



Family &  
Community  
Services

# Program Guidelines for the Brighter Futures Program

Vulnerable Children & Families Branch

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## 1. Purpose

These guidelines provide an overview of Brighter Futures and form part of the program level agreement with the lead agency.

The Brighter Futures Program guidelines are supported by a companion resource – the Brighter Futures Service provision guidelines which provide additional policy, procedural and practice information for the successful implementation of Brighter Futures.

## 2. Legislative framework

The primary legislation that underpins FACS provision of funding to non-government organisations through Brighter Futures is the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* and the *Community Welfare Act 1987* and the regulations associated with these acts. Other legislation that impacts on FACS management of its funded programs includes the *Public Finance & Audit Act 1983*, and the *Privacy & Personal Information Protection Act 1998*.

## 3. Policy directions and commitments

Goal 13 of NSW 2021 commits the NSW government to actions that better protect the most vulnerable members of our community and break the cycle of disadvantage and includes three key targets:

- increased proportion of NSW children who are developmentally on track in Australian Early Development Index domains
- reduced rate of children and young people reported at risk of significant harm by 1.5% per year
- reduced rate of children and young people in statutory out-of-home care by 1.5% per year.

Brighter Futures aims to support the achievement of these targets and is particularly focussed on reducing the rate of children and young people reported at risk of significant harm (ROSH) and reducing the rate of children and young people in out-of-home care (OOHC).

### **FACS Community Services Program Reform**

Over the next two years, Community, Early Intervention and Intensive Programs will be undergoing reform with a focus on local need and outcome measurement. There will be many opportunities for organisations to be a part of that reform process. Program reform will focus on how services delivered to children, young people and families can have a greater impact and reduce the incidence and prevalence of behaviours that put children and young people at risk.

Over the next two years, these program guidelines will be revised and will require organisations to address impacts and connections with NSW Government reforms including:

- NSW Child Protection reforms ‘Safe Home for Life’
- NSW Homelessness reforms including ‘Going Home Staying Home’
- FACS localisation including the requirement to participate in district plans
- NSW Family and Domestic Violence reform ‘It Stops Here’
- developments in other programs.

In the case of Brighter Futures, the reforms will focus on the program effectively supporting families where the ROSH threshold has been met. Over this period FACS will work with Brighter Futures lead agencies to develop revised Brighter Futures model and service interventions.

From July 2014, an incremental transition of the Brighter Futures program to supporting families where the ROSH threshold has been met will take place. Program guidelines and the Service provision guidelines will be updated as Brighter Futures policy and procedure is revised.

These reforms may lead to changes occurring during the contractual period. In this case, the existing agreement may be renegotiated with services to reflect new policy and program requirements.

### **Cultural issues in the provision of FACS funded services**

As a FACS funded organisation, you are responsible for ensuring that the services you provide are ‘culturally capable’. This means that your organisation takes account of cultural, linguistic and religious issues in the design and delivery of services so that services are appropriate to the characteristics and circumstances of children, young people and their families. Some practical aspects of being culturally capable include:

- the employees of the service reflect the cultural diversity of the Service’s target population
- your service has clear policies and strategies in place for working with families from culturally diverse backgrounds
- employees are able to provide information to clients and to use resources that are linguistically and culturally appropriate
- training is provided for service staff in culturally reflective casework practices that are appropriate for refugee and migrant communities
- staff have access to interpreter services where this is necessary to support a client.

Funded organisations will source interpreter services independent of FACS. They will also be required to report on their use of interpreter services through the annual Community Services acquittal / accountability process.

## 4. Program description

Brighter Futures delivers tailored services to families with children aged under 9 years, or who are expecting a child, where the child(ren) are at high risk of entering or at risk of escalating within the statutory child protection system.

The program is one component of a suite of targeted early intervention and prevention programs funded by FACS to promote the wellbeing and safety of vulnerable children and young people in NSW.

### Program goals

Brighter Futures aims to ensure that vulnerable children (including those at ROSH) can live safely at home. The program has three key performance measures, they include:

- reduce the rate of ROSH reports to the Helpline
- reduce the rate of entry to and length of time in OOHC
- reduce future demand for services, such as child protection, corrective or mental health services.

### Service delivery principles

The following principles guide the delivery of Brighter Futures services:

- **Voluntary participation** – participation in the program is voluntary
- **Child-centred** – the focus of intervention is on outcomes for children
- **Family-focused** – services are flexible and responsive to the particular needs of each family
- **Strengths-based** – a strengths-based approach involves recognising, fostering and building on people's skills, capacities and competencies
- **Integrated service delivery** – case management is coordinated so that families can access the different services and supports they require through the one case manager.

### Referral pathways

There are two referral pathways into Brighter Futures.

- **Child Protection Helpline referrals** – families referred to a lead agency by FACS following a report to the Child Protection Helpline.
- **Community referrals** – families referred directly to a lead agency by an agency or individual.

