



# Western Sydney Community Forum Submission to NSW Department of Community Services



## Response to the Targeted Earlier Intervention Program Reform

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# Response to the Targeted Earlier Intervention Programs Sector Consultation Paper

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In partnership with:

- Bankstown City Council
- Bankstown Workers with Youth Network
- Blacktown City Council
- Community Resource Network
- Council of Social Service NSW
- Liverpool City Council
- Local Community Services Association (LCSA)
- Mountains Community Resource Network (MCRN)
- NSW Family Services Inc. (FaMS)
- Sector Connect Inc.
- WESTIR Ltd.

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## 1. Introduction

In early September, the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) released the Targeted Earlier Intervention Programs Sector Consultation Paper. Western Sydney Community Forum joined with partner peak agencies and local councils to host three Roundtables in Greater Western Sydney on the FACS Earlier Intervention Programs (TEIP) Reforms.

In total the three Roundtables captured the views of 270 representatives from a range of services providing support to the Western Sydney community. Feedback forms were received from 200 participants. Analysis of the notes and feedback forms provides an overall picture of the character and views of individual representatives who participated in the forums.

The consistency in views and the size of the participant groups alone suggest that these forums have captured the general sentiment of services across the region. The themes they identified are largely consistent with the key research and review findings outlined in the FACS discussion paper and demonstrate a sector wide willingness to work in partnership with FACS to improve outcomes. The results present an overview of the current challenges for the region and highlight specific opportunities to address structural and systemic barriers.

## 2. Executive Summary

The feedback shows that community expectations for involvement in the reform process are high. Services are keen to receive direct information, ongoing updates and to be involved in face to face discussions as the reform process unfolds. It is also clear that there is a level of trepidation regarding FACS's ability to meet these expectations. The multi-level role that FACS has as a direct service provider in its own right, a program administrator and an advocate within government contributes to a view that these differing responsibilities sometimes compromise the approach to planning for TEIP. The feedback from Roundtables reflects a diversity of views on each of these roles across the region.

Overall the Roundtable discussion indicates a high level of willingness to collaborate with FACS to deliver better service system outcomes. They highlight a number of areas where there is potential to improve the current structure of the system and a direction that actively employs an evidence base for improvement. During the course of discussions over 50 participants from across the region indicated their interest in being part of a district based "leadership group". Membership of these district leadership groups was based on the understanding that they would use the results of the Roundtable discussions as a basis from which to lead the sector's response to the reform and also potentially discreet projects that might result. In the context of the reform aims these groups present an immediate opportunity to pilot district decision making as part of the reform process and begin to develop the localised plans that are proposed.

The opportunities that adoption of new technology presents have been a consistent theme throughout the discussions. This is an area where there is scope for significant change in approach and the structure of existing services. Provision of online support for services from a single provider for example has the potential to change the way information is provided to individuals and communities, data collection requirements and case management approaches alone. There are numerous examples of the benefits that access to technology can provide in delivery of intervention services.

The framework of the Roundtables focused on the five key topics listed in the FACS discussion paper. The results therefore need to be seen as the baseline for a discussion about the health of the existing structure and service delivery system. Much of the work subsequently recommended such as evaluation of the current funding models, more comprehensive community profiles and better strategic planning will highlight where structural change is needed to better support these initiatives and improve service delivery efficiencies. It is generally recognised that the current service system will change as a result of the reforms. Planning for and management of this change must therefore be a fundamental component of the reform process from the view of existing service providers and those families and individuals who rely on the services and support they provide. Engagement on formal structural change must therefore be a key priority for the reform and needs to commence along with its introduction for wider community discussion.

## 2.1 Summary of Recommendations

There are ten recommendations which have been made as part of this response, with further details about each recommendation available in section five.

- That FACS work collaboratively with the roundtable leadership groups to develop and deliver a "transition plan" that addresses issues such as service contracts and employment obligations.
- Develop and trial a service delivery "community profile" to support planning, measurement, information dissemination, identification of needs and allocation of resources.
- Establish a strategic planning approach that enables the matching of community need with resources.
- That FACS and the district leadership groups commit to working collaboratively to ensure programs are adequately resourced in the context of anticipated regional growth and demand.
- Create professional communities of practice to explore the application of new practice approaches.
- Conduct a review of the current funding model and contractual system to identify whether resource savings and additional capacity could be achieved.
- Conduct a pilot project to explore the potential to improve efficiencies in data collection, reporting and case management.
- That FACS takes a leadership role in the formal engagement of other state government services providers including health, education, police, housing and emergency services.
- Develop a research project to identify service system determinants that facilitate collaborative practices.
- Conduct a pilot project that examines formal service referral agreements/processes.
- That FACS work collaboratively with the district leadership groups to explore development of a cost benefit analysis approach.

