

Brighter Futures

Program Guidelines



**NSW Department of
Community Services**

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Introduction

The Brighter Futures (DoCS Early Intervention Program) Program Guidelines have been developed to provide an overview of the program as it is implemented in NSW.

The guidelines ensure that the purpose and parameters of the funding program are clearly articulated, enabling DoCS, the service provider as well as service users and the community to be clear about what is being funded and why.

The DoCS Corporate Plan 2004/05 – 2008/09 presents a Results Logic Diagram that maps out the range of outcomes required to achieve the overarching corporate goal that children, families and communities are safer, healthier and more resilient. Brighter Futures plays a major role in achieving that outcome by providing early intervention services that reinforce family relationships, increase resilience, promote healthy child development and prevent child abuse and neglect.

These guidelines link the results expected from DoCS funding programs and the funding processes. They outline the results for the program, the activities that are expected to lead to these results and the performance measures that need to be incorporated into agreements with service providers.

The current hierarchy of documentation within the program is:

1. DoCS Corporate Plan

Provides the Results for the community that DoCS is seeking through the program

2. Program Guidelines

Outlines the objectives, activities and performance measures for the program

3. Service Specifications

Provides the individual specifications and outcomes for services funded in the program

4. Performance Monitoring Framework.

Provides the performance monitoring processes that ensure that outcomes and program results are achieved.

These Program Guidelines will be updated in line with any major update or revision of the above key documents.

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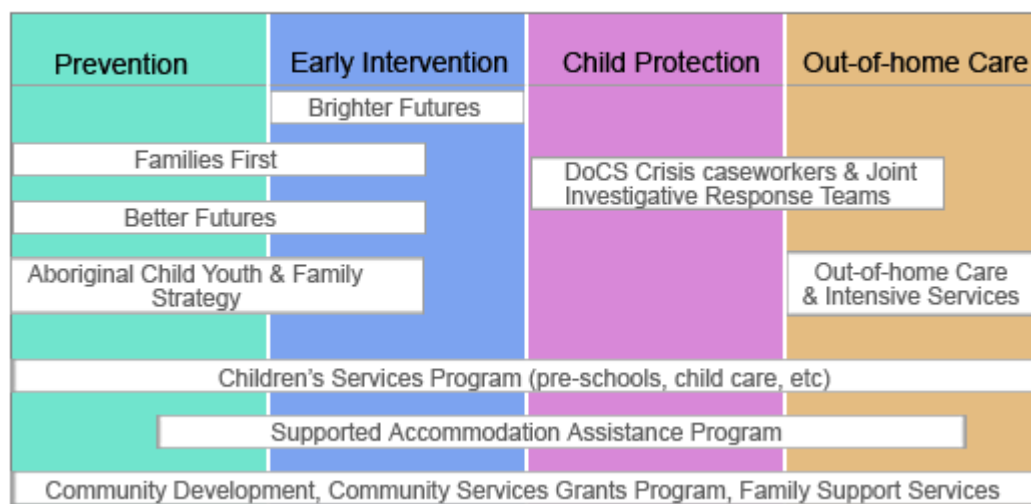
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1 Program Description and Clients

Brighter Futures is a voluntary, targeted program designed for families encountering problems that impact on their ability to care for their children. The program provides families with the necessary support and services to help prevent an escalation of the problems they are facing. The program recognises that supporting families before problems reach a crisis improves family resilience, promotes healthy child development, and reduces child abuse and neglect.

Brighter Futures is part of a continuum of integrated service provision to children and families in NSW – with this program at one end of the continuum and Out of Home Care (OoHC) placement and support services at the other.

Brighter Futures in relation to other DoCS' programs



Brighter Futures can support pregnant women and families with young children aged 0-8 years who require long term support (up to two years) by a range of services. The program gives particular priority to those families with children under three years. To be able to access the Brighter Futures program parents must also be experiencing a vulnerability that if not addressed is likely to worsen and:

- impact adversely on their capacity to parent adequately and/or
- the wellbeing of the children.

Vulnerabilities included within the Brighter Futures program are:

- domestic violence
- parental drug or alcohol problems
- parental mental health issues
- lack of family or social support
- parents with significant learning difficulties or intellectual disability
- child behaviour management problems
- lack of parenting skills/inadequate supervision.

