

2 February, 2015

A lifeline for children and families

For immediate release: 2 February 2015

Family & Relationships Services Australia, FRSA, would like to congratulate the Minister for Social Services, the Hon. Scott Morrison, for recently announcing a four month extension of funding to 30 June 2015 for a range of existing social services. This announcement will ensure service coverage and a level of service continuity for these high-demand and much needed services to the community.

The Minister's announcement on Friday also sets in motion the funding negotiation phase with the sector for new and existing services under the new Families and Communities Framework within the DSS Discretionary Grants funding scheme which commences on 1 March 2015.

"Members of FRSA have entered this week feeling far less anxious and uncertain about the continuity of their services to children and families in our community," said Executive Director of FRSA, Mrs Jackie Brady. "This has been a particularly confronting and challenging time for our members who have been concerned about the future of those clients accessing their services and their ability to retain valuable staff."

"Knowing that families who are experiencing challenging circumstances, such as family violence or drug and alcohol problems have access to Commonwealth Funded services, if only for the short term, is certainly a positive direction," she said. "We look forward to working with the Minister and the Department of Social Services over coming months to ensure that we are meeting all the needs of our community into the future. Learning over the weekend that this lifeline has been delivered in the face of the abandonment of the Relationship Counselling Trial is not surprising," said Mrs Brady. "The money had to come from somewhere."

"However, we must be careful not to confuse the inability of the Trial to attract couples to sign-up to the scheme over the last seven months with whether or not early investment in relationships is of value," she said. "In 2013 FRSA published "Value for Everyone" a paper highlighting the benefits of early intervention for families in a range of circumstances."

"Investing in Early Intervention and Prevention services is increasingly shown to be of value. Although many of our members actively participated in this Trial, its effectiveness has been difficult to demonstrate as the Trial has only been in place for a relatively short period of time. We fully support a proactive rather than reactive approach to family relationship assistance. However, normalising help-seeking behaviour requires a cultural shift. Recognising and valuing healthy relationships needs to start early, with key transitional life-stages targeted."

"We look forward to working with the Minister to identify how best to support families and communities in this important area," she said

Family Relationships Services Australia (FRSA) is the representative body of family and relationships services Australia. FRSA serves to provide national leadership, representation and support for services that work to strengthen the wellbeing, safety and resilience of families, children and communities.