



Standing Council on Community, Housing and Disability Services

COMMUNIQUÉ Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference 21 October 2011

The Community and Disability Services Ministers met in Sydney today to progress key national reforms in community services, child protection and services for people with disability and their carers.

Select Council for Disability Reform

Ministers noted that the new Select Council for Disability Reform met for the first time yesterday.

Ministers noted that the Select Council would work to give effect to Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) agreement on the need for fundamental reform of disability services through a National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Ministers noted the Select Council's Terms of Reference include responsibility to deliver the foundation reforms necessary for a National Disability Insurance Scheme, which include matters that were formerly the responsibility of Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference (CDSMC.)

These foundation reforms include:

- Developing a suite of common assessment tools, so people's eligibility for support can be assessed fairly and consistently, based on their level of need.
- Putting in place service and quality standards, so people with disability can expect high quality support irrespective of what disability they have or how they acquired it.
- Building workforce capacity so there are more staff to support people with disabilities.
- Building the capacity of the disability sector.

Ministers noted that the work plans for foundation reforms include clear outcomes, objectives, deliverables and milestones to support the delivery of these and other essential foundation reforms, and hold governments accountable for progress.

Update on the National Disability Agreement

Ministers agreed to progress the amendments to the National Disability Agreement which reflect COAG's commitment to commence foundation work for a National Disability Insurance Scheme and agreement to the National Disability Strategy, as well as the changed responsibilities for aged and disability care services arising from the National Health Reform Agreement. These amendments, together with the findings of the current review of the National Disability Agreement performance framework, are expected to be considered by COAG in early 2012.

Younger People in Residential Aged Care (YPIRAC) initiative

Ministers received a briefing from Bronwyn Morkham and Alan Blackwood of the Young People in Nursing Homes Alliance. Dr Morkham and Mr Blackwood noted the progress which had been made under YPIRAC and highlighted the need for continued effort and reform to support younger people with disability in, or at risk of entering, residential aged care. The presentation highlighted the importance of ensuring health, aged care and disability services work more closely together to improve support for this vulnerable group of people.

Ministers agreed to a continued effort to meet each of the three objectives under the initiative:

- Moving younger people with disability from residential aged care to more appropriate supported accommodation;
- Diverting younger people with disability from entering residential aged care; and
- For those where residential aged care is the most appropriate option, or choose to remain there, ensuring they can access additional services.

Ministers agreed to continue reporting on progress against these three objectives every six months, along with broader annual reporting under the National Disability Agreement.

Ministers also agreed that all jurisdictions would develop action plans to identify specific activities that jurisdictions will undertake with a focus on achieving better connections with mainstream services for younger people with disability in or at risk of entering residential aged care. Ministers agreed these action plans would be developed by December 31 2011.

People with cognitive impairment in the criminal justice system

Ministers discussed the over-representation of people with cognitive disability within the criminal justice system, including through prisons and forensic services, and as victims and witnesses, particularly Indigenous people with cognitive disability.

Ministers tasked officials to provide advice about how and why people with cognitive disability come into contact with the criminal justice system including as victims of crime and witnesses and to develop advice on these issues, including on existing examples of good practice, and options for diversion and early intervention and post release services, such as accommodation and housing.

Ministers tasked officials to work with their counterparts in Justice and Attorney-Generals' portfolios to progress this work. This will focus on the role of specialist disability services in reducing the rate of people entering and re-entering the criminal justice system, and improve outcomes for people exiting the criminal justice system.

National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children

Ministers noted the significant progress made on the implementation of national priority projects under the *First Three-Year Action Plan 2009-2012*.

Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to working together, and with the non-government sector, to protect vulnerable children, and agreed to discuss the second *Three Year Action Plan (2012-2015)* at their first meeting in 2012.

Ministers agreed to prioritise Indigenous children in future national priority projects under the National Framework, and to report on outcomes for Indigenous children in future annual reports. Ministers further agreed to develop an online resource to share best and promising practice for keeping Indigenous children safe and well.

