup> Question 14, Children and Parenting Support, Questions and Answers. Department of Social Services website posted during Families and Communities Programme funding round.

<sup>ii</sup> Families and Communities Programme, Families and Children Guidelines Overview, June 2014 accessed at

[https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/07\\_2014/families\\_and\\_children\\_programme\\_guidelines\\_overview\\_final\\_15\\_july\\_2014\\_2.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/07_2014/families_and_children_programme_guidelines_overview_final_15_july_2014_2.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/women/programs-services/reducing-violence/safety-programs>

<sup>iv</sup> In 2012-13, 4576 clients were assisted through specialised family violence services. Twenty-seven organisations were funded \$2.4M that year to deliver these services.