



## PROPOSALS FOR THE 2010 FEDERAL ELECTION

Representing around 400 family and community sector organisations across Australia, Families Australia strongly urges the adoption by the next Federal Government of the following general and specific proposals to better assist families and children, especially the most vulnerable and socially excluded.

### GENERAL

#### ☞ NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR PROTECTING AUSTRALIA'S CHILDREN

Families Australia believes that there should be a substantial increase in resources devoted to the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020. We propose that an additional \$120 million be provided over four years especially to support targeted family and child related services.

#### ☞ FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Federal Family Support Program has the potential to make a major contribution to improving family wellbeing especially amongst the most vulnerable. Cognisant of the national macroeconomic picture, we strongly urge that this program grow in real terms over the next four years, ideally by a minimum of 10-15%, and that it increasingly focus on early intervention and integrated service delivery initiatives.

#### ☞ CLOSING THE GAP

We strongly share concerns about the pace of overall improvement for Indigenous communities families and children. We recommend a substantial increase in funding for all Federal Government 'Closing the Gap' programs and urge that programs be designed and delivered in an ongoing and close partnership with Indigenous peoples. We align ourselves with the views being put forward by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care.

#### ☞ PAY EQUITY TEST CASE

We strongly support the Pay Equity Test Case 2010 and look forward to it resulting in an improvement in the overall remuneration of community sector workers. We would be deeply concerned, however, if any wage increases resulted in reductions in service delivery and, accordingly, call on the Federal Government to fully support NGOs in meeting the anticipated wages gap.

### SPECIFIC

#### ☞ PARENTING PROGRAM FOR YOUNG MOTHERS AND FATHERS

Young parents are relatively more prone to isolation, low income and poor educational attainment, with flow-on negative effects for their children. In-home mentoring or coaching programs have been effective, but there has never been a concerted national effort which takes an integrated and holistic approach. Special attention needs to be paid to the situation for young Indigenous parents and young people who are in, or transitioning from, out-of-home care.

*We call upon the Federal Government to provide \$10 million over 4 years to pilot and evaluate a parenting program for young parents which is targeted on areas/communities of high need, especially Indigenous communities and on young people who are in, or leaving the out-of-home care system.*

## **GRANDPARENTS AND OTHER CARERS**

Around 35,000 children are in out-of-home care, about half are in the care of grandparents and other kin; the number is rising. The number of foster carers is declining. Greater recognition of, and support for all these carers is required. Indigenous kinship carers and those carers living in remote and regional areas require special attention. More support groups and better information and referral processes are needed.

*We call upon the Federal Government to:* provide \$6 million through a grant program for an initial four years, with matching State/Territory funding (total program \$20 million) for local support groups; and to place grandparent/kinship/foster care liaison officers in 20 major Centrelink offices around Australia to act as contact points for carers (est. cost: \$10 million over four years).

## **YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING OUT-OF-HOME CARE**

Around 1500-2000 young people leave out-of-home care each year. Educational, social and employment outcomes are significantly lower than for other young people. Effective planning to assist young people leaving care is critical. A high proportion of care leavers do not have transition plans in place. The Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) assists young people who have left or are leaving care to transit to independent living. It is currently \$1,500 per person (total budget outlay, \$3.75 million pa).

*We call upon the Federal Government to:* fund free TAFE or university training for young care leavers on a dollar-for-dollar basis with States/Territories (est. cost: \$5 million over four years); double the Federal funding of TILA to \$3,000 per person leaving care and remove the time-limit requirement to apply for the allowance (est. cost: additional \$15 million over four years); and match funding with the States/Territories to provide plans for all young people leaving care (est. cost: \$3 million over four years).

## **FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS**

Support services for Forgotten Australians (referrals, advice and support, training and drop-in centres) are provided only in Victoria and Queensland (one is promised in NSW). Funding is around \$7 million pa. This is grossly inadequate and inequitably distributed. Ongoing support services need to be provided in the State/Territory in which survivors live, not at a distance by the State/Territory where they were in care. Federal and State/Territory cooperation is required to deliver a consistent national approach to support. Around \$20 million is needed annually, including for specialised mental health interventions. Services should be provided across all State/Territory boundaries on a reciprocal basis.

