

## **2007 Federal election proposals**

### ***Child protection***

Families Australia calls for the establishment of a National Child Protection Strategy that guides policy, practice and research must be developed. An Australian Government Minister for Children and Young People and an independent Federal Commissioner for Children should be appointed.

To ensure that universal services are available and accessible to all children and families child and family wellbeing and resilience should be promoted at a population level that provide equitable access to quality universal services for families and children.

Effective early intervention can prevent child abuse and neglect. This can be achieved by building organisational capacity for prevention, through services targeting individuals and families who need additional support or are working to overcome significant problems, developing criteria or indicators – national where possible – to identify children, families and communities at risk, and analysing best practice and identifying 'lighthouse' examples of good practice, for example, nurse home visiting services.

To respond effectively to children who have been harmed or are at risk of harm, there should be more effective relationships between child protection services and broader legal systems, including by making clear their respective roles and responsibilities.

In order to address the over-representation of Indigenous children in the child protection system, we should adopt principles to underpin actions to prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect in Indigenous children, expand the scope and number of Indigenous child and family welfare agencies, expand the scope and number of Indigenous early childhood services, and enhance the capacity and responsiveness of mainstream family and children's services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

### ***Family wellbeing***

Families Australia calls for a National Family Wellbeing Framework to set high-level national targets. It should highlight the most important things that foster family wellbeing, such as quality relationships, health and safety, community connection and economic wellbeing. It should contain high-level, measurable, national targets to guide policy makers and researchers in the public, private and community sectors. It should be prepared by a taskforce from the government, research, business and the community sectors and families themselves.

A 5-10 year National Family Wellbeing Action Strategy should be agreed between Federal and State/Territory governments based on the Framework and clearly elaborate roles, aims and targets. An independent body such as an Australian Families Commission comprising Federal/State/Territory government, community, business and family representatives should advise on priority matters in the Framework and the National Family Wellbeing Action

Strategy. A 'National State of the Family Report' should be prepared triennially to report on progress in meeting Framework and Strategy goals.

### ***Forgotten Australians***

Families Australia calls for a commitment by all governments and past providers of institutional care to provide ongoing assistance to organisations supporting Forgotten Australians, including seed funding for new organisations forming in States or Territories where no group currently operates. There should be ongoing funding for the Alliance for Forgotten Australians, to enable present and future support groups to work productively together at the national level, promoting the interests and needs of Forgotten Australians.

### ***Grandparents as carers***

Families Australia calls for the establishment of a national information service (such as a 24 hour telephone line and/or a website) would make information about financial assistance, family law and other legal matters more accessible to grandparents and would enable appropriate referrals to be made to local services and supports.

Families Australia also calls for extended exemptions from Welfare-to-Work participation requirements would assist grandparents who have semi-formal care of a grandchild (that is, where no formal 'registered and active' status has been provided by a State or Territory but where placement of the child has been arranged through a State or Territory authority). Additional training to enhance the understanding of front-line staff in State/Territory child protection agencies and government departments that interact with grandparents, such as Centrelink, Medicare and the Family Court of Australia, may help to ensure that grandparents' needs are better understood.

Grandparent/kinship care liaison officers should be established within State/Territory child protection and other support agencies to act as a contact point for grandparents would benefit grandparents, in particular those from culturally and linguistically diverse or Indigenous backgrounds, as well as other vulnerable grandparents who may be unfamiliar with, or who experience difficulty in, navigating government systems.

Emergency or discretionary payments from Centrelink or other State/Territory government agencies would assist particularly necessitous grandparents in cases where children are placed in grandparents' care at short notice.

### ***Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples***

Families Australia calls for a national apology to Indigenous people for the suffering they have endured since the invasion of their country. It also calls for: increased health spending, beginning with an increase of 1% in the Federal Indigenous health budget; this would bring expenditure on Indigenous health up to the same level as non-Indigenous health; universal provision of high quality, culturally appropriate, early learning and school education services for Indigenous children and families, including Indigenous playgroups; child welfare and family support programmes that link existing services and develop new ones that provide a more holistic response to Indigenous families' needs; and national strategies to address the needs of Indigenous children in out-of-home care, including a strong emphasis on consistent application of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle.

### ***Substance abuse***

Families Australia calls for support for harm minimisation as the central guiding principle for all national drug policies and programs. Greater effort should be made by governments to promote public understanding of the meaning of 'harm minimisation'.

### ***Work and family***

Families Australia calls for workplace policies that make leave, part-time work and other flexible work practices easily accessible to parents, thus supporting parent-child attachment relationships, giving parents more choice and ultimately attracting more parents to the workforce. It also calls for support and facilities within workplaces for nursing mothers who wish to continue breastfeeding after returning to work, and universal access to family friendly work conditions - this would include access to paid maternity/parental leave for up to fourteen weeks, access to unpaid leave for up to a maximum of two years and access to paid leave for a non-child bearing partner.

Families Australia calls for high quality, accessible and affordable early childhood services vital to improved workforce and work/family outcomes. Government, business, unions and the community sector should develop a work and parenting information strategy, to include information about family-friendly work options and tips on how to minimise 'negative spill-over' from work to family relationships.