Parents and children are able to access a range of key services and support including home visiting, quality children's services and parenting programs.

As the program is voluntary, suitability also depends on family's willingness to participate in it.

The Brighter Futures program is designed so that either a DoCS Brighter Futures Team or a lead agency can manage delivery of services or support. A key feature of the program is that families can access the full range of services and supports they require through a single entry point, which is either the DoCS Brighter Futures Team or the lead agency. This central coordination promotes efficient and consistent service provision and reduces complexity for families.

Transitioning a family out of the program must be considered when:

- the family's goals have been achieved
- the family is no longer benefiting from the program
- the family moves to an area where the program is not operating
- the family decides to stop participating in the program
- the child/ren has been removed from the family as a result of a statutory child protection intervention.

2 Legislative Framework

Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 ('the Act') forms part of the framework for the provision of Brighter Futures. Children, however requiring statutory care under this Act are not eligible for the program.

The relevant objects of the Act that guide the program are:

S 8 (a) that children and young persons receive such care and protection as is necessary for their safety, welfare and well-being, taking into account the rights, powers and duties of their parents or other persons responsible for them, and

S8 (c) that appropriate assistance is rendered to parents and other persons responsible for children and young persons in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities in order to promote a safe and nurturing environment.

In relation to the principles of the Act, the program is guided in particular by section 9 (d) which states that:

In deciding what action it is necessary to take (whether by legal or administrative process) in order to protect a child or young person from harm, the course to be followed must be the least intrusive intervention in the life of the child or young person and his or her family that is consistent with the paramount concern to protect the child or young person from harm and promote the child's or young person's development.

The establishment of the program is an appropriate program response and is within the scope of the principle roles of the Minister and the Director-General described in Part 3 of the Act, which are:

S 15 General role of the Minister:

The Minister is to promote a partnership approach between the government, non-government agencies, families, corporations, business agencies and the community in taking responsibility for and dealing with children and young persons who are in need of care and protection under this Act.

Under S 16 (1) Principle role of the Director-General:

The Director-General is to provide services and promote the development, adoption and evaluation of policies and procedures that accord with the objects and principles of this Act.

3 Program Result and Service Group Objectives

The DoCS corporate plan for 2004-2008 provides the intended result for provision of services in Brighter Futures (as the DoCS Early Intervention Program):

