

# families australia

BULLETIN No. 6 [Spring 2005]



## Highlights in this edition...

family policy news, ideas forum & family sector information

- Australia's children: latest research
- Key family challenges
- Balancing work and family
- Family wellbeing
- Conference calendar

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# SECTION 1: FAMILIES AUSTRALIA UPDATE

## Welcome

Families Australia is growing fast, thanks to the support of over 360 member organisations and the Federal Government.

In our first three years we ran several important initiatives, such as the *Globalisation Work and Families Conference*, the *National Child Abuse and Neglect Summit*, and three National Families Weeks.

2005/6 will see us enter a phase marked by greater outreach to members, the community and government with the aim of better understanding and promoting the interests of families and the family sector.

Several initiatives are underway. In the coming months, we will commence a rolling program of national community consultations to better understand the views of families and to render these to Government.

We are further strengthening relationships with Federal Government Departments and agencies, such as the Department of Family and Community Services and Centrelink, in order to improve the prospects of informing and influencing family policy and service delivery. We are going to expand participation in National Families Weeks in 2006 and 2007, especially through greater use of television.

We are enhancing the information we provide to Members, including through *National Family News*, which will be published ten times per annum and which will contain updates on latest developments in national family policy, practice and research.

There will also be renewed emphasis on policy development: we will be seeking Members' views on issues such as Family Wellbeing and Work and Family through the year.

We are always keen to know the views of member organisations about family issues, and to assist members wherever we can, especially in relation to providing understanding about Federal Government policies and initiatives.

In this edition, we examine the outcomes of the 2005 Federal Budget for families and provide a roadmap of Government agencies involved in family policy and service delivery. We showcase Family Wellbeing, current research on Australia's children, and the issue of work and family. In the Members' section, Relationships Australia and Family Services Australia tell us about their future directions.

## Join Us!

### Families Australia Membership

#### General Members

Incorporated national bodies that demonstrate support for the aims of *Families Australia* may apply to become General Members.

Membership fee: General \$250 + GST (\$275) or less!  
(Please contact *Families Australia* for details)

#### Associate Members

Individuals, groups, alliances, or organisations that demonstrate support for the aims of *Families Australia* may apply to become Associate Members.

#### Membership fee:

Full \$50 + GST (\$55) Concession \$25 + GST (\$27.50)  
(Full-time students and pensioners)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Organisation \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Membership Type \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

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# Families Australia future directions

Families Australia's four objectives for 2005-2007 are to: inform and influence national policies in relation to families; promote the importance and needs of families; act as a two-way conduit for information to and from the family sector; and, strengthen and expand the organisation.

The main activities Families Australia will undertake to achieve these objectives are: running community and family forums to elicit views about key, emerging or 'hot' family issues which are then provided to government and the family sector; devising and disseminating the 'Family Wellbeing framework' and a Families Australia *Manifesto*; co-hosting the *Work, Family and Wellbeing* Forum at the Australian National University; undertaking projects in the areas of Indigenous families and of child abuse and neglect; running National Families Week in May 2006; providing strategic policy advice (for example,

by responding to opportunities to express policy views to Parliamentary Committees, and Departmental and community forums); and, enhancing member services, including through *National Family News*.

In deciding these directions, the Families Australia Board wishes further to build the reputation of the organisation as an independent national voice on family matters which fosters a good national public policy environment in which family-related issues and the family sector can prosper, and which focuses on informing and influencing national policy at the highest government levels. We intend to be a strong advocate for the cultural diversity and the value of families, be proactive in support of justice and equity for Australian Aboriginal and Islander peoples, and not duplicate what any one of our members do.

# National Families Week 2005



Picture: Stefan, 4 years old  
The University of Melbourne's Early Learning Centre

The 3rd National Families Week was held between 15 and 21 May 2005 to celebrate the vital role families play in Australian society. Thanks to all Families Australia members who participated and made the Week a great success.

The theme for the Week was "make a lifetime of difference... support our children". Helping children in their very earliest stages sets the scene for the rest of their lives – as young people, students, workers and future parents. Organisations

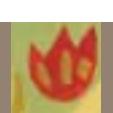
and individuals throughout Australia were encouraged to take time to think about families, whatever shape they take, and to celebrate the role they play in our lives and community.

15 May 2005, the start of *National Families Week*, was also the United Nations International Day of Families. This day is observed by the United Nations to mark the importance that the international community places on families as the most important units of society, as well as concern about their situation in many parts of the world.

The Australian Government, through the Department of Family and Community Services, sponsored National Families Week with Families Australia. Centrelink also promoted National Families Week and provided support through its national network. Their support is greatly appreciated.



Picture: Rosalyn, 4 years old  
The University of Melbourne's Early Learning Centre





Picture: Sian, 4 years old  
The University of Melbourne's Early Learning Centre

National Families Week was officially launched by the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator the Hon. Kay Patterson at the Melbourne Museum on 16 May. The involvement of children from Melbourne University's Early Learning Centre highlighted the theme of National Families Week and their artwork provided a colourful backdrop for the launch.

An estimated 64,000 people were involved in various National Families Week activities across every Australian State and Territory. Over 450 events were held nationwide during the Week, the overwhelming majority of which were held at a grassroots level in local communities. Events included: morning teas, barbeques, sausage sizzles, playgroup visits, family picnics, artwork displays, family information days, drawing competitions, dances, art displays, photo competitions, seminars and workshops, health and hygiene days, breakfast gatherings, story-telling events, services displays, and fashion parades.

Community support for National Families Week has been very enthusiastic and Families Australia is pleased to announce the Department for Family and Community Services will fund the Week for another two years. The dates are still to be finalised, however, the Week will be run around the International Day of Families on 15 May 2006.



Picture: Isabella, 4 years old  
The University of Melbourne's Early Learning Centre



Picture: Olivia, 4 years old  
The University of Melbourne's Early Learning Centre

If you are interested in participating in National Families Week 2006, please contact Families Australia by email on: [familiesweek@familiesaustralia.org.au](mailto:familiesweek@familiesaustralia.org.au), and we will place you on our mailing list.

Some of the hundreds of events that happened around Australia during National Families Week 15-21 May 2005 included:



Picture: India, 4 years old  
The University of Melbourne's Early Learning Centre

...a community of 1,200 Indigenous people in Cape York Peninsula celebrated the Week at local pre-school events...a small accounting firm in Chinchilla, Queensland, helped a foster family...

...Canberra Girl Guides took time to consider the value of families...a playgroup in Ceduna painted artwork for their family tree...Sudanese refugees played soccer with Centrelink staff and the local community in Launceston...

...children from Melbourne University's Early Learning Centre did wonderful paintings of their families...a Fun Day was held in a park in Broome for isolated and remote families...

...in Bamaga, there was a day-care fun day...children from Mowbray Primary School in Tasmania participated in a poster competition...and at Noarlunga in South Australia 1,000 people got together for a Family Expo Day...



