

APPENDIX 7

Prevention and early intervention strategies and programs in NSW

A broad range of early intervention services and programs are available across NSW. An overview of some of the main programs operating in NSW include:

1. Families First Strategy

Families First is the NSW Government's whole-of-government prevention and early intervention strategy, which aims to improve the health and wellbeing of children aged 0 to eight years in NSW. It is built on principles that take a holistic view of families and acknowledges that families know what is best for their children. Families First recognises that all families need support to raise their children and that some families will need additional support for their particular needs. Families First aims to reorient the human service network towards principles of prevention and early intervention, using a strong research and evidence base.

The Families First strategy aims to provide a combination of universal and targeted services. Some services are known to be more effective when universally available, while others are known to be more effective when targeted towards particular sections of the community. The combination of these two approaches results in a coordinated program.

The Families First initiative is the responsibility of five government agencies in partnership with non-government organisations working collaboratively with families and communities. The aim of planning from a whole-of-government approach is to develop more responsive, coordinated services through existing service networks and links, and building on existing services through innovation and collaboration.

Families First aims to improve children's health and wellbeing by:

- ▶ supporting parents who are expecting or caring for a new baby
- ▶ supporting parents who are caring for young children
- ▶ assisting families who need extra support
- ▶ building communities that support families
- ▶ improving the way agencies work together to make sure families get the services and support they need.

The service networks developed as part of the Families First planning process will generally reflect the different needs of each area. Although services may vary from area to area, they will all be grounded in the principles, aims and objectives of the Families First strategy. Some of the key service models utilised by Families First to support families include:

- ▶ **Family Worker Services** – involve skilled professionals working with a range of groups (such as teenage parents, fathers and Aboriginal parents) within local communities to provide support and assistance to parents in developing social networks, life and parenting skills
- ▶ **Schools as Community Centres** – are located in primary schools and provide a range of early childhood services and projects, including supported playgroups, parenting skills courses, breakfast clubs and transition-to-school projects. One of the main aims is to promote interagency collaboration in breaking down barriers to children successfully entering school
- ▶ **Supported Playgroups** – are facilitated by qualified workers and provide an informal way for parents to learn from each other, the facilitator and invited professionals about child development and play. The Supported Playgroup can be a point of access for parents in gaining information about services, issues and general parenting advice and support

- ▶ **Universal Health Home Visiting** – all parents in NSW with a new baby are offered a visit from a child and family health nurse within the first few weeks of returning home from hospital
- ▶ **Volunteer Home Visiting Services** – involves volunteers visiting parents of newborn babies and toddlers in their home to provide practical advice and support. Volunteers also assist parents in linking up with services and supports within their local community.

The Families First strategy is the combined responsibility of five Government agencies, namely NSW Health and Area Health Services, the Department of Community Services, the Department of Education and Training, the Department of Housing, and the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, together with non-government agencies funded to support families.

The Families First strategy is implemented by Regional Officer's Groups, made up of Chief Executive Officers, Area Managers and Department Heads of Government Agencies in each area. Managers responsible for Regional Strategies from the Department of Community Services Communities Division coordinate the planning and implementation of the Strategy through these Groups, which are responsible for all the planning and budget for the Strategy in their region, in response to identified local needs.

Parents usually find out about services delivered under the Families First strategy at antenatal classes, from local early childhood nurses or from health centres. Each new mother is visited by a nurse who is part of the network and who might recommend other services. Families are also referred by other agencies or they may approach a service directly.

REFER Families First website: <http://www.familiesfirst.nsw.gov.au>

REFER Department of Community Services website: <http://www.community.nsw.gov.au>

REFER Department of Community Services parenting website: <http://www.parenting.nsw.gov.au>

2. Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Health Strategy (AMIHS)

The goal of Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Health Strategy (AMIHS) is to improve the health of the Aboriginal mothers and their infants, and decrease Aboriginal perinatal death and illness across NSW. The AMIHS operates seven targeted antenatal/postnatal programs for Aboriginal women and infants across Greater Western, Hunter, New England and North Coast Area Health Services.

REFER Information about this strategy is available online at: <http://www.health.nsw.com.au>.

