

BUILDING STRONGER AUSTRALIAN FAMILIES

POLICY FORUM REPORT

29 January 2016

Canberra, ACT

Building Stronger Australian Families
What do they need to thrive?

AN INITIATIVE OF
Families Australia

Families Australia

Vision

Australian families, in all their diversity, enjoy the greatest possible wellbeing.

Mission

Families Australia is a national, member-based, not-for-profit organisation that strives to improve the wellbeing of all Australian families by initiating, inspiring, informing and influencing national public policy debates.

Families Australia works to promote a national policy environment in which the needs and interests of families, especially the most vulnerable and marginalised, are heard and addressed.

Acknowledgement

Families Australia acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to elders past, present and future.

Families Australia gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the many organisations and individuals who assisted in providing input to this report.

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FAMILIES AUSTRALIA POLICY FORUM

Background

Families Australia is convening a series of policy forums commencing in 2015 as an important part of its role in representing families and children, and the services and academics committed to advancing the wellbeing of families.

This forum brought together key people from the fields of service provision, academia and government to identify policy ideas that could assist families now and into the future. The forum also benefited from the experience of Austria and Italy through the attendance and contribution of His Excellency Dr Helmut Boeck, Ambassador of Austria, and His Excellency Mr Pier Francesco Zazo, Ambassador of Italy. A list of participants can be found at [Attachment A](#).

Aim of Forums

The aim of these forums is to identify policy ideas that could assist families, particularly those experiencing the greatest marginalisation, vulnerability and complex needs to thrive in the short term and in coming decades. Families Australia wants to better understand the key issues facing families now and into the future as well as to hear views on possible national policy responses.

Forum Preparation

Key people from service provision, academia and government were invited to attend in person in Canberra, ACT or via the webinar. Families Australia provided participants with a Background Information Note prior to the forum, containing information on the forum and future forums as well as some background about Australian families. Six questions were highlighted for participant's consideration prior to the forum. These questions were:

- Q.1. What key issue or issues need to be addressed to improve family wellbeing, especially for the most disadvantaged families (i) in the next 3-5 years and (ii) in coming decades?
- Q.2. Why is this an important issue to solve?
- Q.3. How appropriate is it for governments to address this issue?
- Q.4. What are your specific policy or program ideas to address this issue?
- Q.5. What are the likely benefits and costs of addressing this issue?
- Q.6. Do you have any other comments to make?

The Background Information Note can be found at [Attachment B](#).

The Forum

Brian Babington, CEO of Families Australia, welcomed participants and provided background to the series of forums and then introduced leading academics, Professor Alan Hayes AM, Distinguished Professor in Family Studies, Director, Family Action Centre,

Faculty of Health and Medicine, University of Newcastle and Dr Lyndall Strazdins, Associate Professor and ARC Future Fellow, National Centre of Epidemiology and Population Health, Australian National University.

Professor Hayes presented an analysis of the broader trends of Australian families now and in coming decades by scoping where Australian families are now and which families are vulnerable, how many are vulnerable and what these families need. Professor Hayes called for the need to focus family policy priorities on Promoting, Preventing and Protecting.

The use of 'Promoting' as a family policy priority included examination of quality of life with a focus on personal wellbeing, family strengths and community capability. Professor Hayes reminded participants that while compared to other countries, Australia was doing well but many Australian families were left out and missed out on opportunities.

The family policy priority 'Preventing' considered pathways to poverty and intergenerational transmission with a focus on social mobility limitations, deprivation and exclusion and the multiple challenges and complex needs of many families. Participants engaged with the current environment of the loss of jobs related to mining and manufacturing that has led to unemployment, under or fragile employment and the mismatch of education and the skills needed.

Professor Hayes also provided a key area of focus that continued through the discussion following the presentations. This key area was recognition that family policy and program responses targeted those most marginalised, vulnerable and complex needs but there was a need to develop policy and responses for the vulnerable middle group of families. This group was also referred to as the emerging vulnerable during the forum due to the risk of these families facing serious disadvantage because of loss of or under employment and/or other stressors.

The focus on 'Protecting' as a priority for family policy goes to the need for child protection, personal and family safety and innovations in intervention and support.

Another key theme from this presentation was current and future Australia's economic situation leading to governments doing less with less and the subsequent need to target investments and interventions. Areas that could be further explored included place based targeting, social investment alliances and actuarially-based approaches to long-term welfare dependency.

Professor Hayes outlined five conditions for achieving collective impact. These were having a common agenda, being clear about outcome measurement, limiting competition through mutually reinforcing activities, having feedback loops to adjust actions where needed through a commitment to continuous communication, and supporting and facilitating the organisations that are the backbone of the service response.

