



General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
Inquiry into child protection
Supplementary questions for Fams
26 September 2016 hearing

Fams
Level 4, 52 William Street
Woolloomooloo NSW 2011

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1. Is it the case that the shift in language regarding eligibility for the Brighter Futures program from “vulnerable” to “at high risk” has shifted vulnerable children and families to longer waiting lists under different services?

When Brighter Futures was introduced it was the only consistent state-wide early intervention program. Generally, early intervention programs are more place-based in their approach. The transition of the Brighter Futures program to “at high risk” has certainly created a gap in the service system response available to vulnerable children and families.

Fams’ members confirmed that:

- there are longer waiting lists for access to services – with clients on those lists being prioritised according to need;
- caseloads are full;
- prevention programs are being removed from offer (in a trickle-down effect from a reallocation of resources); and
- in some instances, cases are being closed without a response.

That said, it is important to note that many NGOs are responding to this systemic deficiency by creating alternate “work around” options for vulnerable children and families. These include:

- holding clients for longer while waiting for a place in Brighter Futures to become available;
- responding to clients in a group-work setting (for example, parenting classes) rather than individual case management; and
- providing training to their workers so they work with clients along the continuum.

2. Has this resulted in funding being pushed away from clients who require an early intervention response?

Absolutely, yes! NGOs are required to prioritise clients based on an assessment of presenting risk factors.

3. Do current funding and tendering requirements for NGOs place an emphasis on the focus of service delivery to those who are easiest to engage and for whom change would be most evident?

Fams considers that an historic emphasis on block funding for outputs has contributed to creating a service system where the focus has been incorrectly placed. In a competitive funding environment, Fams is concerned that the focus incorrectly remains on simply the number of clients an NGO works with, rather than the positive outcomes achieved for those clients.

Fams supports a transition to a model of commissioning for outcomes, where NGOs are aware of their shared contribution towards achieving positive impact for vulnerable children and families. This requires a different approach to funding, relationships and collaboration, practice models and geographic challenges outside of metropolitan Sydney.

4. What access is the Government providing to NGOs to better access data to strengthen the process of localisation and to facilitate action and collaboration in communities?

There is limited access to data and cross-agency data is not easily available. Fams' members report they must actively request and pursue data requests. Access to data is complicated because there is not a common language, means of collection or coordination of data across agencies. Fams believes that transparent access to consistent data would enhance service planning and service delivery for vulnerable children and families. Poor access to meaningful, timely and accurate data inhibits NGOs capacity to plan, respond and target their service delivery.

5. What support is being provided to practitioners to enhance their professional development?

Where evidence based programs are being implemented, then it is usual for the cost of training and support to be built into the implementation costs of the program. Otherwise, in Fams experience, each NGO takes individual responsibility for professional development of their workers – there is no common approach. The result is varied approaches including:

- internal vs external support options; and
- generic training vs clinical supervision.

Without exception, Fams members believe that good staff who feel supported achieve good outcomes for their clients. Otherwise, staff vote with their feet and look for alternate employment with NGOs who prioritise professional development as a core governance and management responsibility. A challenge identified by Fams members is that the time required for professional development is not specifically factored into funding arrangements, and therefore, not genuinely reflected in the caseload numbers that NGOs are carrying.