## 3. Roundtable Series

### 3.1 Roundtable Structure & Support

The format of the roundtable forums was designed to facilitate conversation around the five key topics listed in the FACS paper. A structured discussion format was used for each roundtable discussion. This format was reflected in the structure of the written feedback form that was distributed to participants at the roundtable discussions. The feedback from each of the three round table forums was recorded:

- By individual tables in discussion notes completed on the day.
- In feedback forms completed by individual representatives during and following the forum.

The information from the notes and the feedback forms was consolidated in three regional summaries. These were presented to subsequent consultation meetings held with each of these regional groups. A Report of Findings was distributed to all participants.

The Community Sector Roundtable series was led by Western Sydney Community Forum in collaboration with the following partners including:

- Auburn City Council
- Bankstown City Council
- Blacktown City Council
- Blue Mountains City Council
- Camden Council
- Campbelltown City Council
- Community Resource Network Inc. (CRN)
- Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS)
- Domestic Violence NSW
- Fairfield City Council
- Hawkesbury City Council
- Holroyd City Council
- Liverpool City Council
- Local Community Services Association (LCSA)
- Mountains Community Resource Network (MCRN)
- NSW Family Services Inc. (FaMS)
- Parramatta City Council
- Penrith City Council
- Sector Connect Inc.
- The Hills Shire Council
- WESTIR Ltd.
- Wingecarribee Shire Council
- Youth Action

### 3.2 Roundtable Participation

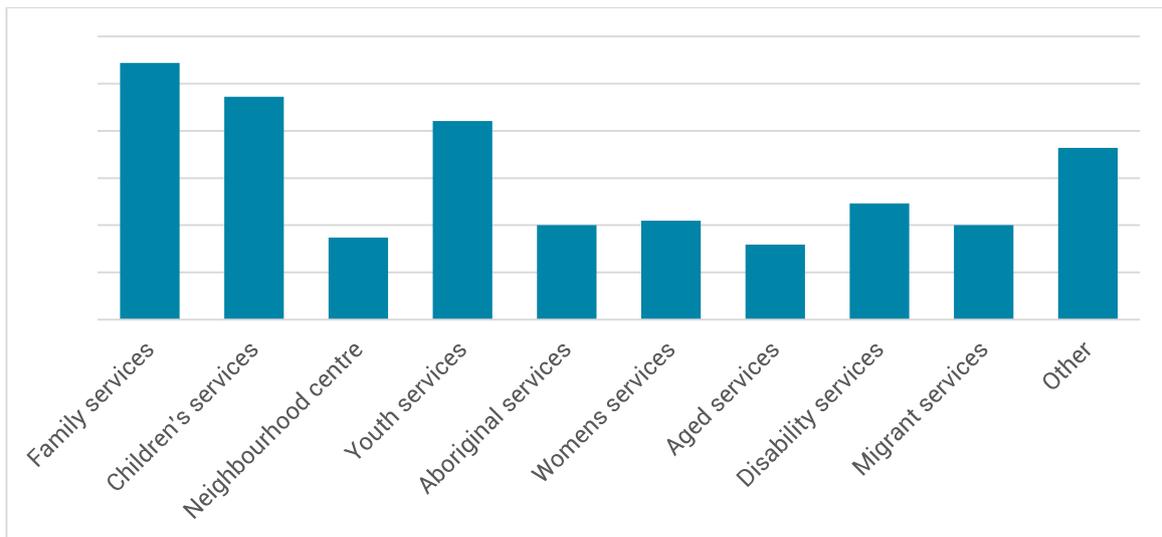


Figure 1: Service Types Provided

The Roundtables submission captures those views of 270 service representatives. This group includes organisations from every Local Government Area within the region that are providing a range of early intervention service types. The issues highlighted and the strategies proposed during the forums are therefore based on discussion and consideration of the potential impacts of these proposals on the full range of early intervention service areas.