## Some comments from National Families Week participating organisations:

*National Families Week is a great opportunity for us to think about what family means and for Kununurra Centrelink to make sure the entire community knows about the full range of services we can offer their families. (Kununurra)*

*We will participate again next year. Any positive promotion of communities like us is good and shows that all is not bad up this way as the media most of the time portrays it. (Kowanyama Community, Western Cape York Peninsula)*

*Thank you for a wonderful way to begin our new program: Small Steps for Families. We loved everything you sent us and held wonderful events. (Lutheran Community Care, Tanunda, SA)*

*Many thanks for your support of our venture. We are eagerly looking forward to 2006! (Whyalla)*

*The occasion was used to highlight upcoming Budget changes and the enhanced assistance available to customers. (Centrelink, Area Central & Northern Queensland)*

*Students were happy to have an opportunity to discuss family life and express some of their joys and sorrows. Parents were grateful for the support and encouragement they received as parents. I believe there is a real need to encourage young people and their parents in the culture of today. Thank you for your work in support of families. (Rehoboth Christian School, Perth)*

*The children loved the stickers, balloons and tattoos.*

*Great to celebrate families and promote our programs for families.*

*Keep it going – it's an important week.*

*I love the idea of National Families Week and we will certainly be supporting it in the future.*

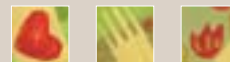
*Thanks! A nice "focus" for our family events.*

*It was a great success with a huge crowd. Feedback has been great and we hope next year will be even better.*

*The children really enjoyed celebrating Families Week – it was lovely to share our family photos and discuss our family heritage.*

*I think it is run wonderfully and we thank your department for your wonderful support for our families here at St Thomas'.*

*It is an ideal opportunity for parents to keep in touch with services and older children to visit as well as younger ones.*





## SECTION 2: IDEAS EXCHANGE

### Australia's children: the latest research

The following article is an edited extract from materials published by the Australian Institute of Family Studies at [www.aifs.gov.au](http://www.aifs.gov.au), and is reproduced with their kind permission.

*Growing Up in Australia* is the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (also known as LSAC), the first-ever comprehensive Australian national data on children as they grow up.

LSAC was initiated and is funded by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) as part of the Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. Responsibility for the design and management of the study rests with the Australian Institute of Family Studies, in collaboration with a consortium of eight other leading research organisations across Australia.

The study aims to examine the impact of Australia's unique social, economic and cultural environment on children growing up in today's world. It will further our understanding of early childhood development, inform social policy debate, and be used to identify opportunities for early intervention and prevention strategies in policy areas concerning children.

During 2004, over 10,000 children and their families were recruited to the study from a sample selected from the Health Insurance Commission's Medicare database. It is intended that these children and their families will be followed at two-yearly intervals until 2010, and possibly beyond.

LSAC addresses a range of key research questions about children's development and wellbeing. Information is collected on the children's physical health and social, cognitive and emotional development, as well as on their child care, education, family and social environments. Respondents include parents, child carers, preschool and school teachers and, in time, the children themselves. The study's longitudinal design will enable researchers to determine optimal periods for the provision of services and welfare support and identify the long-term consequences of policy innovations.

Development work for the study commenced in March 2002, with the testing phase continuing through 2003. The first phase of the study involving more than 500 families occurred in late 2003. The main phase of recruitment, of over 10,000 children and their families, took place from March until November 2004.

#### Research findings

The data of Wave 1 of LSAC were released by Senator the Hon. Kay Patterson, Minister for Family and Community Services, in May 2005. Full information about LSAC and Wave 1 outcomes can be found at [www.aifs.gov.au/growingup](http://www.aifs.gov.au/growingup). Below are just some of the highlights of those outcomes.

#### Combining work and family

On the whole, parents had quite a positive view of work, both in terms of its impact on them (around 70 per cent of parents agreed that working made them feel more competent) and their children (49 per cent felt that their working had a positive effect on their children, while a further 37 per cent felt the effect was neither positive nor negative).

Most parents disagreed with the statement that family time was less enjoyable due to work. However, when asked what hours they would prefer to work, taking into account the impact on their income, a substantial number of parents indicated that they would like to work fewer hours than they do now. This is consistent with the fact that working parents were more likely to indicate that they felt rushed (47 per cent of working parents stated that they felt rushed always or often, as compared to 36 per cent of non-working parents).



#### Breastfeeding and weight

Breastfeeding is linked to a number of important child outcomes including reduced prevalence of obesity and asthma and improved cognitive outcomes. The National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) dietary guidelines (NHMRC 2003) consider that an initiation rate in excess of 90 per cent, and 80 per cent of mothers' breastfeeding at six months, are achievable goals in Australia. The 2003 dietary



guidelines also recommend “exclusive” breastfeeding (the consumption of breast milk only) to the age of six months, a change from the previous guidelines (NHMRC 1996) which recommended exclusive breastfeeding for the first four to six months.

The proportion of babies who start breastfeeding is around 90 per cent, compatible with the NHMRC goal. However, the length of time babies are breastfed falls below the guidelines. In both cohorts, by about six months only around one-half of all babies were still being breastfed, as compared to the 80 per cent goal. The numbers being breastfed dropped quickly after six months. In the 4-5 year old cohort, 72 per cent had ceased breastfeeding by age one.

## Children’s diet

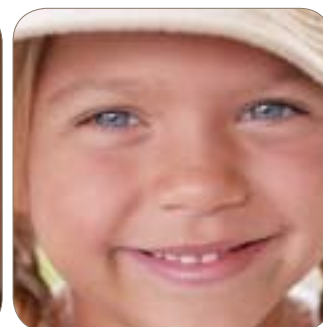
The dietary intake of the 4-5 year old cohort was assessed by asking whether certain types of foods were consumed once, more than once, or not at all in the previous 24 hours. While the data collected are based on the number of occasions of consumption, rather than servings (which is the basis for dietary guidelines), the proportion of children consuming little or no fresh fruit or vegetables (16 per cent) and those having high fat foods at least three times a day (28 per cent) is worth noting. For example, the NHMRC 2003 dietary guidelines recommended consumption of between one and two servings of fruit and two to four of vegetables (including legumes) each day for children aged four to seven years. Further analysis of the diet data will be able to ascertain the relationship of diet to concurrent and future weight problems, as well as other health outcomes.

## Childhood injuries

Over the previous 12 months, 7 per cent of infants and 18 per cent of the older cohort were hurt, injured or had an accident that needed medical attention from a doctor or hospital. Of the children who were hurt or injured, in the vast majority of cases (90 per cent of infants and 74 per cent of 4-5 year olds) there was only one incident. For infants, most injuries were unspecified, whereas cuts or scrapes and broken or fractured bones were most common for the older cohort. The broad LSAC data set will be able to help identify factors in the child’s environment that are related to the occurrence of injuries.

## Child care

The expansion in the use of non-parental child care has raised concerns about possible long-term effects on children’s development. At the same time, child care can provide a range



of valuable experiences to the child. LSAC gathers data on the quantity and quality of regular non-parental care a child receives, and so will be able to shed important light on the influence of care arrangements on developmental outcomes.

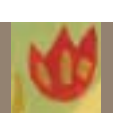
In the month before the survey, 35 per cent of infants had been looked after by someone other than a parent at regular times during the week. Multiple care was experienced by a minority of infants. Of those who experienced non-parental child care, most infants (76 per cent) only had one type of care arrangement per week, and a further 21 per cent experienced two types of care.

Of those infants who experienced some type of regular non-parental care, the two most common types of care were with grandparents and day care centres.

## Children spending time with non-resident parents

In Wave 1 of LSAC, where a child had a non-resident parent, primary parents were asked about their own relationship with the non-resident parent and, when there was no or little contact between the non-resident parent and child, the reasons for this. In later waves, it is hoped that data will be collected directly from non-resident parents.