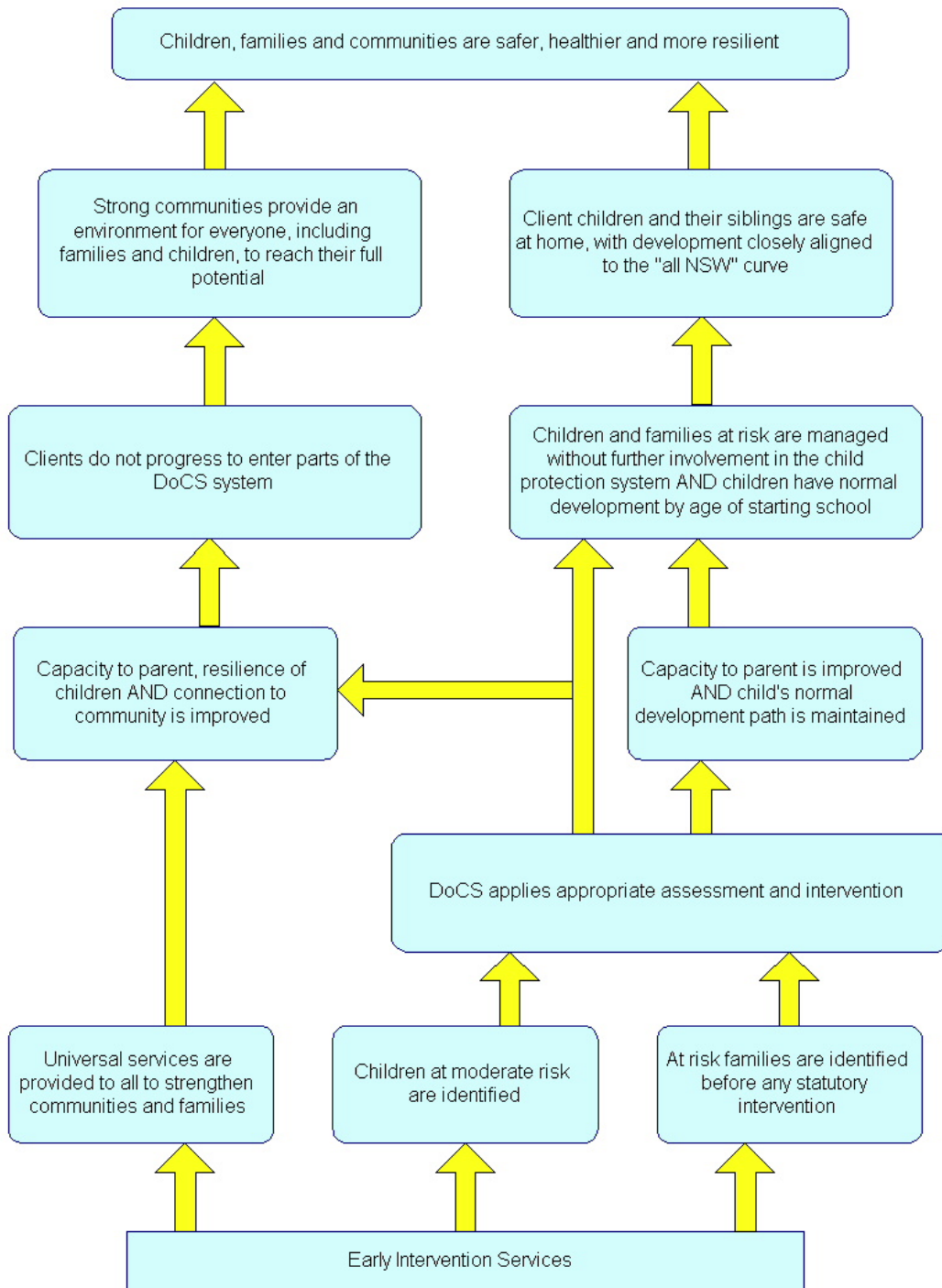
Client children are supported so that they have age-appropriate development without ongoing involvement in the child protection system.

The objectives for the program from the DoCS Corporate plan 2004-2008 are:

- intervene as early as possible to strengthen families and provide high quality childcare so at-risk children have optimal development
- in conjunction with DoCS' partners, plan and fund services that provide a range of appropriate support options for vulnerable families
- reduce re-reporting by making children safe earlier
- establish a robust evaluation framework and adapt the program to respond to what we learn as it is implemented.

The DoCS Results Logic Diagram places the goals of Early Intervention OOHC within a goal hierarchy as follows:

Diagram 1: DoCS Results Logic Diagram for Early Intervention



4 Performance Measures

The following performance measures for Brighter Futures (as the Early Intervention Program) are identified in the 2004/05 – 2008/09 Corporate Plan:

Subsequent safety of children receiving early intervention

Percentage of (child) service recipients who were assessed as not requiring to be placed in out-of-home care but are later placed in out-of-home care¹.

Development of children receiving early intervention

Percentage of children receiving early intervention services under five years old who reach appropriate developmental milestones by school entry age, with particular emphasis on:

- i) school readiness
- ii) physical and mental health.

Cost of early intervention service delivery

Annual real² recurrent expenditure per child admitted to the early intervention program.

5 Service Activities to be Funded

DoCS funds a range of flexible services under Brighter Futures that cater for individual, as well as family needs in order to improve emotional, social, health and educational developmental outcomes for families.

DoCS contracts lead agencies to provide case management by a Brighter Futures case worker as well as a number of support services. The lead agency may deliver the whole suite of Brighter Futures services as a single agency, or may do so in conjunction with its partners as part of a consortium. In the latter arrangement, DoCS' contractual arrangement for funding purposes is with the lead agency only. Funding is also provided to lead agencies to provide support services for Brighter Futures clients case managed by DoCS Brighter Futures caseworkers.