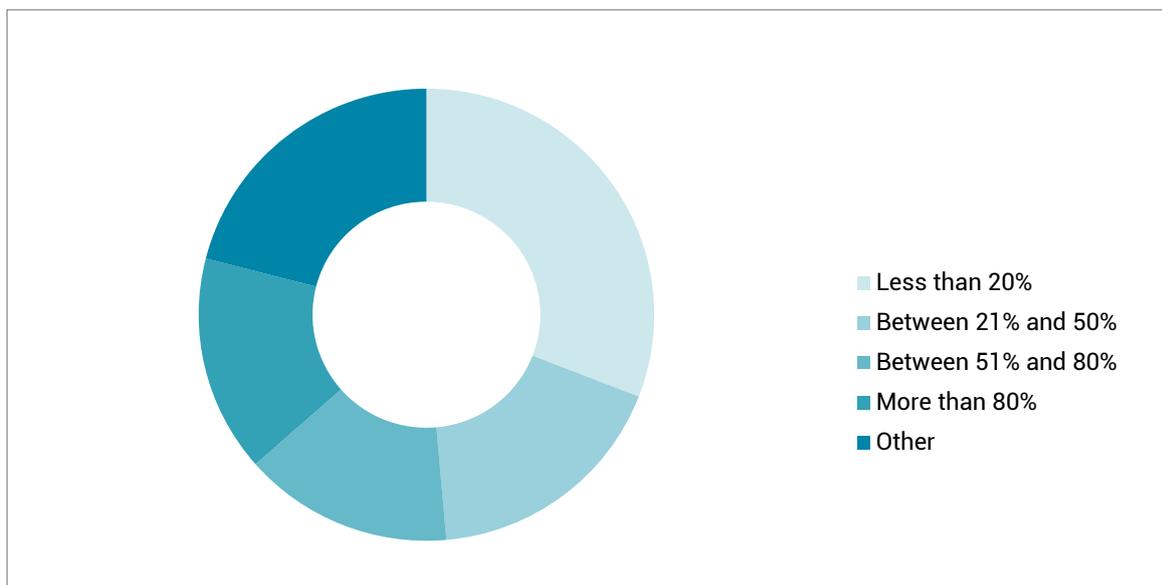


Figure 2: Approximate organisational income from FACS TEIP funding

While the TEIP is a significant source of funding for delivery of early intervention programs for this group most have combined the income they receive from this program with other sources of funding. As shown in Figures 2 and 3 only a small proportion of organisations were solely reliant on TEIP funding. The total organisational income from the program was

more than 50% for around one third of the organisation represented. A significant proportion of the organisations represented also receive funding from Federal, Local and other State Government departments, presumably also with reporting and accountability requirements similar to those of the TEIP. This funding mix is perhaps a strength and a weakness of these organisations. It demonstrates a good return on investment to FACS since it is likely that services are able to achieve efficiencies in services delivery as a result but also highlights how changes in the TEIP have the potential to impact across a range of government program initiatives. These potential interrelationships and the outcomes should be part of the considerations of the reform.