About 11 per cent of infants and 17 per cent of the older children had a parent who did not live with them. Around 20 per cent of both infants and 4-5 year old children did not see the non-resident parent. Infants were more likely to spend time with their non-resident parent on a daily or weekly basis, while 4-5 year olds were more likely to have once a fortnight or less frequent time together. Further analyses will be able to examine factors associated with the amount of time spent together, and its relationship to children’s wellbeing.





## Family Wellbeing: optional or essential?

Wellbeing is a hot discussion topic in many parts of government, the community, and academia. How well are families managing the gap between values and lifestyle?

*The Wellbeing Manifesto*, prepared by Clive Hamilton, Richard Eckersley and Richard Denniss and launched by The Australia Institute in early 2005, has helped stimulate the discussion – it begins with the statement: “Australians are three times richer than their parents and grandparents were in the 1950s, but they are no happier”. Full text of the *Manifesto* is available at [www.wellbeingmanifesto.net](http://www.wellbeingmanifesto.net).

Families Australia is working on its own Family Wellbeing Framework as an umbrella for its policies. We are delighted to have Richard Eckersley from the Australian National University as a Board member to help guide this work.

## Beyond Economic Growth: from quantity to quality

By Richard Eckersley  
Fellow, National Centre for Epidemiology  
and Population Health  
Australian National University

(An edited extract from Richard Eckersley, *Well & Good: morality, meaning and happiness*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2005).

The political perspective continues to equate progress with the pursuit of economic growth. Wealth creation comes first, the argument goes, because it not only increases personal freedom and choice, it also allows us to spend more on meeting broader social objectives such as improved social welfare and environmental care and conservation.

It is striking just how much the political framework of growth is regarded as a ‘policy constant’ that is beyond scrutiny or debate. Political leaders explicitly state high growth as their prime objective, believing it to be the foundation upon which social progress, including better health and greater wellbeing,

is built. This view is understandable: strong economy, higher growth, more revenue, bigger budget surpluses, more to spend on new or bigger programs.

However, if the processes by which we pursue growth do more damage to the social fabric and the state of the environment than we can repair with the extra wealth, then we are still going backwards (even assuming we can identify and repair the damage). ‘Efficiency’ in generating wealth may well mean ‘inefficiency’ in improving overall quality of life. Some social problems have worsened with rising wealth, not diminished, including crime, unemployment, obesity, drug and other addictions, declining social capital and increasing social isolation and alienation.

It is true that a lack of growth – the economic contraction experienced in recessions and depressions – causes hardship, especially through increased unemployment, and governments usually justify the pursuit of growth in terms of job creation. However, the association between growth and jobs does not negate the need to examine more broadly and carefully the social effects of growth.

We need to think less in terms of a ‘wealth producing economy’ and more about a ‘health producing society’, where health is defined as total wellbeing – physical, mental, social and spiritual. Economics does not forbid such a choice. It is in our nature to cooperate as well as compete, to show compassion and generosity as well as ruthlessness and selfishness. And human nature isn’t fixed, hard-wired; it is influenced by culture.

We need to think more about the consequences of the lifestyles government policies promote.

## Families Australia: on family wellbeing

Families Australia is developing a Family Wellbeing Framework, which will include recommendations aimed at a range of stakeholders – individuals, industry, non-government organisations and government – to increase family wellbeing and ultimately our quality of life.

Research consistently highlights the fact that many of us feel increased levels of dissatisfaction with our lives. The 1997 Clemenger/BBDO report *The Silent Majority III: The Everyday*



*Problems of the Average Australian* identified 'the distress of a nation divided, deeply anxious about its children and its future'. Social researcher and commentator Hugh Mackay's qualitative research indicates increasing gaps between values and lifestyle: the 2003 *Mind and Mood* report highlights our anxiety about 'the state of the world' and the 'degeneration' of the Australian way of life, yet we affirm that we live in 'the best country in the world'.

Sociologist Michael Pusey's study of middle Australia between 1996 and 2000 revealed that the majority of Australians felt that their quality of life was falling due to breakdown in community and social life, too much pressure on families, parents and marriages, and falling living standards. Over 90% of people believed that family life was changing and two-thirds said that the negative aspect of change stood out the most.

The Families Australia Family Wellbeing Framework is expected to consider contributing factors such as environment, work and life balance, income issues, relationships, community connectedness, health and happiness. Most importantly, the framework will look at the role that family wellbeing plays in a strong and resilient society.

Families Australia would welcome any questions, comments and suggestions. Please contact us at [admin@familiesaustralia.org.au](mailto:admin@familiesaustralia.org.au).

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## Work and family: questioning the balance

Dubbed a "barbeque-stopper", the issue of work and family continues to generate public debate in Australia. Families Australia has been participating in the debate, building on our 2004 conference on *Globalisation, Families and Work: Meeting the Policy Challenges of the next two decades*.

In March 2005, the House of Representatives' Family and Human Services Committee commenced a Parliamentary Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family. The Committee is particularly interested in: the financial, career and social

disincentives to starting families; making it easier for parents who so wish to return to the paid workforce; and the impact of taxation and other matters on families in the choices they make in balancing work and family life.

Over 130 submissions were received, and the Committee is yet to finalise its Report. Further details are at [www.aph.gov.au/house/committee](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee). Families Australia's views on work and family are set out below.

In another important development, on 22 June 2005, a discussion paper was launched by Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner Pru Goward entitled '*Striking the Balance: Women, men, work and family*'. The paper explores men's and women's choices for balancing their competing work and family responsibilities. Commissioner Goward said the paper will tease out various aspects of the work and family debate by looking at choices people make between the 'public' realm of the paid workforce and the 'private' realm of the home.

'*Striking the Balance*' focuses on the particular issues faced by men and women in balancing their various responsibilities, on the gender relations that underpin the lives men and women lead, and on the legal, policy and attitudinal frameworks that both facilitate and constrain the choices open to men and women.

The paper poses key questions in the work and family debate, such as: Do women's and men's different paid and unpaid work obligations affect their economic outcomes, health, relationships and life changes?

What are barriers to changing attitudes towards a more equal division of paid work and family responsibilities? What should the role be for the government, employers and families in promoting appropriate divisions of paid and unpaid work by Australian families?

Submissions are invited on the issues raised in this discussion paper by 30 September 2005. For further information, please refer to [www.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.humanrights.gov.au).





## Families Australia: on work and family

Families Australia believes that the issue of work and family is one of great importance to the wellbeing of the Australian community and the country's economic and social sustainability.

Between 1983 and 2002, the proportion of two-parent families with dependent children in which both parents were employed increased from 39.7% to 56.9%. Working hours have become longer for many, and work schedules less standardised. Average hours worked by full-time employees have increased since the late 1970s for both women and men.

The majority of Australian fathers work full-time and many work long hours. Moreover, many grandparents have taken on caring roles. Many grandparents are in the paid or unpaid workforce at the same time as being responsible for the care of children or young people either on a part or full time basis.

Recent research shows that change in the balance between work and family responsibilities is having substantial negative effects on the quality of life for average Australians. In 1996, the *Australian Family Life Course Study* found that 44% of men and 28% of women said that work interfered negatively with family.

Indications from a range of research are that many parents want more family time, more flexibility in their working arrangements, more information both about their employment entitlements and about parenting, and financial support that assists transitions in and out work. For example, in the Relationships Australia survey, when asked what would assist, the highest ratings went to more flexible working hours (46%) and an increase in government financial support (47%). Another 34% said a change in their spouse's attitude would help achieve the balance and 39% said more part-time work for women.