## 5. Program scope and boundary

Brighter Futures delivers targeted services to families at high risk of entering or escalating within the statutory child protection system.

Children (and families) eligible for the program will meet program entry criteria and will not:

- be the subject of current proceedings to assign parental responsibility to another person
- be referred where any member of the family is the subject of criminal proceedings and / or a current joint investigative review team (JIRT) investigation that relates to an allegation of abuse or neglect of a child or young person
- receive a statutory care allowance or a supported care allowance.

## 6. Program results and outcomes

The broad goal of the Brighter Futures program is to enable vulnerable children to live safely at home without the need for further intervention.

Brighter Futures services work to achieve the following outcomes for:

- children to be:
  - safe from harm and injury
  - developing and learning appropriately for their age
- parents to:
  - have the skills which enable them to reduce the risk of neglect or abuse of their children
  - foster healthy development and resilience
  - adequately manage vulnerabilities that contribute to risk, including mental health, alcohol or drug misuse, domestic violence, learning difficulties or intellectual disability
- families to:
  - have access to the universal and specialist services they need.

## 7. Service group objectives

In the FACS funded programs system, Brighter Futures forms part of the Targeted Earlier Intervention for Vulnerable Children, Young People & Families service group. The programs in this service group are all geared to meeting the needs of children, young people and families who have identified vulnerabilities. The shared, broad,

objective of these programs is to prevent the further escalation of issues that contribute to this vulnerability.

The table below illustrates where this program is located within the FACS funded programs continuum of services.

### Continuum of Service

Universal		Targeted							Statutory Intervention						
Prevention and Early Intervention									Child Protection			OOHC			
Community Builders	Families NSW	Aboriginal Child Youth & Family Strategy	Aboriginal Child & Family Centres	Integrated Domestic & Family Violence Services Program	Staying Home Leaving Violence	Child, Youth & Family Support	Getting it Together	Brighter Futures	Youth Hope	Strengthening Families	Statutory Child Protection Casework	Intensive Family Support/ Intensive Family Preservation	Intensive Family Based Services	OOHC Casework	OOHC Reform

## 8. Evidence base

Brighter Futures is predicated on contemporary research and evidence<sup>12</sup> that demonstrates effective prevention and early intervention programs:

- are multi component – rather than single intervention strategies
- are tailored to meet the specific needs of the target group
- are implemented with program fidelity and are of high quality
- establish a positive respectful relationship between the family and caseworker / program facilitator.

Key findings of a four year (2006–2010) independent program evaluation by the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) 3 and subsequent FACS data analysis highlighted:

<sup>1</sup> Watson J et al. (2005) *Prevention and early Intervention literature review*

<sup>2</sup> Watson J and Tully L (2008) *Prevention and early intervention update – trends in recent research*

<sup>3</sup> Hilferty, F et al. (2010). *The Evaluation of Brighter Futures, NSW Community Services' Early Intervention Program: Final Report*. Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW

- Families with more complex issues (CP reports, OOHC) at entry to Brighter Futures demonstrated the greatest level of improvement after commencing the program - subsequently a decrease in child protection reports and less time in OOHC was evident for this group.
- Child protection reports and length of time in OOHC were reduced by Brighter Futures when compared to a similar comparison group.
- An overall modest improvement in family functioning, noting however that a substantial proportion of families did not benefit from the program.
- Families with drug and alcohol problems and/or experiencing domestic violence demonstrated the smallest reduction in reports over time.

## 9. Target group

Brighter Futures delivers targeted services and support to families with children aged under 9 years or who are expecting a child, where the child/ren are at high risk of entering or escalating within the statutory child protection system, including OOHC.

### **Eligibility criteria**

Eligible families will meet the following criteria:

- the family will have at least one child under the age of nine or be expecting a child, where the child is at high risk of entering or escalating within the statutory child protection system
- the parent / carer will have at least one program vulnerability which impacts adversely on capacity to parent and / or the child's safety and wellbeing.

### **Program vulnerabilities**

The parent / carer will experience at least one of the following vulnerabilities:

- domestic violence
- drug or alcohol misuse
- parental mental health issues
- lack of parenting skills or inadequate supervision
- parent(s) with significant learning difficulties or intellectual disability.

### **Priority**

Brighter Futures priority of access is provided to:

- referrals made following a report to the Child Protection Helpline
- families with children under 3 years of age
- Aboriginal families
- pregnant younger women or young parents in OOHC or leaving care.

## 10. Service types / activities funded

### **Case management**

On average a family will receive approximately 12 months of sustained case management from a Brighter Futures worker. Caseworkers plan and coordinate these services to ensure that families access the most appropriate services and support at the right time. Together with the family, caseworkers regularly review these services and supports and respond to the family's changing needs.

### **Casework focused on parent vulnerabilities**

Casework has a specific focus on the impact of domestic violence, mental health issues and drug or alcohol misuse on parental capacity and on children. Parents are supported to implement strategies, and develop the necessary skills and resources to increase the safety of their children at home.