*We call upon the Federal Government to:* provide \$40 million over four years for support services to match dollar-for-dollar State/Territory funding.

## **DISABILITY: ASSISTING SIBLINGS**

Siblings of children or young people who have a disability or chronic illness are often overlooked for service provision. They are at risk of failing to realise their potential, as the focus of their family tends to be on the child or children with the disability. Siblings can experience lower self-esteem and a higher level of mental ill-health compared with many other child cohorts. Research is, however, limited. Investing in strengths-based sibling support programs has the potential to improve the wellbeing of the whole family.

*We call upon the Federal Government to:* fund on a matching basis with States/Territories a national NGO coordination service that links families and siblings to early intervention and support services; review existing *ad hoc* programs in conjunction with disability support organisations to estimate the numbers and needs of this cohort; and develop a national strengths-based service delivery model (est. cost: \$2 million over four years).

## **ADDRESSING SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF CHILDREN OF PRISONERS**

Children of offenders experience significant and multiple forms of disadvantage. They are more likely than children in the general community to experience parental drug and alcohol abuse, parental mental illness, family violence, child abuse, poverty, housing instability and social isolation. Children of Indigenous offenders are especially vulnerable – Indigenous people are 13 times more likely to be incarcerated than others. Children and families of offenders remain largely invisible, due to a lack of robust, shared data.

*We call upon the Federal Government to:* fund, in conjunction with State/Territory governments, a pilot child and family support program which identifies the needs of, and provides targeted support for, children and families of offenders (est. cost: \$4 million over four years).



## **National Action Plan for Grandparent and other Kinship Carers**

### **National Action Plan for Grandparent and other Kinship Carers**

March 2010

*Tens of thousands of grandparents and other kinship carers provide full-time care of a child or children due to family break-up or problems such as mental ill-health, substance abuse, gambling or domestic violence. The majority of kinship carers are grandparents whose special needs must be met if they are to fulfil their role adequately.*

*In the absence of a reduction in national rates of substance abuse, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence and other problems affecting families, it is highly likely that grandparents and relatives will increasingly find themselves taking on primary caring roles for children affected by these circumstances. The costs to the nation are substantial and include lost productivity of older Australians.*

*Issues for grandparents include: physical capabilities associated with ageing that affect their ability to care for children; emotional and social pressures such as isolation and stress; dealing with family conflict; inconsistent advice from some Government services; generational differences in relation to cultural issues and parenting styles; and financial and legal issues.*

*There are few services in Australia directed to assisting grandparent and kinship carers, and there is relatively little community recognition of the important role they play. We know that grandparent/kinship carers would benefit from targeted, additional financial, emotional and social support.*

#### **Families Australia and Grandparents Australia call for the establishment of a National Action Plan for Grandparent and other Kinship Carers** which would include:

- Urgent joint effort by Federal and State/Territory Governments to ensure that a *uniform, nationally-consistent carer allowance* is paid to grandparent and other kinship carers who are providing primary care for children.
- Placement of full-time grandparent/kinship *care liaison officers* within 20 major Centrelink offices to act as a contact point for carers across Australia.
- *Emergency or discretionary payments* by Centrelink to assist particularly needy grandparent and other kinship carers in cases where children are placed in care at short notice.
- A *national information service* (such as a 24-hour telephone line and/or a website) to make information about financial assistance, social support, family law and other legal matters more accessible.
- Additional and sustained, multi-year funding for grandparent/kinship carer *support groups and access to respite services and local information*.
- A review of *Legal Aid income assessment processes* for grandparent and other kinship carers providing primary care of children.
- Access to a *health care card* for each child being raised by a grandparent/kinship carer – to be issued irrespective of the carer's level of assets or income.
- A *counselling/support program* within the national Family Relationship Services Program which specifically address the needs of grandparent/kinship carers.
- National *research into the effectiveness of whole-of-family conferencing* as a strategy of support for grandparents raising grandchildren.

Families Australia, ph: (02) 6273 4885, email: [admin@familiesaustralia.org.au](mailto:admin@familiesaustralia.org.au) web: [www.familiesaustralia.org.au](http://www.familiesaustralia.org.au)

Grandparents Australia, ph: (03) 9372 2422, email: [director@grandparents.com.au](mailto:director@grandparents.com.au)