Families Australia believes that the definition of progress or development in Australia should go beyond economic growth and include the notion of sustainability in which the value of caring for others is counted, carers are not marginalised, and the goal of maximising wealth does not override the goal of optimising the health and well-being of individuals, families and community.

It is also important to register that communities need children. Disincentives to childbearing as a result of real or perceived difficulty in balancing work and family life will reduce further Australia's birth rate and further accentuate the trend toward an ageing population.

As most children in Australia grow up in families where both parents are in paid work, it is important for their wellbeing that parents are able to move in and out of employment according to family care needs and priorities. It has been estimated that 28% of sick children are at home alone. The wellbeing of children stands to suffer if working arrangements do not ameliorate this type of situation.

It is also important for the long-term financial security of families that parents and carers are able to maintain workforce attachment. For work to be sustainable for people with caring responsibilities, it needs to be reasonably flexible. In particular, parents and carers need access to adequate leave, to part-time work on return from leave, to family/carer's leave, and scope to modify their working hours or arrangements to attend school events, medical appointments and the like.

While dual earner families may be the new 'norm', almost one in five of our children are growing up in 'jobless families': this is strongly correlated with long-term disadvantage. For them it is especially important to address the barriers to workforce participation commonly associated with caring, which include lack of flexible work opportunities, and access to high quality and affordable childcare.

Against the general background of rising work pressures, reduced time for family life and increased stress as workers try to juggle these two factors, there are many changes that should occur to improve work-family balance in Australia.

### Promoting recognition of the interconnections between families and workplaces

Policy settings, government services and government information strategies need to reflect the reality that paid employment and family responsibilities are not alternatives but co-exist for most people in different combinations over the life cycle. At a basic level, family income security is linked with job security so issues such as casualisation of the workforce impacts on family wellbeing.



Understanding the linkages between families and workplaces, rather than seeing them as separate spheres, opens up new opportunities for intervention and support that maximise the beneficial impacts of parents' work on family functioning and ameliorate negative spillover. It also helps to connect the Federal Government's workforce participation agenda with their stronger families and early childhood agendas.

Evidence suggests that there is a lack of community awareness of family-friendly work options. There is scope for initiatives to strengthen the links between workplaces and family support services. Such information could be included, for example, in antenatal and parenting information programs. At the same time the concerns of parents about how to improve relationships with their children may be addressed through workplace-based programs. Some employers already provide this.

One practical idea is for Government, business, unions and the community sector to develop a work and parenting information strategy, which includes information about family-friendly work options and tips on how to minimise 'negative spillover' from work to family relationships.

## Recognising time as a family resource

Time to spend together is an important family resource, and parents' working time arrangements determine when they are available to their children and to each other. The matter of when parents work is important to family life. Research shows that working evenings, nights, and on weekends can mean that these workers miss out on shared family events, routines and outings. Not having time for a daily shared, planned family meal can increase the strain on family cohesion and communication, as well as have possible negative nutritional outcomes, especially for children. Evening and night work times can be stressful for parents and disruptive for families, and can diminish parent involvement and responsiveness to children. Linkages have been shown between shift work and relationship discord and breakdown which impacts on children's wellbeing.

Overseas research indicates that compared with parents on standard hours, those working non-standard schedules tend to spend less time reading, playing and helping children with school work, are less likely to share a family meal and are less satisfied with the time they spend with their children. Parents commonly attempt to buffer or compensate for the disruption, for example, by forgoing time with their partner or trying to spend extra holiday time together. Some workplaces have started to address this with employee-choice rostering systems.

There are also ways for families to better manage the impact of shiftwork if they have the right support and information.

Some ideas for action are: to establish model guidelines for family-friendly shiftwork arrangements, in partnership with employers and unions involved in negotiating and managing shiftwork and families where at least one parent works shiftwork; and, to provide information on how best to manage the impact of shiftwork, long hours and unsocial working hours on family relationships be developed in conjunction with relevant experts and distributed through unions and employers.

## Supporting the changing role of fathers

In general, fathers still plan their family time around the demands of work time while mothers tend to plan their work around the family needs. However, the role and aspirations of fathers are changing. They want more time with their families and a closer involvement with their children, but are wary of the consequences for their careers. Where men do take time off work after having a child, the bonding that results has lasting and positive effects on the father-child relationship.

Men are less likely than women to take unpaid leave for family purposes, a factor contributing to low take-up by fathers of parental and other leave. There is also evidence of employer resistance and other workplace barriers to men's use of family-friendly work options. An increase in men's awareness and take-up of family-friendly work options may improve the work and family balance.

Suggestions for action under this heading include: a community based awareness campaign that focuses on the needs and aspirations of working fathers; and, the establishment of a network of employers who will champion workplace cultural change that enables fathers to spend more time with their children and partners.





## Expanding family choice and flexibility

Ensuring that families have real choice and flexibility in how they manage paid work and caring over the life-cycle is a challenge that involves commitment from governments, business, communities and individuals.

Family-friendly workplaces are a key element. Parents, grandparents and carers in lower socio-economic groups are less likely than those in professional jobs to feel they have any choice or control over their working hours or arrangements.

The increase in the casual workforce affects not only the financial security of families but also access to leave. Casuals are not entitled to sick leave, carer's leave or annual leave, all of which are particularly important to working parents. Part-time work is not necessarily family-friendly, is concentrated in certain sectors, much of it is casual and offers limited training and promotion opportunities. For many, it is not a preferred option but the only alternative to unemployment. The issue of 'poverty traps' and effective marginal tax rates are important in this regard, and together with the costs of childcare can inhibit workforce participation.

While there appears to be a belief amongst some employers that "family friendly practices" are likely to be expensive and are therefore reluctant to enter the debate, some employers and industry groups have taken important steps to improve work-family balance. While some of the larger Australian companies have done cost-benefit analyses of different models of family and work practices, there is particular need for more work to be done in relation to small and medium size enterprises. It is necessary for comprehensive work to be done to better understand the costs (financial and non-financial) of a range of family-work practices and to open up a more fully informed debate amongst a wide range of public, private and community sector stakeholders.

Possible actions to improve this situation are: for Government to commission comprehensive economic modeling of the costs and benefits (financial and non-financial) of a range of family-friendly work practices; and, to undertake a national project to examine and promote wide dissemination of information about quality, secure, family-friendly flexible employment arrangements (including part-time work and job-share opportunities), building on initiatives to date by public and private sector organisations and industry groups.

## Taking the family pulse

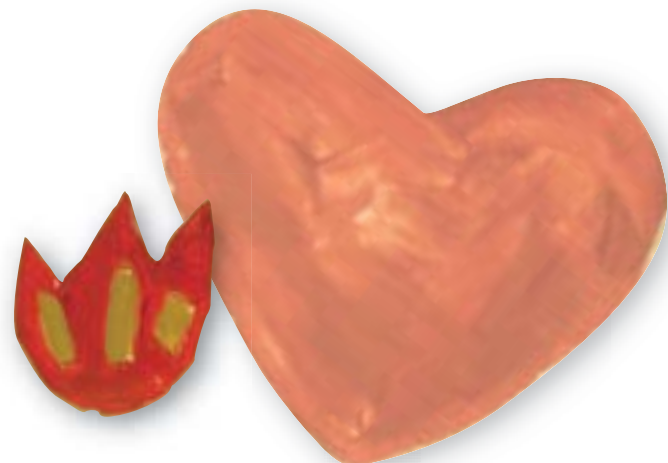
Families Australia's primary objective is to promote the interests of families. To help do that effectively, we will shortly commence a nationwide consultation process designed to gain a sound understanding of key and emerging issues for families.