### **Quality children's services**

Includes any of the following, licensed, children's services:

- centre-based childcare, such as long day care or occasional care services
- preschools
- mobile services in rural and remote areas
- family day-care or home based services.

### **Parenting programs (group based)**

In the Brighter Futures context, parenting programs (group based) are usually:

- delivered in a group
- delivered outside the home
- often aimed to address a specific issue e.g. child behaviour
- short-term interventions delivered by a facilitator.

### **Structured home visiting, including parenting programs delivered one-to-one**

Structured home visiting provides support and skill development to parents in the home environment and includes:

- coaching, practical support and advice to parents about the care of their children
- modeling good parenting practices
- assisting families to develop supportive networks.

### **Brokerage funds**

The Brighter Futures program includes the use of 'brokerage' funds to purchase goods and services to support case plan goals and promote positive outcomes for children participating in the program.

## 11. Performance measures and service results

This table outlines current Brighter Futures program monitoring and reporting conducted by FACS:

Service result	Performance measure
Eligible children and families receive Brighter Futures services.	Lead Agencies maintain at least 90% Brighter Futures program occupancy.*
Children live safely at home following participation in Brighter Futures.	The proportion of children who exit Brighter Futures with case plan goal achieved and who are reported at ROSH.
	The proportion of children who following participation in Brighter Futures enter OOHC.

\*Quarterly program occupancy and data reports are provided to support Brighter Futures program monitoring and review. The occupancy rate is subject to review in 2014–15.

Further information about Brighter Futures data reporting requirements, and access to reporting tools, is available through the Community Services website:

[www.community.nsw.gov.au](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au)

## 12. Data collection strategies

FACS maintains a Brighter Futures minimum data set through the DOCS Connect Portal. Administrative data collected as part of the mandatory minimum data set enable FACS to monitor and report on Brighter Futures program performance as noted.

## 13. Partnership framework

FACS enters into agreements with other government agencies to facilitate collaboration within the service system. An example of this is the 2013 Memorandum of Understanding between Family and Community Services and the Department of Attorney General and Justice regarding the regulation of minimum standards for men's domestic violence behaviour change programs.

Under this agreement, when providing referrals to domestic violence behaviour change programs, Community Services funded Service Providers will only refer domestic violence perpetrators to behaviour change programs that meet the minimum standards. A list of approved providers can be found under 'Minimum standards for men's behaviour change programs' at

[www.domesticviolence.lawlink.nsw.gov.au](http://www.domesticviolence.lawlink.nsw.gov.au).

## 14. Glossary

### **Brighter Futures ‘Lead agencies’**

Lead agencies are responsible for the provision of Brighter Futures services within a discrete planning area. Lead agencies undertake referral, assessment and ongoing case management for families in the program.

Lead agencies also oversee and coordinate delivery of Brighter Futures funded service options – children’s services, structured home visiting and parenting programs.

Some lead agencies have formed consortia to provide Brighter Futures services. A consortium is made up of a group of partner agencies that, together, provide the suite of Brighter Futures service options. Lead agencies are responsible for ensuring that they and their consortium partners provide services in accordance with the Funding Deed and Program Level Agreement entered into with FACS.

### **Brighter Futures Unit**

The Brighter Futures Unit (BFU) is a specialist staff group that processes reports received at the Child Protection Helpline for children (and families) eligible to participate in the program.

### **NSW Health**

Managed by NSW Health, the Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Health Strategy (AMIHS) and Building Strong Foundations (BSF) are both key referral sources to Brighter Futures.

Brighter Futures provides priority access for Aboriginal families, including eligible families referred by AMIHS and BSF services.

### **Family Referral Services (FRS)**

Eleven FRS provide advice, referral and needs assessment to vulnerable children, young people and families across NSW. FRS are an important referral pathway for Brighter Futures and in NSW five trial sites facilitate the referral of children and families at ROSH to Brighter Futures. FRS are managed by NSW Health.

### **Child Wellbeing Units (CWUs)**

Located in NSW Health, NSW Police, and the Department of Education and Communities, CWUs provide support and advice to mandatory reporters regarding concerns for the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child, young person or unborn child. CWU staff assist workers to apply the Mandatory Reporter Guide (MRG) and complete a report to the Child Protection Helpline where necessary.

CWU’s also identify and refer families to appropriate support services including Brighter Futures.

### **Community Service Centres (CSCs)**

CSCs are locally based offices that work directly with children and young people reported at ROSH. CSC's provide triage, assessment and case management to support children and young people to live safely at home.

CSCs refer to and work collaboratively with interagency partners to provide families with the intervention and support they need. The relationship between CSCs and Brighter Futures is important to effective intervention for children and families at ROSH.

### **Early Intervention Council (EIC)**

Established in 2011, the EIC provides advice and recommendations to achieve service system improvement within Early Intervention programs.

Chaired by FACS, membership of the EIC includes NGO representatives, (including Brighter Futures Lead Agencies), peak organisations and relevant NSW Government agencies.