New partnerships and coalitions will be needed to deliver better outcomes for families in Australia, including:

- Governments/agencies/sectors
- Business and philanthropy
- Individuals, families and communities.

Dr Strazdins followed Professor Hayes with a presentation that scoped the complicated connection between work and family through the concept of a family “puzzle” that has jobs, family life, care of children and family health and wellbeing at the heart. This family puzzle included the linkages with wider social, economic, demographic and cultural factors through the megatrends of globalisation, population ageing and social equity/gender.

Dr Strazdins’ presentation linked to that of Professor Hayes by looking at three megatrends that affect both families and the economy. These megatrends are arising inside and outside Australia and include:

- Globalisation with pressure on jobs and business,
- Population ageing and longevity with the need for more people to work and more people will be working and caring, and
- Gender and social equity.

Globalisation was seen to have huge opportunities and benefits as well as disadvantages with the need for economic and family policy to consider how to be part of it and how to respond to it. Groups particularly affected by globalisation are those struggling to find a job and those left out of the labour market. This closely connected with Professor Hayes analysis of vulnerable groups.

Dr Strazdins highlighted the effect of the labour market on two of the fundamental resources needed by families: money and time.

Australia was seen as being effected by the global market because of its closeness to the most populous countries with entirely different (to Australia) labour markets, wages, and social or employer protections. The “offshoring” of jobs, mostly in manufacturing, agricultural and some technical and professional areas also impacts Australia’s economy and families.

This impact has split the Australian labour market into well-paid, high skilled jobs with good conditions and a pool of low paid, insecure, poor quality jobs. The “hollowing” of the labour market leaves fewer jobs in the middle, and impacts parents as more seek to enter the workforce and find they are unable to find good quality jobs.

The “hollowing” of the labour market has increase numbers of casual jobs from 16% in 1984 to 21%. These casual jobs are worked by the most vulnerable in Australia’s labour market: the young, low skilled, immigrants, aged, and mothers.

Importantly, it is not easy for both those who are under or unemployed because they lack income, and those who are overemployed as they lack time.

Dr Strazdins then moved onto the issue of the ageing of the population with projections of 2.7 working age people for each Australian aged 65 years and over by 2050 compared to 5 today. This will reduce labour supply and tax revenue while increasing the demand for care. The current policy responses of government to Australia’s economic situation and the ageing of the population include:

- Encouraging and supporting older workers to stay working, and
- Encouraging and supporting more women, especially mothers to remain working and to work more hours.

While necessary to improve the economy these policy responses raise some important challenges. Also necessary was the need to look at the intergenerational contract with the reducing numbers of young workers and the ageing of the population.

These responses to population ageing were seen as further tightening the connection between working and families. While the responses include keeping people working longer we need to recognise that these older workers and mothers will be carers of children, grandchildren, partners or elderly parents. Economic solutions and responses need to be developed in collaboration with families.

Participants were reminded that small changes in social and economic conditions, if they affect large groups of families and children, can make large differences to the health of the whole population.

The vulnerability of those families who are now struggling with fragile or no employment and the low participation rate of women in Australia would require governments, business and families to look at how jobs are designed and families supported.

Dr Strazdins also highlighted the projected costs of poor health rising and leading to less people being able to work and be productive. Participants were reminded of the close link between family health and work.

Dr Strazdins built on the strong foundations proposed by Professor Hayes – Promoting, Preventing, and Protecting, by adding Partnering. Partnering was added as a means of aligning the goals of business with the goals of families to deliver a strong family-friendly economy.

This partnering would find families represented at all major economic discussions, an alignment of the goals between business and families with a recognition of their social and economic interdependence leading to a family-friendly economy.

Three discussants then provided participants with their reflections on the presentations which reflected an energy in thinking about family policy. Participants input can be found at [Attachment C](#).

Key Highlights

Key highlights of the forum included agreement that:

- Promoting, Preventing, Protecting and Partnering were important family policy priorities.
- Australia could not afford to ignore the needs of families and the economy, especially the needs of both the vulnerable and those at risk of becoming vulnerable.
- Governments and services should examine how best to respond to the need to do less with less. Examination of responses could include social impact bonds and an investment approach.