Each family joining the program will be supported by a Brighter Futures DoCS caseworker or lead agency worker, who will work with parents to plan for the services that will best support their family.

¹ This measure counts children who have been accepted as clients needing early intervention services but despite the intervention, finally need to be placed in out-of-home care.

² Base year for real dollars is 2002/03.

Services and supports provided by the Brighter Futures program include:

Case management

Case management is the process of assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring and review. Together, parents and their Brighter Futures worker plan for the services that will best support their family. In the Brighter Futures context case management aims to strengthen families and decrease risks to children and young persons, in order to optimise their outcomes through integrated coordinated service delivery. Brighter Futures workers plan and coordinate services to ensure that families access the right services and support at the right time. They regularly review with parents the services and supports families are using and respond to the changing needs of families.

As part of the case management process lead agencies are expected to provide a range of individual and / or family services, as per the types of services described below:

Home visiting

Families are visited at home and provided with support and the opportunity to talk about family and child related issues that they may be facing. The visits may be on a professional and / or volunteer basis. Key elements of home visiting in the context of the program include:

- providing information, practical support and advice to parents in the care of babies and children
- modelling good parenting practice
- assisting families develop supportive networks.

Parenting programs

Programs where parents can get together to learn about issues such as child development and strategies for managing behaviour. The programs should be 'strengths-based' and focus on positive gains such as parenting skills and children's activities and avoid making parents feel singled out as 'bad parents'. Activities may include supported playgroups as part of parenting program service design.

Quality childcare

Childcare supervised by professional carers, where children can play and socialise and gain a head start for the years ahead. In providing quality, the program aims to improve child developmental outcomes, such as cognitive, language, behavioural and social development.

Other services

Where services such as respite care are identified in the family's case management plan, these may be purchases with brokerage funds. Such funds can also be used to buy material aid, such as essential household or personal items and/or other essential services to meet the immediate short-term needs of vulnerable children and their families.

Other specialist services, such as mental health and drug and alcohol services, which are available within the broader service system but not funded within Brighter Futures can also be accessed for families if required.

6 Evidence Base and Data Collection

DoCS' Brighter Futures program is the largest early intervention program ever implemented in Australia and uses an evidence-based approach modelled on programs from the US and the UK.

It was developed from a growing body of evidence in Australia and overseas highlighting the value of prevention and early intervention strategies. Such strategies are widely employed by human service providers including disability services, population health, juvenile justice and children's services.

Evidence from such programs overseas and in Australia indicates that early intervention targeted at vulnerable children and families can reduce the need for more intensive and expensive services over the long term. This is because it is easier and less costly to address problems before they escalate or compound.

The decision of priority access for children less than three years of age was based on a range of current research showing the importance of the first three years of life in having a good neurological foundation for later cognitive and emotional development.

The service elements of the DoCS Brighter Futures program were informed by the NSW Parenting and Research Centre's Early Intervention and Prevention Literature Review³ and other research projects outlined in the DoCS Research Agenda and findings from research summarised in DoCS' Research to Practice notes.

Further details (including copies of these documents) can be found online at:
http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/html/news_publications/research_practice.htm.

The Brighter Futures program is being independently evaluated from its inception by a consortium led by the Social Policy Research Centre from the University of New South Wales.

The evaluation will build on the current knowledge in early intervention and will inform improvements to the program over time. The results of the evaluation will seek to quantify the financial and human returns from this important social investment.

See the Early Intervention Evaluation Plan online at:

http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/DOCSWR/assets/main/documents/EI_evaluationplan.pdf

DoCS is also leading the development of a data collection system for the program. As part of this, funded Brighter Futures agencies will be required to provide data to DoCS, such as service counts and provision; client information, dates of entry and exits, to

³ NSW Centre for Parenting & Research – Prevention and Early Intervention Literature Review, Research, Funding & Business Analysis – Department of Community Services, Ashfield, January 2005

enable longitudinal tracking and assessment. This will assist in performance monitoring and contribute to the evaluation of the overall program.

7 Partnership Framework

Brighter Futures relies on the cooperation and coordination between government, lead agencies and their partners, other non-government agencies within the early childhood sector, and the families within the program.