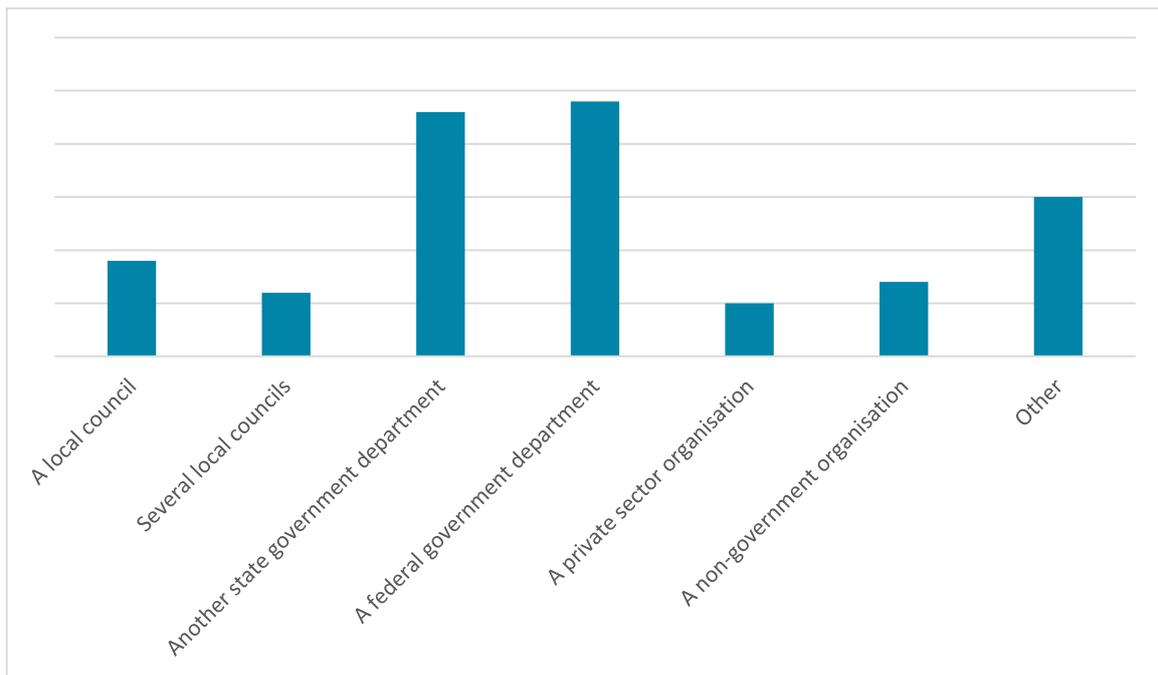


Figure 3: Funding Sources apart from TEIP

## 4. The reform aims

The FACS discussion paper identified five reform aims drawn from current evidence within the early intervention and child protection field. This submission considers the consolidated feedback from the three roundtable forums. The summary highlights the issues raised that relate directly to each of the aims.

### 4.1 Improving outcomes for clients of targeted earlier intervention services

The discussion paper highlights that, while data is limited, services are having an impact on the wellbeing of vulnerable children but that there are continuing challenges that limit the extent to which early intervention is able to make a difference. The Roundtable discussions show that there is broad agreement with the general sentiment expressed with regard to this reform aim and the need to improve outcomes.

The forum discussion explored a range of topics that related directly to improving outcomes and identified a number of strategies that would:

- Expand the capacity to measure outcomes at local, regional and service delivery levels, and
- Address the challenges that limit the service systems' ability to make a difference.

These are summarised in the following section.

#### **Expand the capacity to measure outcomes**

Improving capacity to measure outcomes requires both an understanding of demand and robust measures of success. These were key themes in forum feedback. The strategies proposed focused on:

- **Gaining a better understanding of the character of the communities these services need to reach through:**
  - Mapping of service delivery.
  - Data collection approaches that enhance services' understanding of performance and promote collaboration.
  - Measure satisfaction with services by individuals and families.
  - Mapping of demographic and other population data.
  - Strengthening the overall structure of planning, monitoring and service delivery.
  - Consistency in language around "universal" services to improve communication and information exchange.

- **Funding decisions that better consider the context of the overall service system:**
  - The mix of services that will be established at local level.
  - Their implications on other State and Federal government funding of services.
  - How these decisions contributed to community capacity and building resilience at local level, e.g. engaging volunteer input and promoting local community relationships.
- **Increasing our ability to respond to emerging needs:**
  - Developing better local data collection approaches.
  - Supporting evidence based practice.
  - Development of skills and capabilities.
- **Explore the system from the family and community perspective:**
  - How easy do people find it to navigate the system “shouldn’t need experts in order to understand and access”?
  - Does it provide the support that they need?
  - What would they like to see change?
- **The role of FACS as a partner and facilitator:**
  - Review of FACS accountability data to maximise its potential as a resource to services to inform and drive change.
  - Participate more actively as a direct service agency in monitoring and measuring outcomes.
  - Advocate and lead increased engagement of government delivered services in initiatives designed to improve measurement of outcomes at all levels.

