
MEDIA RELEASE

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FAMILIES NEED SUPPORT RATHER THAN 'MANAGEMENT'

Family Relationship Services Australia (FRSA) is a network of more than 140 organisations across Australia that work with families, including families that are receiving income support from the Australian Government.

FRSA supports the call from ACOSS and other national networks for the withdrawal of compulsory income management provisions contained in the *Welfare Reform and Reinstatement of Racial Discrimination Act Bill 2009* ('the Bill') currently before the Australian Parliament. "This legislation is disrespectful to the majority of families receiving income support who take good care of their kids" said Samantha Page, FRSA Executive Director. FRSA is also concerned that it has the potential to discourage help-seeking by families who are struggling for fear that they may be judged as "vulnerable".

FRSA believes that the funds allocated to income management under the Bill's provisions (\$352M in the NT alone) could be better spent on improving the lives of children in households with limited income by funding programs. "Service providers and families consistently report that it is very difficult to arrange family support, particularly intensive family support, before parents hit 'rock bottom' and children are assessed for placement into out of home care".

"Across Australia there are programs that have been developed and evaluated by experts, which are known to deliver outcomes for families and yet struggle to attract sufficient funding to continue. Experienced practitioners know that there are few parents who don't genuinely want the best for their kids. Programs that work are those that engage families in a positive way to build on their strengths and provide effective long-term support to address areas of difficulty such as drug or alcohol misuse, family violence, mental health issues or just the challenges of unstable and unsuitable housing and inadequate levels of income" said Anne Hollonds, Chairperson of FRSA and CEO of Relationships Australia NSW.

Those on the front line of service delivery consistently identify the need for increased investment in programs that target the underlying causes of family breakdown and dysfunction. For example:

- Improving financial capacity through matched savings schemes, no interest loans, assistance with student or school expenses.
- Reducing financial vulnerability through financial counselling and advice, credit reform and representation as well as using community service settings to increase financial literacy.
- Improving social inclusion for children and young people through sport and recreational programs, mentoring programs, diversionary programs for young offenders and therapeutic programs addressing the emotional needs of children and young people exposed to family violence, parental conflict or impacted by disability, health or mental health issues.
- Drug and alcohol rehabilitation for parents with children, consistently identified as an area of difficulty for service providers this can include peer mentoring programs and home visiting services delivered by practitioners with expertise in both family support and therapeutic recovery from substance use.

Family Relationship Services Australia is the national peak body for over 140 family relationship and support service providers, operating in more than 550 locations across Australia. For more information visit

www.frsa.org.au



Linking services, supporting relationships

- Mental health services, families on income support cannot afford private counsellors and psychologists, they rely on free community based mental health services which are chronically underfunded nationally.
- Intensive support for families in which children are at risk of cumulative harm has been consistently identified as an area of priority need by inquiries and evaluations into child protection - investment in multi-faceted intensive programs that coordinate supports to parents and children across home, school, community settings and work.
- Enhancing parental competency and confidence through free parenting seminars in community settings, school based education programs, supported playgroups and paint and play programs help to address social isolation and encourage parenting competence.

There is a wealth of evidence to support increased funding for programs such as those mentioned above. Sadly there are too many examples of programs that have closed or at risk of closure because of inadequate funding. The expenditure on income management is a lost opportunity to direct funding to programs with proven efficacy.

-ENDS-

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