DoCS

DoCS promotes the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and works to build stronger families and communities through the provision of community services, prevention and early intervention services, statutory child protection and OOHC.

DoCS fund lead agencies to provide the full range of Brighter Futures services, including case management while also directly providing case management for some clients through DoCS 'quarantined' case workers. DoCS is also responsible for determining eligibility for the program.

Non-Government Organisations

DoCS also established an External Stakeholders Reference Group to provide expert advice on prevention and early intervention and key issues relating to the development and implementation of the program.

The group was convened for a limited time to provide a forum for discussion and feedback on key issues arising from the implementation program.

The Brighter Futures Partners Seminar is the current forum for lead agencies. The purpose of the Seminar is to provide a forum for discussion and consultation between the Department and the community sector, to reflect on the Program with the aim of promoting a co-operative approach to program implementation, evaluation and refinement, as well as clarifying DoCS' service delivery requirements.

Other Government Agencies

Other government agencies have responsibilities to use their 'best endeavours' in responding to requests for services from DoCS, provided the request is consistent with each Department's responsibilities and policies. The involvement of other government agencies is essential in improving outcomes for children and young people in the areas of education, health, emotional and social development etc.

Memorandums of Understanding between DoCS and government agencies have been developed to assist in ensuring that children and young people in the Brighter Futures program are able to access services in a timely manner. Memoranda are currently in place with the Department of Education and Training, Health, the Department of Juvenile Justice and the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

Lead Agencies

DoCS funds Brighter Futures services under the auspice of a lead agency, and where DoCS provides case management, purchases services for DoCS Brighter Futures clients through a designated lead agency.

For contractual purposes, a lead agency is the legal entity responsible for undertaking referral, Brighter Futures intake, assessment and ongoing case management with families in the program. The lead agency can be part of a consortium or a single agency where this single agency proposes to deliver the whole suite of Brighter Futures services.

A lead agency must be an eligible organisation for the purposes of funding, which in Brighter Futures is considered to be a not for profit incorporated non-government community services organisation. Local government authorities or state government departments are also eligible to be lead agencies provided these activities are not part of their core business. For-profit organisations and individuals are not eligible to be a lead agency. However, a consortium can include for-profit agencies as partners.

Consortium partners

Where the lead agency is part of a consortium, partner agencies provide services in conjunction with the lead agency. Partners may be non-government services and / or private organisations, such as private childcare centres.

Notably, DoCS' does not have a direct contractual relationship with any of the partner agencies.

NCOSS

The NSW Council of Social Services (NCOSS) is a peak body that plays a coordination, advocacy, policy development, leadership and information role for the social community sector in NSW. NCOSS was involved in providing support to small and medium sized organisations forming partnerships and preparing costings for the expression of interest process for the program.

Association of Children's Welfare Agencies

The Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) is the peak child welfare organisation in NSW. ACWA works to promote quality care, protection and support for vulnerable children and young people with its membership of organisations and individuals involved in child and family welfare services. Through its training arm, the Centre for Community Welfare Training, ACWA provides a comprehensive range of learning and development opportunities for people working across the community services sector. The diverse activities of the organisation in policy, research, advocacy and education are shaped by a common purpose: to develop an effective

community service system which promotes the rights and responds to the needs of children, young people and their families in NSW.

Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (NSW) Inc. (AbSec)

Funded by DoCS, the peak NSW Aboriginal organisation develops advice on child protection and Brighter Futures and OOHC policy and services for Aboriginal children and families.

Family Services Inc. (FaMS)

FaMS promotes the provision of quality support services by non-government agencies in NSW and ACT to families experiencing stress. This includes contributing to policy development affecting families and services.

Community Child Care Cooperative NSW (CCCC NSW)

CCCC NSW is the peak body for community-based children's services that promotes, supports and advocates for quality children's services, including providing resources, support and skill development opportunities for children's services providers.

Early Childhood Australia Inc.

Early Childhood Australia Inc is a national peak agency that works with government; early childhood professionals; parents and grandparents; other carers of young children; and various peak organisations and lobby groups to ensure equity in all issues relating to the education and care of children from birth to eight years.