### **Address the challenges that limit the service system**

The limitations, or obstacles, within the current system identified overarching structural issues as well as those associated with local practice. The FACS discussion paper notes “there is a view that in order to make real, sustained inroads to disadvantage, the service system should be rebuilt to achieve a more targeted response”. Feedback from the forums suggests that there is support for this view. The need to create additional opportunities for more in-depth discussion about how services can develop and respond “creating space at a macro level” to discuss the structure of the system was explicitly highlighted in the Western Sydney forum and reinforced tangentially in the South Western Sydney and Blue Mountains Nepean district roundtables. The need to consider the impact of the current funding model on the capacity of the system to delivery outcomes was also a strong theme. The key strategies identified by the forums that directly address challenges that limit the existing system focused on:

- **Creating a vehicle(s) to explore options for ongoing improvement to the service structure:**
  - How we evaluate and measure performance that “captures the story” not simply the numbers.
  - Whether we are having an impact in the longer term on vulnerable populations.
  - Addressing systemic blockages e.g. the funding time lag from identification to responding to emerging/increasing needs.

- Learning from other service models to improve early intervention systems e.g. NDIS
- Developing techniques to use data better.
- Identifying additional resources to drive development of innovative approaches.
- **Evaluation of the effectiveness of the current funding approach:**
  - Identifying its impact on the effectiveness of delivery of services
    - Establishing trust and rapport with families and individuals.
    - Impact on collaboration and partnership development.
  - Identifying its impact on the efficient use of resources:
    - Ability to recruit and retain staff.
    - Decisions to invest in staff training and support.
    - Development of knowledge base.
    - Disincentive to invest in monitoring or robust evaluation of service outcomes.
- **Efficiency increases through adoption of new technologies:**
  - Explore opportunities for improved service information sharing
  - Electronic referral systems
  - Data collection systems at service, local, regional levels
  - Use of social media to promote, inform and compliment service delivery
- **Review current data collection approaches:**
  - Refocus on systems that drive collaborative performance
  - Focus on qualitative outcomes.
  - Maximise the opportunity to share data which supports case management.
- **Evaluate the adequacy of current resourcing:**
  - Address service delivery delays that lead to escalation of problems for families and individuals.
  - Assess consistency in delivery of services.
  - Investment in training to enable delivery of high quality services.
  - Ensuring that communities have access to a spectrum of services including specialist, soft entry and local services.

## 4.2. Creating a service system continuum grounded in good practice

The feedback from the forums indicates that there has already been a significant investment by service providers in development of good practice techniques. Much of the research highlighted in the FACS paper draws directly from learning and evaluation at the Tertiary level of the service continuum. The reform process is an opportunity to initiate a comprehensive review of research to provide a more solid grounding for practice at the Secondary and Universal levels of the TEIP. In particular this would support improvement in measuring the impact of these service interventions in prevention and assist further development of links between Secondary and Universal providers that has been highlighted as an existing weakness in the system. The issues raised in the forums clearly articulate agreement that there is continuous improvement in practice and the areas where further effort needs to focus including:

- **Develop practice techniques** “more *procedural mechanisms rather than depending on individuals*” to improve quality e.g. develop a client vulnerability tool, common principles around referral and support, coordination of case management.
- **Formalising referral processes** to improve the ability of services to respond and breakdown existing “silos” which restrict families’ access.
- **Maintain and enhance collaboration between services and agencies across the service system:**
  - Identify the systemic contributors for good collaboration and using this learning to support and improve collaborative capabilities across the service system.
  - Improve collaboration with and between State Government services.
  - Implement the lessons from new research to drive practice change.
  - More active support for multi-functional services as opposed to single service delivery organisations e.g. “Hub models were working well and they seem to be disappearing”.
  - Partnerships and networks need to be established and maintained so that services can:
    - Refer to the right services at the right time.
    - Have confidence that the people they refer will receive the support.
- **Maintain good information about services for communities and individuals as well as the service networks:**
  - Clear information to communities and individuals on what services are available – “If the services are unclear on what is available the people who need them are likely to be uncertain and confused as well.”

- A “better overall understanding of how things fit together at a broad community services level” to ensure that people gained access to the right services at the right time based on:
  - Effective interagency referrals.
  - Clear understanding of eligibility criteria.
  - Confidence that each service will coordinate its resources to an agreed case mix.
- **Consistency in interagency approaches:**
  - Networking.
  - Partnerships.
- **Access and resourcing for skills training for agency staff:**
  - Ongoing professional development.
  - Implementation of new techniques and approaches.
  - Updating and refreshing information on emerging needs e.g. availability of specialist services, working with refugees, responding to domestic violence etc.