Forum Participants

First Name	Surname	Organisation
Bridget	Anyon	Department of Social Services
Brian	Babington	Families Australia
Dr Roslyn	Baxter	Department of Social Services
Vanessa	Beck	Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Helen	Bedford	Families Australia
Sharron	Bessell	ANU
HE Dr Helmut	Boeck	Ambassador of Austria
Alison	Brook	Relationships Australia
Stella	Conroy	Families Australia
Vivienne	Cunningham-Smith	Playgroup Australia
Elizabeth	Handsley	Australian Council on Children and the Media
Professor Alan	Hayes AM	University of Newcastle
Susan	Helyar	ACTCOSS
Lisa	Hillan	Healing Foundation
Jennifer	Horsfield	Families Australia
Elizabeth	Hunter	Families Australia
Mary	Ivec	DSS
Lisha	Jackman	Department of Social Services
Dagmar	Kelly	Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Fiona	MacGregor	Belconnen Community Service
Anne	McLeish OAM	Grandparents Australia
Anne-Marie	Mioche	Playgroup Australia
Paul	Monagle	Australian Family Association
Tricia	Murray	Wanslea
Dr Ann	Nevile	The Australian National University
Naomi	Nicholson	AFCA
Kirsty	Nowlan	The Benevolent Society
Bev	Orr OAM	AFCA
Dr Sue	Packer AM	NAPCAN
Samantha	Page	Early Childhood Australia
Lara	Purdy	Department of Social Services
Julie	Samuels	AFCA
Simon	Schrapel	Uniting Communities
Charlene	Smith	Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
Marion	Stanton	Save the Children
Dr Lyndall	Strazdins	NCEPH
David	Templeman	PHAA
Prue	Warrilow	ACCS
Richard	Weston	Healing Foundation
HE Mr Pier Francesco	Zazo	Ambassador of Italy
Attended via webinar		
Andrew	Blair	YMCA: Children's Services (OSHC Coordinator)
Karl	Brettig	The Salvation Army/ Salisbury Communities for Children
Winnie	Bridie	Children with Disability Australia
Jennifer	Cartmel	Griffith University
Vanessa	Gentle	CSCM Chippendale Child Care Centre
Sarah	Matthews	mainly music
Jayne	Meyer Tucker	JMT Inc
Ellen	Newman	Hunter Institute of Mental Health
Ruth	Phelan	Children & Young People's Mental Health
Fiona	Pulford	Mount Gambier Children's Centre for Early Childhood Development and Parenting
Rachel	Saliba	Practically Learning
Chris	Steele	Early Childhood Australia

FAMILIES AUSTRALIA POLICY FORUM BACKGROUND INFORMATION NOTE

Introduction

Families Australia welcomes you to the 'Building Stronger Australian Families' policy forum.

The forum brings together key people from the fields of service provision, academia and government to consider how best to advance the wellbeing of Australian families now and into the future.

Families Australia is convening four policy forums in 2015 and 2016 to identify policy ideas that could assist families, particularly those experiencing the greatest marginalisation and vulnerability, to thrive in coming decades.

This note provides information about:

- I. what will take place at, and after, each forum
- II. some background about Australian families to assist your preparations.

How will the forum run?

Each forum will take two hours. They will be facilitated by Brian Babington, Chief Executive Officer of Families Australia.

Discussions will open with two presentations, each of around 20 minutes, by leading academics.

After the initial presentations, the floor will be open for questions to the presenters and comments from participants attending the forum either in person or via weblink.

You may wish to focus on matters raised by the opening presenters, or raise other issues facing families.

Our focus is to better understand the key issues facing families both now and in coming decades **and** to hear your thoughts on possible national policy responses.

We suggest that you take time to consider the following questions in the lead-up to the forum:

1. **What key issue or issues need to be addressed to improve family wellbeing, especially for the most disadvantaged families (i) in the next 3-5 years and (ii) in coming decades?**
2. **Why is this issue important to solve?**
3. **How appropriate is it for government to address this issue?**
4. **What are your specific policy or program ideas to address this issue?**
5. **What are the likely benefits and costs of addressing this issue?**
6. **Do you have any other comments to make?**

These questions are also set out in the attachment to this note.

You can contribute ideas through discussions at the forum itself as well as in writing.

At the end of the forum we would like to collect your written responses on these questions to help our thinking.

We plan to record proceedings and add these to the Families Australia website, via You-tube.

What will happen after the forum?

At the end of the series of four policy forums, Families Australia will devise a set of short, medium and long term policy ideas.

We will keep you posted about developments in our thinking over coming months.

Please do provide any additional ideas by emailing brian.babington@familiesaustralia.org.au

The remainder of this note contains background reading about Australian families. Rather than attempting to be comprehensive or prescriptive, it aims to give forum participants some key facts about families in Australia today.

Families in Australia

For statistical purposes, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines “a family as two or more persons, one of whom is at least 15 years of age, who are related by blood, marriage (regular or de facto), adoption, step or fostering, and who are usually resident in the same household” (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014).