We are mapping community and family consultation processes already being undertaken, exploring opportunities for collaboration with other organisations, and devising a cost-effective workshop and survey model which can be applied at local levels.

We plan to commence a sample number of workshops and surveys in late 2005-early 2006 on a selected number of policy issues. At that time, we will ask families, member organisations and others to help us coordinate a range of focus groups across the country. We will also be asking member organisations to assist us in promoting the work and encouraging families to participate.

As results become available, we will provide feedback from these processes to Families Australia members and Government departments to assist in policy making and advocacy.

**Have your say**  
we would welcome your thoughts on the issue  
of Work and Family – please email us on  
[admin@familiaustralia.org.au](mailto:admin@familiaustralia.org.au)



# SECTION 3: FAMILY POLICY NEWS



## 2005 Federal Budget – what's in it for families?

### Senator the Hon. Kay Patterson, Minister for Family and Community Services

The 2005/06 Federal Budget was handed down on 10 May 2005. Following are the key announcements relating to families in my portfolio. Further information can be obtained at [www.budget.gov.au](http://www.budget.gov.au).



### Assistance for families

- From 1 July 2006, Government will increase the Family Tax Benefit Part A lower income threshold to \$37,500.
- Families will be able to negotiate a new rate of ongoing Family Tax Benefit payment when they inform Centrelink of a change in their income estimate during the year.
- Government will increase the support to those families who have the most difficulty estimating their income. The Family Assistance Office will contact these families and provide them with additional assistance with income estimation as well as providing information sessions at local community venues about the family assistance system.
- The income estimates will be automatically uplifted to help families start the income year with a more accurate income estimate for their family assistance payments.

- Government will extend the Maternity Payment to families who adopt a child up to the age of two years and to families who adopt a child from overseas up to the age of two years at the date of entry into Australia.

### Carers measures

- A one-off lump sum payment will be provided to eligible carers as follows: a payment of \$1,000 will be made to carers who receive Carer Payment, and recipients of Carer Allowance will receive a payment of \$600 for each eligible care receiver. Subject to the passage of legislation, the payment will be automatically made to the majority of eligible carers by 30 June 2005.
- Backdating provisions for Carer Allowance will be standardised to allow for a maximum period to be claimed of 12 weeks prior to the claim lodgement date by carers of both adults and children.

### Family law

- \$199 million will be provided over four years to fund the establishment of 65 new family relationship centres. These centres will help separating parents resolve child custody disputes in a less adversarial way outside the formal court system. As part of this initiative, \$10 million will be provided to Rural Outreach Services.
- \$137 million over four years will be allocated to maintain the increased funding provided in 2004/05 to the Family Relationship Services Programme, expand early intervention, prevention and pre-marriage education services, and continue ongoing funding for Mensline.
- The Budget expands other current services, providing \$54 million over four years for 15 new services under the Contact Orders programme, 30 new services under the Children's Contact services programme and additional dispute resolution services.





## “Welfare to work”

(More information on these measures, including changes to Parenting Payment, Disability Support Pension, Newstart, Youth Allowance and other allowances is contained at [www.budget.gov.au/2005-06/overview](http://www.budget.gov.au/2005-06/overview))

- Government will implement a package of measures to support more Australians to move from welfare to work. The package includes funding for an additional 84,300 Outside School Hours Care, 2,500 Family Day Care and 1,000 In-Home Care places over four years. It will also include additional funding for the Jobs Education and Training (JET) Child Care Program to cover the out of pocket ('gap') costs of child care, as well as support to assist parents to return to the workforce as child care workers.

## Assistance for women

- Government measures to help eliminate domestic violence and sexual assault include:
  - The 'National Violence Against Women: Australia Says No' campaign will be re-run to increase community awareness of the issues of domestic violence and sexual assault. Through a 24-hour help line, the campaign will provide practical assistance to those experiencing violence, to friends and family who want to know what they can do to help and assistance to those wanting to change their violent behaviour.
  - Funding will continue for the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse and the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault to provide central points for the collection and dissemination of Australian domestic and family violence and sexual assault policy, practice and research.
  - Research projects on domestic violence and sexual assault will be funded.
- Practice nurses in regional and rural areas will receive training to assist them to identify and respond to domestic violence and doctors will receive assistance to release the nurses for this training.
- Training for the criminal justice sector on sexual assault will be provided.
- Counsellors at Mensline will be given training and materials on domestic violence.

## Housing assistance

- Funding will further consolidate targeting of community housing needs in rural and remote communities. The measure is expected to: encourage reform of Indigenous community housing through improved governance and asset and tenancy management practices; continue a programme of involving Indigenous households and communities in assessing and repairing up to 500 of their own houses per year in around 15 communities; and, continue to deliver Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Programme (AACAP) projects in at least one community per year as a positive demonstration of practical reconciliation.
- The National Homelessness Strategy (NHS) will be funded for a further four years. NHS will be enhanced, including continued funding for the Complex Demonstration Projects, the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness and an NHS communication strategy.

## Seniors support

- From 1 July 2005, the refundable balance of all lump sum accommodation bonds, paid on entry to residential aged care, will be exempt from the social security and veterans' entitlements assets tests. The exemption applies regardless of when the bond was paid or when the resident entered aged care.
- Assistance will be provided to aged care residents who pay their accommodation bond periodically, or through a mix of lump sum and period payments. Residents who pay their accommodation bond partially or wholly by periodic payments will be able to rent out their former home, without the rental income or the value of their former home affecting their rate of pension.

## Youth

- Government will provide new funding to the Mentor Marketplace Programme for a further four years.
- Mentor Marketplace will continue to provide mentoring opportunities for young people, renew the current funding agreements for up to 12 existing Mentor Marketplace projects, and provide funding for up to 15 new mentoring projects.
- Government will extend the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) for a further four years and expand the eligibility criteria.



# Federal Government discusses family challenges

A speech by Senator the Hon. Kay Patterson, Minister for Family and Community Services, at the opening of the Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference on 9 February 2005 highlighted a range of Government policies relating to families, as well as the thinking behind those policies. Below is an edited extract of the Minister's speech in which she talks about three main priorities for families.

## Key challenges for families, community and government

Family pressures in many households with children revolve around three main priorities: raising and educating children; balancing work and home life; and maintaining healthy relationships within the family unit.

### Raising and Educating Children

First, let me talk about raising and educating our children. Compared with other OECD countries, Australian children rate well across a range of indicators.

We do particularly well in literacy and numeracy. The 2000 OECD PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) study compared 15 year olds across 32 countries, and in each of the reading and mathematical literacy sections Australian students were outperformed by only one country - Finland topped the league in reading and Japan in mathematics.

But there is room for further improvement. Worrying trends, such as the incidence of obesity among young children for example, need to be addressed. This is of concern to the Government and several of my Ministerial colleagues are already working with the community to address this problem.

Beyond this, we know that some groups are more at risk than others. In particular we know that outcomes for Indigenous children remain well below that of the broader population across a range of health and development indicators.

That is why, for example, we provided \$4 million over four years to the Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care to assist Indigenous communities and services to develop and implement early childhood development and child and family support programs.