Second three-year action plan 2012 - 2015

Ministers agreed to discuss the action plan at the next meeting.

Ministers agreed to consider the professionalisation of foster care and a dedicated Medicare item for children in out of home care as part of the discussion on the second three-year action plan.

Better support for young people leaving care

Ministers agreed to a nationally consistent approach to planning for young people leaving out of home care. Young people leaving care will have the support to access housing, education and financial

assistance, find employment and receive help to develop and maintain their health and wellbeing and independent living skills.

This best practice approach will be incorporated by all states and territories into their leaving care planning processes. Progress in implementing the national approach will be monitored and reported on through the National Standards for Out of Home Care, which started on 1 July 2011.

Ministers also agreed that an online resource, outlining good practice transition planning across jurisdictions, would be developed by mid 2012.

Improving support for young people leaving care will continue to be a priority under the National Framework.

A national research agenda for child protection

Ministers agreed to jointly provide \$600,000 over three years for the first ever national research agenda for child protection.

Following extensive consultation with researchers and non-government organisations working with children and families, Ministers agreed to the following research priorities for the next three years:

- Prevention – the effectiveness of responses in preventing child maltreatment;
- Protection and therapeutic responses – the effectiveness of preventative initiatives in protecting children and young people, along with the effectiveness of responses when maltreatment has occurred;
- Care – alternative out-of-home care arrangements;
- Systems – how to make joined-up service delivery across agencies, the workforce and organisations more effective; and
- Maltreatment types –the prevalence of various forms of child maltreatment and how types of maltreatment interact.

Information for carers

Ministers agreed that a landmark national carers' online resource and a supporting information campaign targeting carers through General Practice, child welfare agencies and Centrelink, would be launched by November 2011.

This online resource will improve carers' awareness of the existing supports and services available to them, by bringing together information on Commonwealth and state and territory government payments, supports and services and non-government services.

Working with children checks

Ministers agreed to introduce, by late 2012, national exemptions to working with Children Checks for paid employees and volunteers who are required to cross state or territory borders for work related purposes. These exemptions will be for up to 30 days in any 12 month period and will enable workers to participate in national and inter-jurisdictional activities on a short- term basis.

This means volunteers and workers with a valid check in their home state or territory will be able to participate in short-term activities across state and territory borders without the need for additional checks.

National collaboration framework for family support services

The Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments have today agreed to support the implementation of a national collaboration framework for family support services.

The framework commits all jurisdictions to a practical approach to working more collaboratively with each other and with non-government organisations in the delivery of accessible and coordinated family support services to vulnerable families and individuals.

This further enhances the work already underway under the joining up service delivery national priority under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children.

The national collaboration framework is available here: www.csmac.gov.au

Community sector development

Ministers today recognised the valuable role of the community sector in delivering high quality services to vulnerable people.

Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments agreed to establish a new working group to monitor the impact on community services following the decision by Fair Work Australia on the Social and Community Services Award.

The new Community Sector Development Group will not consider wage supplementation, which is being considered separately, but will provide a forum for jurisdictions to work together on measures to support community sector organisations to maintain the high level of services provided to the community.

Student concessions

Ministers today discussed cross-jurisdictional recognition of concessions and recognised that this was an important issue for students across Australia.

State and Territory Ministers agreed to establish an inter-jurisdictional working group to consider the reciprocal recognition of student concessions and sought the involvement of officials with responsibility for school and tertiary education and transport in the working group.

Rebuilding NSW: Family and Community Services

Ministers noted the briefing from Minister Goward on directions being considered in New South Wales to improve child protection through a more collaborative, integrated and devolved system across government and non-government agencies.

Guardianship and settlement services for unaccompanied minors

Ministers agreed to continue the current funding arrangements for services to unaccompanied humanitarian minors for two years from December 2011, or until a new funding model is implemented.

Ministers agreed to continue to negotiate regarding funding and service delivery for the additional number of unaccompanied humanitarian minors beyond the proposed pilot program.