ABS further defined the basis of a family as being formed by the identification of the presence of a couple relationship, lone parent-child relationship or other blood relationship. This means that some households will have more than one family.

This definition of family reflects the diversity of families in Australia. Our forum discussion could also consider an understanding of family that changes as people move through their life course (Weston & Qu 2014).

Also, many of us would include relatives that live outside of our household unit such as siblings, parents and grandparents and their households as close family members, as well as those friends who are integral to our family’s daily life.

Families are the basic unit of society and the place where most children grow up (Weston & Qu 2014). This basic unit of society is often supported, when needed, by the broader family and community. Our connection to each other and the community is explored later in this note.

Key facts and trends

On 20 October 2015, the ABS Population Clock estimated the Australian resident population as 23.9 million people (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015a).

In 2012-13 there were 8.9 million households in Australia with 74% being family households (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015a).

About 88% (20.1 million people) of the Australian population were living in family households with most families living in households that contained only one family (96% of all family households in 2012-13).

In 2012-13, of the 17.6 million adults in Australia living in private dwellings, 64% were currently married, either in a registered marriage (52%) or in a de facto marriage (12%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015a).

Partnering experiences varied with age with a higher proportion of under 35 year olds having only been in de facto marriage(s) (29%), compared with those 35

years and over (9%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015a).

For all people 35 years and older, 69% had only been in a registered marriage, although they may have lived with their partner before entering into a registered marriage. This was a decrease from 75% in 2006-7 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015a).

In 2012-13, almost half (46%) of all those currently in a registered marriage cohabited with their partner prior to marriage, compared with 39% in 2006-07 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015a).

Over the period 1996 to 2011, the most common living arrangement for people in Australia was in a couple family with children and half of the population were either a partner or a child in this family type (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015b). The ABS reported a decline in this type of living arrangement from 54% of Australians living in a couple family with children (27% were partners and 27% were children) in 1996, to 49% (24% partners and 25% children) by 2011.

Between 1996 and 2011, children in one parent families increased from 6% to 7% with female lone-parents increasing from 3% to 4% while male lone-parents remained at 1% (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015b).

An increase in the proportion of people living as partners in couple families without children, from 19% in 1996 to 21% in 2011 is thought to be due mainly to the ageing of the population as well as couples putting off having children or not having children (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015b).

The proportion of people living alone remained at 9% from 1996 to 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015b).

In 2012-13, just over 3.4 million children of any age (48%) lived in couple families where both parents were employed (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015c). Of these children, 42% lived in families where their mother was employed full-time, compared with 58% in families where their mother was employed part-time.

Of all dependent children, 2.8 million lived in couple families where both parents were employed. About 869,000 dependent children lived in lone mother families while 143,000 lived in lone father families. Of the dependent children in these lone parent families, just over half (54%) had an employed parent.

About 676,000 dependent children (12% of all dependent children) were living in families without an

employed resident parent, although in some cases, other people in these families were employed. There were 562,000 dependent children (10% of all dependent children) living in a family where no one was employed.

Of the 5.2 million children aged 0 to 17 years in 2012-13, 1.1 million (21%) had a natural parent living elsewhere (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015c). Of these children, 75% lived in one parent families, 10% in step families and 12% in blended families.

Children were more likely to live with their mother than their father following parent separation. Of these children who had a natural parent living elsewhere, almost four in five (79%) had a father living elsewhere.

As children aged they were less likely to have at least fortnightly contact with their natural parent living elsewhere. In 2012-13, 54% of children aged 0-9 years, 43% of children aged 10-14 years and 35% of children aged 15-17 years saw their natural parent living elsewhere at least once a fortnight.

Better understanding the Australian population

The 2014 General Social Survey (GSS) surveyed Australians aged 15 years and over to gain an understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of relative advantage and disadvantage across the Australian population as well as to report on and monitor people's opportunity to participate fully in society (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014).

The summary findings from the GSS provide an insight into aspects of social capital including participation, support and feelings of safety and trust. The GSS measures the resources that reflect the wellbeing of individuals and communities, with a particular focus on social capital.

This concept of social capital includes elements like community support, social participation, civic participation, network size, trust and trustworthiness, and an ability to have a level of control of issues important to them (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014).

Key to our consideration of advancing the wellbeing of Australian families are the GSS results showing changes in the level of involvement in activities connecting people to their broader community and the way people are interacting with the community outside their household.

These changes appear to be consistent with the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 'Measures of Australia's Progress, 2013' data which shows a reduction in time and opportunity that Australians

have for recreation and leisure, and social and community interaction (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014).

