

Submission to the Australian Government
for the 2008-09 Commonwealth Budget
by Families Australia

Families Australia is Australia's national peak, independent, not-for-profit organisation which promotes the interests of families (www.familiesaustralia.org.au).

Families Australia recommends the following for inclusion in the forthcoming 2008-09 Federal Budget, based on consultations with families and family and community service organisations, including Families Australia's 400 member organisations.

Government priority: Social inclusion and justice

Indigenous health, wellbeing and safety

- Increase by 1-2% the Federal Indigenous health budget, to bring expenditure per head on Indigenous people into line with the level of non-Indigenous spending and help bridge the health care gap.
- Establish Indigenous family support centres, building on the existing Child Care "Hubs", to ensure access by Indigenous families to holistic support services and by children to learning and development opportunities, health care, protection and (where necessary) counselling.

Child safety and wellbeing¹

- Fund consultation processes for the development and implementation of the National Child Protection Framework, including: the establishment of a Commissioner and an Office (within the Prime Minister's Department) for Australian children and young people; using the skills and knowledge of non-government organisations, communities and care professionals in the development of sustainable solutions; engagement of children and young people in care; workforce development strategies; national targets and indicators of child wellbeing to drive improvement; evidence-based "social marketing/health promotion" strategies specifically aimed at preventing child abuse and neglect and enhancing children's wellbeing; a review of assistance available to survivors of child abuse, including adult survivors; and the convening of a national summit on child protection in 2008 involving Federal and States/Territories governments, together with the non-government and academic sectors, aimed at elaborating in detail upon the national framework based on the draft National Child Protection Strategy (June 2006).
- Review the current status of foster and kinship carers with regard to the appropriateness of participation requirements and family support payment policies.

¹ *Towards a National Child Protection Strategy for Australia*, outcomes of the June 2006 National Child Protection Forum, Melbourne, accessible at <http://www.familiesaustralia.org.au/publications/pubs/cpsdraft.pdf>

- Comprehensively review funding for not-for-profit organisations providing advice and assistance to families in crisis and support for children at risk.

Forgotten Australians - people who were raised in institutional care²

- Provide targeted health program, similar to a Gold Card, enabling this group of disadvantaged Australians to access the care they need, including counselling, physical and mental health care and dental care.
- Provide recurrent funding for the national coalition of support organisations, the Alliance for Forgotten Australians, including project funding for an oral history to ensure their stories are preserved and disseminated.

Government priority: Lifting workforce participation and productivity in the face of an ageing population

Work and family³

- Develop a 'Families and Work' website to provide workers, parents and other interested people with access to practical information, resources and research on reconciling work and family, including re-entry to the workforce, adjusting work patterns around the needs of dependents, financial issues and support services.
- Establish a one-stop-shop for carer information, advice and support to enhance access to, and quality of, aged and disability services⁴.
- Undertake a comprehensive review of public policy and employment strategies to assist employees to reconcile work and caring responsibilities for the aged and people with a disability. This review should be conducted in concert with State, Territory and Federal Governments and be aimed at creating a whole-of-government approach to enhancing service provision, responsive to local and regional settings.
- Review current policies with a view to ensuring that asylum seekers are able to contribute to the community and improve their own prospects through paid or voluntary work.
- Direct the Productivity Commission urgently to examine the effectiveness of different models of paid maternity leave in order to improve support for parents in the labour force with new born children, their likely impact on work and family preferences and workforce participation more generally.

² Families Australia, *Forgotten Australians*, August 2007, accessible at <http://www.familiesaustralia.org.au/publications/pubs/Policies/fapforgottenaustraliansaugust2007.pdf>

³ Families Australia, *Work and family*, August 2007, accessible at <http://www.familiesaustralia.org.au/publications/pubs/Policies/fapworkfamilyaugust2007.pdf>

⁴ Taskforce on Care Costs 2007 Report *The hidden face of care: Combining work and caring responsibilities for the aged and people*

with a disability, in conjunction with Families Australia, November 2007, accessible at www.tocc.org.au or www.familiesaustralia.org.au

Grandparents⁵

- Establish a national information service (a 24-hour telephone line and/or a website) to make information about financial assistance, family law and other legal matters more accessible to grandparents and enable referrals to be made to local services, and publish a guide on parenting skills for grandparents.
- Place Grandparent Liaison Officers in Centrelink, Medicare and other Government service delivery agencies as a contact point for grandparents, to benefit grandparents from culturally and linguistically diverse or Indigenous backgrounds, as well as other vulnerable grandparents who may be unfamiliar with, or who experience difficulty in navigating, government systems.

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⁵ Families Australia, *Grandparenting: Present and future*, January 2007, accessible at <http://www.familiesaustralia.org.au/publications/pubs/Grandparentingpresentandfuture.pdf>