### 4.3 Targeting resources to those in greatest need

The need for targeting is an action required where resources are insufficient to meet overall need. Feedback from the forums shows that there are significant existing gaps in the services system. Targeting to “those in greatest need” has in the past tended to focus resources at the Tertiary level of the service system rather than Secondary and Universal levels. As noted in the paper “the benefits of early intervention across the population are well documented” but we need to examine “where to invest to reduce child maltreatment”. The tension created between demand from Tertiary providers on the resources focusing on Secondary level services means that resource targeting for “earlier” intervention programs often becomes a vexed issue for debate particularly in a context where there is limited data on which to evaluate those strategies and programs contributing most to reduction in child maltreatment. It may be worth expanding the focus of discussion to consider lessons from other areas. For example research in the area of disaster management and crime prevention, both fields where loss of life and serious injury are the potential outcomes of poor management, shows that investment in community resilience can deliver real financial saving over time to their prevention and management functions. They too grapple with the need to target resources where the balance needs consider the risk to life and property versus investment in local relationships and “just in case” prevention measures.

The impact of targeting on the services system makes this one of the most critical areas for collaboration in determining an approach particularly in the context of significant structural changes. Poor consideration of the gains that have been achieved through Secondary level intervention could lead to a new service system that is less able to deliver the outcomes expected at this level and subsequent escalation of the incidence of child maltreatment. The feedback from the forums provides a tentative blueprint for how this discussion might be achieved constructively within the region as part of the reform process.

- **Considering strategies that maximise the impact of the existing resource base:**
  - Funding that considers the context.
  - Maximising flexibility.
  - Locally focused multi service outlets.
  - Strategic planning to identify emerging needs.
- **Improving partnerships and collaboration with universal service providers including:**
  - Education providers.
  - Health services.
  - FACS service delivery providers.
- **Ensuring provision of a basic service mix that responds to the local charter and needs of communities:**
  - Soft entry services based locally.
  - Universal services that build capacity.
  - Targeted services to address identified needs; options for women and service to young people.
- **Strategic planning which quantifies emerging needs and enables services to plan for new demand:**
  - Domestic Violence support.
  - Refugee services.
  - Youth support.
  - CALD support.
  - Aboriginal services.
- **Evaluation of services that demonstrates impact and likely return on further "investment":**
  - Measurement of the contribution to prevention of early intervention service types.
  - Identification of critical triggers for intervention.
  - Investment based on strong evaluative findings.

## 4.4 District and local decision making

The importance of local decision making is one of the strongest overall themes articulated in the roundtable feedback. The ability of individual and collaborative service networks to make decisions locally in response to needs is highlighted as a significant contributor in their ability to respond effectively and improve outcomes overall.

Locally based and provided services were identified as a cornerstone for community wellbeing. They provide the baseline for:

- Improved capacity to respond to need.
- Sharing data, skills and information to improve service delivery.
- Strong existing networks "our integrated service system has been a 30+ year investment".
- Established systems for collaboration across the full spectrum of service availability "from the pointy end to general population strengthening".
- They are seen as more accessible, providing ease of access "soft entry" points, negating the potential that transport is a barrier and more likely to have an existing connections with local mainstream services such as recreation, general health or interest groups.
- Exemplifiers of a "no wrong door" approach to access which eased entry for vulnerable groups to services at critical points.
- A focus for access to services for communities.
- Information point for specialist and regional service providers.
- Open door and drop in approaches mean these are more accessible to the community.

Local services are also more likely to be able to attract local support and resourcing whether it be funding through local clubs, Local Government or general community support. The participation of Local Government representatives in each of the forums is indicative of the investment by this level of government in the effectiveness of the local services system. As shown in the feedback Local Government is also a significant contributor of funds to a number of services. Withdrawal of that support would impact on the existing service system, conversely greater engagement of local government in decision making has the potential to increase the level of support that these organisations allocate to supporting earlier intervention providers based within their local area.