To achieve better outcomes for children we need to act on multiple fronts and perhaps coordinate our efforts better across all levels of government. Early intervention also has significant benefits for children. Certainly it is much more cost effective than trying to deal with difficulties later in life. That much of the literature in the field of early childhood development refers to "the critical early years" is hardly a surprise to most parents who intuitively know that nurturing their children in the early years is critical to their future.

While a good start doesn't guarantee success and a poor start isn't a life sentence, the first five years of life set in place a future that is much more difficult to alter later in life.

### Balancing work and family

The second common priority that I identified a moment ago as facing many families with children is balancing their work and family responsibilities.

As past gender-based roles have changed and the pace of life has increased so have the challenges for balancing work and family responsibilities.

In Australia, the traditional single job family is in decline, mainly because increasing numbers of women with children are participating in the workforce. This includes a significant increase in the number of single mothers undertaking work.

So more couple families have both parents in work, and more single parent families now have their parent in the workforce. As a result, the balance between paid work and family responsibilities is becoming ever more complex.

Supporting the role of fathers is one factor in helping our families achieve a healthy work and home life balance.

The new diversity in working arrangements also mean families are relying more heavily on child care, which I will talk more about in a moment.





## Maintaining strong relationships

It is undeniable that the third priority - maintaining strong and supportive relationships within the family unit - has always been important. And it is undeniable that there have always been strains on relationships. However, modern life can exacerbate the stresses and strains on the relationships we have with the very people we look toward to support us when going through tough times.

We know also that particular events place extra stress on relationships. Even the most wonderful of events such as the birth a child can put stress on relationships.

The Government's approach to supporting family relationships is to fund the programs which help couples learn a range of skills to assist them to work through difficult times, while providing the necessary support in cases where family breakdown does occur.

Relationships within the family are an important influence on childhood development. The Government's main aim is to support strong family relationships - children have the best chance when they grow in families that are strong and nurturing, with parents taking an active role in raising the child.

Research undertaken by my Department in 1999 tells us that men don't spend enough time with their families, and even when the time is provided, they generally don't use it. This suggests to me that we have some longer-term work to do in changing societal attitudes in this area.

Certainly I noted the comments made earlier this week by Pru Goward, the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, regarding the need for fathers to play a greater role in raising their children. Ms Goward was noting that fathers who followed the traditional male-breadwinner role, and particularly those 25% of men working more than 50 hours a week, would find it more difficult to be as involved with their children on a daily basis and form a strong and enduring relationship.

The Coalition Government supports an industrial relations system which provides more flexible workplace conditions and allows fathers to take a more active role in the upbringing of their children. I suspect that this will require not only a change in approach from some fathers but also a greater acceptance and understanding by some employers and the community more generally of fathers who choose more time with their family over more time at work.

Unfortunately family breakdown is a reality and ongoing conflict within the household can be detrimental to children's development. Where this is the case it is important that we strive for functional relationships after breakdown that allow the constructive involvement of both parents in the child's life.

The Government is responding to these needs through the further roll-out of Family Relationship Centres to support improved relationships for couples at risk of breakdown. This is an example of a sensitive policy area where the Government needs to work very carefully in supporting families and communities.

The Government has also established a Taskforce, chaired by Professor Patrick Parkinson, which is due to report in March 2005 with advice on whether particular changes to the child support formula are warranted.

We need to continue to intervene early and provide support for families under relationship stress, while working with separated parents to provide a stable environment. Our goal must be to pursue an approach that always puts the children first.

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## Family policy and services: a Government roadmap

**After the 2004 Federal election, several changes were announced to Federal Departmental responsibilities for family policy and service delivery. Where do responsibilities now reside at the Federal Government level?**

The Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) is the hub for social policy for the Australian Government. Some of the Department's responsibilities changed following the 2004 election, providing the opportunity for a renewed focus on delivering policies and programs for Australian families, children, women, seniors and communities.

The Office for the Status of Women is now known as the Office for Women and is integrated within FaCS. Responsibility for the workforce participation agenda now lies with the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR). DEWR is also responsible for Newstart Allowance, Parenting Payment, Disability Support Pension and Youth employment programs. The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST)



is now responsible for income support payments for young people, including Youth Allowance for students and AUSTUDY. FaCS retains a strong interest in the participation agenda, particularly as it relates to families, and is working closely with DEWR and other agencies on the Australian Government's participation reforms.

The creation of the new Department of Human Services (DHS) groups together government service delivery agencies including Centrelink, the Health Insurance Commission and the Child Support Agency. This allows DHS to concentrate on improving the delivery of government services across a broad range of areas. FaCS' close relationships with the service delivery agencies will continue through DHS.

There is no change to FaCS' relationships with the many non-government organisations that provide advice and help deliver FaCS programs. These relationships will continue to form a vital part of the support Australia provides for its families and children.

The more concentrated focus of the new FaCS is an opportunity for the Department to give greater emphasis to the state of play of Australia's families, children, and the communities they live in. FaCS is using this new position to reinforce and advance its value as the pre-eminent source of advice and support to government around families and children.

### Family policy and services: some key Government websites

**Department of Family and  
Community Services:**  
[www.facs.gov.au](http://www.facs.gov.au)

**Department of Employment and  
Workplace Relations:**  
[www.dewr.gov.au](http://www.dewr.gov.au)

**Department of Education,  
Science and Training:**  
[www.dest.gov.au](http://www.dest.gov.au)

**Department of Human Services:**  
[www.dhs.gov.au](http://www.dhs.gov.au)

**Centrelink:**  
[www.centrelink.gov.au](http://www.centrelink.gov.au)

## Forgotten Australians and Protecting Vulnerable Children: A national challenge A Senate inquiry

by Elton Humphery Committee Secretary  
Senate Community Affairs Committee

In March 2003, the Senate referred to the Community Affairs Committee what was to become an extensive inquiry relating to children in institutional or out-of-home care. The Committee was asked to examine whether, in relation to any government or non-government institutions or fostering practices, any unsafe, improper or unlawful care or treatment of children occurred; as well as the extent and impact of the long term social and economic consequences of child abuse and neglect on individuals, families and Australian society as a whole.

The inquiry was given contemporary relevance by including an examination of the changes to professional practices employed in the administration and delivery of care compared with past practices and whether any changes were required in current policies, practices and reporting mechanisms to ensure that there is an effective and responsive framework to deal with child abuse matters.

The inquiry attracted over 700 submissions, creating without doubt the largest volume of highly personal, emotive and significant evidence received by any Senate inquiry. Many hundreds of people opened their lives for the Committee and the memories of traumatic childhood events came flooding through in their public submissions and at the hearings. Some people were actually telling their life story to another person, including family, for the first ever time.

For the Committee members and parliamentary staff involved with this inquiry the scale and magnitude of the events described in evidence was overwhelming. To fully understand the roller-coaster of emotions generated by this inquiry is indeed very difficult. One Committee member described the inquiry 'as the most emotionally wrenching period I have spent in politics in 15 years', a view shared by all members.





The Committee tabled its first report, *Forgotten Australians*, on 30 August 2004. The report covered the majority of the terms of reference, focussing on children who were in institutional and out-of-home care, mainly from the 1920s until the 1970s when deinstitutionalisation began to see large institutions replaced by smaller residential homes, foster care or other options such as placements with families for accommodating children in need of out-of-home care.