3. Early childhood intervention services

Early childhood intervention programs provide support to young children who have developmental delays or disabilities, in order to promote the child's development and inclusion in family and community life. Early childhood intervention programs can include therapy, education, health services, inclusion support in early childhood services, family support, and the provision of information and support for transition into school.

REFER Information about early childhood intervention services in NSW is available on the Early Childhood Intervention Infoline on 1300 656 865 or on the Early Childhood Intervention Australia website at: <http://www.ecia-nsw.org.au>.

4. Non-government agency early intervention services

Non-government agencies are a large provider of early intervention services in NSW. The type of early intervention supports provided by non-government agencies to families is generally dependent on the needs of the local community in which they operate. The range of services provided by non-government agencies includes home visiting, counselling, antenatal and parent support groups, playgroups, parenting and other courses, advocacy and referral services.

REFER The NSW Parenting Services Directory provides a comprehensive listing of agencies, programs and services in NSW to help parents, carers and families. It is available online at: <http://www.parenting.nsw.gov.au>.

REFER The Greater Western Sydney Community Services Directory is an online directory of community services across Greater Western Sydney. It also lists organisations providing Sydney, NSW and Australia-wide services, and is available at: <http://directory.ngo.net.au/>.

REFER ServiceLink is an online directory of service providers in the Human Services sector in NSW. Community services agencies in NSW that register with HSNet can access the Servicelink Directory at <http://www.hsnet.nsw.gov.au>.

5. Children's services

Children's services can help prevent problems in families by helping families to meet their ongoing commitments. Children's services can prevent problems in families by:

- ▶ giving families a break and helping to relieve stress
- ▶ providing children with programs that assist their development
- ▶ helping children start school on a 'level playing field'
- ▶ detecting early, and providing support for, behavioural and learning problems
- ▶ giving parents the opportunity to participate in the workforce, to have a break from care duties or to join in social activities
- ▶ providing communities, particularly small rural townships, with a focal point for the sharing of information on child and family issues and as a referral point to health, family support and other community services.

The types of children's services available in NSW include long day care, preschool, occasional care, vacation care, toy libraries, supported playgroups, family day care, home-based care, and mobile children's services.

REFER A comprehensive listing of children's services in NSW is included in the NSW Parenting Services Directory, available online at: <http://www.parenting.nsw.gov.au>.

6. The Department of Community Services Early Intervention Program

This Early Intervention Program is a voluntary, targeted program designed for families encountering problems that affect their ability to care for their children. The program identifies children and families who are vulnerable or likely to be at risk of harm, and provides them with targeted supports before further problems arise or become serious.

The Early Intervention Program is being rolled out across NSW in a staged process expected to be completed by the end of 2007.

There are two pathways into the Program. One is through a report of risk of harm to the Department of Community Services Helpline and through to a local Community Services Centre. A screening is then completed on low to medium level risk of harm reports to determine the suitability of the family for referral to the Program.

The other pathway into the Program is via a community referral to a Lead Agency, directly from another agency or person. Lead Agencies are funded to undertake referral, intake, assessment and ongoing case management with families.

Eligibility for the program is determined by the Department of Community Services (DoCS) for all the families entering the program from either pathway. Families may be case managed by either a DoCS Early Intervention Caseworker or by the Lead Agency. Lead Agencies will case manage all families referred via community referral, and the Department of Community Services early intervention team will also transfer some families to the Lead Agency for case management.

The Program uses a strengths-based practice approach that recognises and fosters family strengths and responds to the individual, familial, social, cultural and environmental factors that affect a family. Early Intervention caseworkers work closely and over an extended period with families and community agencies to identify and review family strengths and needs, facilitate support and build the parent-child relationship and the wellbeing of the family unit.

A key component of the Early Intervention Program is that families can access the full range of services and supports they require through a single entry point, either through the Department of Community Services early intervention team if there has been a report of risk or harm, or through the Lead Agency. This is intended to promote efficient and consistent service provision and a more collaborative approach to service delivery.

REFER Additional information about the Department of Community Services' Early Intervention Program is available online at: <http://www.community.nsw.gov.au>.