## 4.5 Increased flexibility so that clients are the centre of the system

The feedback received clearly identified flexibility in response as a key strength. Overwhelmingly services want to see even greater flexibility. Where it exists it is a significant factor in providing support tailored to the needs of individuals and families. The strengths highlighted by the forums reinforced the conclusions summarised in the FACS discussion paper. Flexibility in service delivery enabled:

- The ability to respond when “vulnerability” is initially identified and develop case management approaches uninhibited by time limits.
- Latitude to focus on capacity building, working with whole family’s bottom up client focused approaches.
- Services to develop action strategies based on knowledge of the local community:
  - Linking this with outcomes.
  - Evidence based practice.
  - Evaluation.
- The ability to respond to specific needs of families and individuals creatively:
  - To act at a critical point when intervention now has a good chance of preventing crisis.
  - No constraints in eligibility criteria e.g. by age limits.
  - No constraints in the type of response.
- Promoted family centred approaches to delivery.

There is an obvious tension apparent in the feedback from forums in relation to flexibility versus specific intervention achieving an effective balance and avoiding “siloing”. Underlying this is the current reality of limited resourcing and targeting of those resources.

The clear preference for locally based flexible services has implications for the likely framework of the services system structure in the region in future.

## 5. Recommendations

The WSCF roundtable discussions were intended to kick start discussion within the services sector on the FACS reform process. They have identified a range of issues and ideas that need to be explored further to tease out the detail and engage the service sector.

The results from this initial exercise have identified a number of actions for consideration as part of the reform dialogue and progressing work to achieve the aims outlined by FACS for the reform.

### Recommendation One: Transition Plan

That FACS work collaboratively with the district leadership groups established through the roundtable process to develop and deliver a "transition plan". This plan will anticipate and manage the impact on services that may result from structural changes to the service system. This includes issues such as:

- Discontinuation of service contracts.
- Employment obligations for service staff.
- Transition planning for existing staff.
- New service contracting agreements.
- Effective and efficient procurement processes.

### Recommendation Two: Community Profile

Develop and trial a service delivery "community profile" to directly support service level planning, measurement of the service system, information dissemination, identification of emerging service needs and allocation of resources. Ideally the profile would be a dynamic document available online to services drawing from a range of source materials. It could present consolidated information and data including:

- Demographic information.
- Service delivery mapping.
- Social and health indicators.

### Recommendation Three: Strategic planning approach

Establish a strategic planning approach that enables the matching of community need with resources to:

- Develop strategies to identify emerging needs in each district that recognise the unique landscape of the service system in each area.
- Identify service system qualitative and quantitative performance measures that provide a detailed picture of the investment return of services within the region.

## Recommendation Four: Regional growth and increasing demand

That FACS and the district leadership groups commit to working collaboratively to ensure that early intervention programs are adequately resourced in the context of anticipated regional growth and increasing demand.

## Recommendation Five: Professional Communities of Practice

Create professional communities of practice within the region with the aim of exploring application of new practice approaches. These could provide a vehicle for any pilot and research projects initiated as part of the reforms.

## Recommendation Six: Review funding and contractual models

Conduct a review of the current funding model and contractual system to identify whether resource savings and additional capacity could be achieved through:

- Extension of the length of contracts.
- Changes to reporting requirements.
- Greater focus on flexible local delivery of services.

## Recommendation Seven: Improve data collection and reporting

Conduct a pilot project to explore the potential to improve efficiencies in data collection, reporting and case management using current data management technologies. The project could develop a baseline data collection platform and pilot use for a fixed period.

## Recommendation Eight: Engage other Government service providers

That FACS takes a leadership role in the formal engagement of other state government services providers including health, education, police, housing and emergency services, in strategic planning and collaborative initiatives at local and regional levels designed to improve services system outcomes.

## Recommendation Nine: Identify determinants of collaboration

Develop a research project to identify service system determinants that facilitate collaborative practices. The findings of this project be used to:

- Implement changes within the service delivery structure to promote collaboration.
- Define a set of practice approaches which promote collaborative practice within their organisations.
- Identify service funding performance measures that facilitate collaborative practice.

## Recommendation Ten: Examine formal referral agreements

Conduct a pilot project that examines formal service referral agreements and processes. The project could develop a set of policies and procedures that address the current weaknesses with regard to interagency referrals. These could be piloted in 3 or 4 localities to assess effectiveness and potential for application across the region.

## Recommendation Eleven: Explore cost benefit analysis

That FACS work collaboratively with the district leadership groups to explore development of a cost benefit analysis approach which allows discussion on:

- Targeting of resources.
- Measures of minimum service level costs.
- Identified opportunities for cost savings.
- Identifies performance in terms of investment in TEIP.