The report included background information on institutions and the governments' and Churches' roles in placing children in care, the treatment of children in care and the long-term effects of experiences while in care. The issues of responsibility, acknowledgement and reparation were canvassed, as were issues relating to accessing records and information, and the provision of wide ranging services for care leavers which are critical in ensuring that they and their families can improve their quality of life.

The Committee made a series of recommendations in *Forgotten Australians* relating to statements of acknowledgement and apology; the provision of comprehensive support and counselling services for care leavers; the provision of health care, housing, aged care and education programs; addressing legal barriers; establishment of a national reparation fund; internal Church redress processes; a Royal Commission; the location, preservation, recording and access to records; funding for advocacy and support groups; data collection and the need for a whole of government approach to program and service delivery; recognition through memorials and exhibitions and collecting oral histories; and the funding of research

and the establishment of tertiary study courses on a range of issues relevant to the role and impact of institutional care in Australia's social history through to a focus on child protection and related issues.

This second report, *Protecting vulnerable children: A national challenge*, was tabled on 17 March 2005. The report discusses the structure, services and processes that make up the contemporary framework for Australia's child protection system, including the legal and government framework for child protection and responsibilities under international agreements and treaties; the child protection processes of notifications, investigations, substantiations and mandatory reporting; and the services provided through State and Territory welfare departments, and children's commissioners, advocates and guardians.

The report also discusses foster care, including information from earlier times but with its main focus on contemporary foster care issues; children and young people with disabilities in care; and children and young people in juvenile justice and detention centres.

The Committee acknowledged that in recent years a number of States and Territories have conducted inquiries into aspects of the care and protection of children and the operation of the government departments and agencies with responsibilities in the area of child welfare. These inquiries have identified deficiencies and shortcomings in child protection regimes and clearly show that jurisdictions across Australia are experiencing similar problems in matters relating to the welfare, care and protection of children.

The Committee considered that Australia is at a significant point where many jurisdictions have identified problems and shortcomings in their child protection systems and are addressing them. This great impetus within the States and Territories to commit to and implement change needs to be harnessed and enhanced to ensure that there is a common approach and greater efficiencies and effectiveness within the child protection system.

At the national level, COAG has placed family violence and child protection on its agenda as a significant area of national interest. A National Plan for Foster Children, Young People and their Carers has been endorsed and released by the Community and Disability Services Ministers, and governments have agreed to a national framework on indigenous family violence and child protection.



While it is acknowledged that the main responsibility for the implementation and administration of the child protection system rests with the States and Territories, the Committee considered that the Commonwealth must play a significant leadership and agenda-setting role in driving the changes necessary to systems and policies which would more effectively protect children and young people than has been the case to date. The Committee considered that it is essential that the reform process goes beyond questions about State and Territory versus Commonwealth issues.

Leadership and direction at the highest national levels are required. The Committee therefore recommended the establishment of a national commissioner for children and young people to drive a national reform agenda for child protection. The purpose of the commissioner would be to set the agenda to achieve the framework for a comprehensive national child protection system. The committee does not envisage that the commission would direct the reform agenda in specific areas but rather bring together all jurisdictions - the Commonwealth and States and Territories as well as child protection professionals, researchers and peak organisations - so that they may identify the areas where greater cooperation is required, where greater consistency is needed and where greater sharing of research can be achieved.

The report also covers a number of other specific areas, including issues affecting children in foster care and foster carers. The report highlighted many aspects of today's out-of-home care system, such as the growing numbers of children entering the out-of-home care system and the seeming inability of the system to provide the specialised levels of care for the many children who are entering the system with increasingly complex problems.

The Committee recognised that the many issues affecting foster children and foster carers are intertwined and that their detrimental effects are exacerbated by each other. For example, the major issue of the rise in multiple placements of children and the negative impact this has on their lives is connected to the turnover of foster carers. Large numbers of carers are leaving the system due often to the stress of caring for children

with much more complex personal problems and fewer people are entering the system to replace them. The constant turnover of caseworkers is also a reflection of their escalating workload, arising in part from the reduced number of experienced carers and difficulties in placing children with complex problems into appropriate care.

A number of recommendations are made in the report to address the issues relating to foster children and foster carers. The Committee referred to the National Plan for Foster Children, Young People and their Carers and made recommendations to strengthen and expedite the introduction of a number of components of the national plan including the strengthening of case management and the introduction of national standards for transition planning.

The Committee also recommended extending the plan to include the support and training of foster carers, and in particular national standards for the reimbursement of costs to cover the real cost of caring, improving foster carer retention and developing models of response to allegations of abuse against carers based on international best practice and the articulation of carer's rights.

The Committee's reports and recommendations are currently the subject of intergovernmental discussions coordinated by the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference. Following the conclusion of these discussions the Government is expected to provide its formal response to the reports later this year.

The reports, submissions and transcripts of public hearings may be accessed on the net at [www.aph.gov.au/senate\\_ca](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate_ca) under completed inquiries or in hard copy or CD format from the Committee Secretariat by phoning 02 6277 3515.

families





## SECTION 4: MEMBER NEWS & INFORMATION

### Meet some Members

Over 360 organisations and individuals are members of Families Australia. Included in that number are 36 General Members, many of which are peak bodies in their own right. We have invited two General Members – Family Services Australia and Relationships Australia – to tell us what they are doing and their future directions.

Please let us know if you would like us to profile your organisation in a forthcoming Bulletin (email – [admin@familiesaustralia.org.au](mailto:admin@familiesaustralia.org.au))

#### Family Services Australia

FSA is the largest national Industry Representative Body for the community based family and relationships services sector with currently over 87 member organisations providing family relationships and related family support services across Australia. Members are located in more than 250 sites across Australia, offering a diverse range of services for families in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote communities.

FSA provides industry leadership in policy and program development, service delivery and research initiatives. FSA works to develop effective and cooperative partnerships between the community sector, government and the private and public sectors and to mobilise the diverse resources of member organisations to enhance service delivery. FSA, along with the sector, successfully lobbied for the 30% increase in funding in 2004 (and subsequent recurrent increase in 2005) for Family Relationships Services Program (FRSP) services, and continues its lobbying role around the roll out of the new Family Relationships Centres.

The FSA conference is run annually and provides an opportunity for members and others in the family relationships field to consider a range of policy issues and practice developments regarding the FRSP. FSA members receive discounted registration fees and Ordinary Members are eligible for travel subsidies depending on travel distance from the venue. Ordinary members also have voting rights and are eligible for election to the FSA Board.

FSA regularly communicates with members to keep them up to date on key issues. FSA circulates a monthly email newsletter to members – CyberFSA – and provides more urgent updates on policy or service issues via email. More in-depth briefings and analysis about particular issues that impact on member organisations, such as amendments to the Family Law Act, are provided through FSA Bulletins.

FSA develops resources to assist members such as:

- **FSA Privacy Act Kit** - developed to help FSA member organisations implement privacy policies and procedures in accordance with the *Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000*;
- **Client Feedback and Complaints: FSA Guidelines for Family Relationships Services**;
- **Human Resources across the FRSP Fact Sheets** - provides a snapshot of the human resource characteristics and structures across organisations delivering FRSP services; and
- **FSA Family Services Atlas** – maps existing FRSP and other similar services across Australia against demographic data to provide a picture of unmet need.

In addition, FSA submits responses to government and Parliamentary Inquiries on behalf of members, produces annual Federal Budget Submissions and responds to proposed program changes such as the *Performance Framework for the FRSP* and the *FRSP Cost Methodology*.

For further details about the services offered by FSA contact (02) 6281 1788.

Sarah Lees  
National Manager - Research & Projects

#### Relationships Australia

Having been appointed to the position of National Director in June 2005, I am delighted to have the opportunity to share some background about Relationships Australia and where we are headed in this time of change when there are major reforms to the family law system.

Relationships Australia is one of Australia's largest community-based organisations providing relationship support to people regardless of age, religion, cultural background, gender, social or economic background or lifestyle choice. We are committed to enhancing the lives of men, women and children and supporting positive and respectful relationships.

Relationships Australia provides family support services to over 90,000 Australians per year from around 100 locations across Australia. And despite the reluctance in the past of men to access our services, recent figures show that almost half our clients, 40,000, are men.



Most clients seek our services to help strengthen and build relationships or resolve relationship breakdown issues. These services are provided through our education programs, counselling, mediation, skills training programs, primary dispute resolution and family violence services and children's services.

We have a federal structure with large autonomous member organisations in every State and Territory plus a national office based in Canberra. We employ about 900 people in both a full time and casual basis.

Just over half our funding (52%) comes from the Federal Government through the Family Relationships Services Program (FRSP). This funding is supplemented through client fees, our training programs, state and territory government support, sales of publications, sponsorships, donations and other sources.

Internally, we have a strong national network and a range of working groups and interest groups looking into issues such as rural, primary dispute resolution, children's contact services, relationship education, research and indigenous issues.

One of our most exciting and groundbreaking projects is the partnership between Dr Jenn McIntosh, La Trobe University, and three trials sites of Relationships Australia. This research involves child inclusive practice in mediation that aims to preserve, and preferably strengthen the parenting alliance between separated parties and to facilitate the adjustment of children affected by parenting disputes.

Externally, we are fully engaged in contributing to the family law reforms through submissions, participating in working groups and public hearings and by working very closely with the Department of Family and Community Services, the Attorney-General's Department and our colleagues in the sector.

It is an exciting time to be in this sector with the major reforms and increased funding for services and the introduction of the Family Relationship Centres.

We are looking forward to continued collaboration with government, private industry, the not-for-profit sector and the community with respect to the many changes that lie ahead in the family services sector.

For more information please do not hesitate to contact me on (02) 6285 4466 or via email [mmartin-ryan@relationships.com.au](mailto:mmartin-ryan@relationships.com.au) or visit our website [www.relationships.com.au](http://www.relationships.com.au).

Mary Mertin-Ryan  
National Director

## Anti-Poverty Week 2005



Anti-Poverty Week will be held between 16-22 October 2005. The United Nations has designated 17 October as International Anti-Poverty Day. The Week is concerned with poverty around the world, especially in the poorest countries, but also in wealthier countries such as Australia. Last year in Australia, about 100 organisations ran activities during the Week, with a total participation of over 4,000 people. The main aims of Anti-Poverty Week are to strengthen public understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty, and to encourage research, discussion and action to address these problems. Further information about Anti-Poverty Week is available at [www.antipovertyweek.org.au](http://www.antipovertyweek.org.au), or by phoning 1300 797 290.





# CALENDAR AND LINKS

## 2005

### 4-10 September 2005

National Child Protection Week (NAPCAN)  
Further information: [www.napcan.org.au](http://www.napcan.org.au)

### 8 September

International Literacy Day

### 16-17 September 2005

12th Australasian Society for Traumatic Stress Studies Conference - The Impact of Childhood Trauma Across the Lifespan Perth, WA  
Further information: [www.astss.org.au](http://www.astss.org.au)

### 23-25 September 2005

MARENC - Marriage and Relationship Education National Conference Sydney, NSW  
Further information: [www.mareaa.asn.au](http://www.mareaa.asn.au) or [www.csme.catholic.org.au](http://www.csme.catholic.org.au)

### 28-30 September 2005

Family Services Australia 2005 National Conference - Supporting Australian Families  
Adelaide, SA - Further information: [www.fsa.org.au](http://www.fsa.org.au)

### 28 September - 1 October 2005

Early Childhood Australia Biennial Conference - Kaleidoscope: Changing Images of Childhood  
Brisbane, Qld - Further information: [www.eca2005.com](http://www.eca2005.com)

### 28 September - 2 October 2005

40th Australian Psychological Society Annual Conference: Past Reflections, Future Directions Southbank, Vic  
Further information: [www.apsconference.com.au](http://www.apsconference.com.au)

### 29-30 September 2005

Second Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey Research Conference Melbourne, Vic  
Further information: [www.melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/conf2005.html](http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/conf2005.html)

### 29-30 September 2005

Intergenerational Approach to Community Engagement - Connecting Generations: Linking Research and Action for Health and Wellbeing Strathfield, NSW  
Further information: <http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/IACE/forum>

### 30 September - 1 October 2005

13th Annual Queensland Child Health Conference Gladstone, Qld - Call for papers: Closing date for submission of abstracts is 30 July 2005.  
Further information: Email: [leanne\\_slow@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:leanne_slow@health.qld.gov.au)

### 1 October

International Day of Older Persons

### 10-12 October 2005

Their Lives, Our Work: Critical Questions for Practice in Child, Youth and Family Services Conference  
Preston, Vic - Further information: Tel: (03) 9614 1577

### 16-22 October 2005

National Carers Awareness Week - Further information: [www.carersaustralia.com.au](http://www.carersaustralia.com.au)

### 16-22 October 2005

Anti-Poverty Week - Australia

**17 October**

International Anti-Poverty Day

**17-19 October 2005**Diversity in Health Conference 2005: It's Everybody's Business Conference Melbourne, Vic - Further information: [www.amf.net.au/event\\_nat\\_healthDiversity.shtml](http://www.amf.net.au/event_nat_healthDiversity.shtml)**17-20 October 2005**Family Services: Champions of Change Conference Sydney, NSW - Further information: [www.nswfamilyservices.asn.au/Main/Conferences/FS2005Conference.htm](http://www.nswfamilyservices.asn.au/Main/Conferences/FS2005Conference.htm)**22 October 2005**

Children's Week Australia

**10-11 November 2005**Challenge, Debate, Inspire, Survive, Adolescent Health 2005 Melbourne, Vic - Further information: [www.rch.org.au/cah](http://www.rch.org.au/cah)**20 November**

Universal Children's Day

**25 November**

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

**3 December**

International Day of Disabled Persons

**5-8 December 2005**4th Australian Family and Community Strengths Conference - Evidence driving practice Newcastle, NSW  
Further information: [www.pco.com.au/family](http://www.pco.com.au/family)**2006****8-9 February 2006**

National Investment for the Early Years (NIFTeY) Conference - Prevention: Invest Now - Or Pay Later Sydney, University of New South Wales

**7-10 March 2006**11th National Conference on Volunteering Melbourne, Vic  
Further information: [www.volunteering2006.com](http://www.volunteering2006.com)**8 March 2006**

United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace (International Women's Day)

**13 March 2006**

Seniors Week - NSW

**9 April 2006**

National Youth Week

**28-30 April 2006**3rd International Conference on Healthy Ageing and Longevity Melbourne, Vic  
Further information: [www.longevity-international.com](http://www.longevity-international.com)**15 May 2006**

International Day of Families

Disclaimer: Information about these conferences has been obtained from a variety of sources. No liability for the accuracy of dates or other content is assumed. For further information, please refer to the respective contact organisations.

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