The GSS summary findings show a decline in **volunteering**, which is an indicator of community support (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014). In 2014, both men and women were less likely to volunteer than they were in 2010. This decline also shows there is a drop in the proportion of people providing less formal help and assistance to others outside their household (46% in 2014 compared with 49% in 2010).

There was more stability in other ways that people **support** each other such as the proportion of people caring for someone with a disability, illness or old age (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014). In 2014, 19% of people were caring as described above which was similar to 2010 and 2006. This could reflect the ageing of the population.

In 2014, 95% felt able to get support from outside the household in a time of crisis (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014). This was similar to the results from 2010, 2006 and 2002. While weekly face-to-face contact with family and friends living outside the household was lower in 2014 than in 2010 (76% compared with 79%) weekly non face-to-face contact with family and friends using voice calls, text messaging and calls using video link remained high at 92%.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data suggest that, in comparison to other OECD countries, Australia is below average in **work-life balance** and this is supported by the GSS data (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014). The data suggest that Australians feel time-poor, with 45% of women and 36% of men in 2014 feeling they were always or often rushed or pressed for time, compared with 21% of women and 28% of men who were rarely or never rushed or pressed for time.

In 2014, those with lower levels of education were less likely to engage in forms of **community support**, to feel they could have a say, and to participate in social activities (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014). People aged 18 years and over with a qualification below year 12 were less likely than people with a bachelor degree or higher to have done voluntary work in the last 12 months (22% compared with 41%) and less likely to provide help to others living outside their household in the last four weeks (38% compared with 52%).

In 2014, people who reported they were unemployed (27%), retired (29%) or not in the workforce for other

reasons (26%) were much more likely than those who reported they were employed (4.3%) to live in households in the lowest weekly household income quintiles (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014).

One indicator of **financial stress** is whether a household has experienced a cash flow problem in the last 12 months such as being unable to pay bills on time or seeking help from family and friends. Nearly half of unemployed people lived in a household with at least one cash flow problem, as did almost a third of people not in the labour force for reasons other than retired. This contrasted with about one in five employed people who lived in a household with at least one cash flow problem in the last 12 months.

In 2012, when asked to rate their **life satisfaction** on a scale from 0 to 10, people in countries across the OECD gave it a 6.6 average (0 means 'not at all satisfied' and 10 means 'completely satisfied') (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014).

The GSS data, in 2014, showed that on average, Australians aged 15 years and over rated their overall life satisfaction as 7.6, which puts Australia higher than it was in 2012 and higher than the OECD average.

Overall life satisfaction is not the same across all population groups with people aged 75 years and over reporting 8.1, people aged 15-24 years 7.7, people in couple family households with children 7.7 and recent migrants 7.7.

Low satisfaction levels were recorded for people with a mental health condition (6.6), households with people who were unemployed (6.8), people living in one parent families with children (7.0), and people with a disability (7.2). People in one parent families were almost four times more likely than people in a couple family with children to report low levels of overall life satisfaction (between 0 and 4).

In 2014, **one parent families** with children were more than twice as likely as people in couple families with children to have ever experienced homelessness (25% compared with 10%) and almost twice as likely to have had a mental health condition (30% compared with 16%). People in these families were also more likely than people in couple families with children to have experienced two or more incidents of crime in the last 12 months, and to feel unsafe or very unsafe when walking alone in their local area after dark and when at home alone after dark (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014).

People in one parent families with children were more likely than people in couple families with

children to assess their health as poor (7.9% compared to 2.8%) or fair (14% compared with 8.4%). They were also more likely to have cared for a person with a disability, long term health condition or old age in the last four weeks. They were more likely to have experienced at least one personal stressor in the last 12 months.

People in this population group were also more likely to be concerned about barriers to services with more than half (56%) of people in one parent families with children reporting they could not get health care when needed with the main reason being the cost of service. People in one parent families with children also reported experiencing barriers to other services such as Centrelink.

Some issues affecting families

At the risk of omitting many other important issues, below is a snapshot of some key issues facing some families and children in Australia today.

Young parents are more likely to not have a Year 12 qualification, be unemployed and receive welfare payments (for example, 90% of young parents on Parenting Payment do not have a Year 12 qualification) (Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2011).

The gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is estimated to be 9.7 years for women and 11.5 years for men (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010).

An estimated 17% of women in Australia have experienced violence by a partner (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012).

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with limited proficiency in English are less likely than those highly proficient in English to be working full time (27% compared with 57% of 25-64 year olds) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009).

Compared to the children with Australian-born English-speaking mothers, children with an overseas-born mother with poor English proficiency were significantly more likely to have low parental income and more likely to have a mother with incomplete secondary education (Priest et al. 2012).

Of parents with children in out-of-home care, 43% report substance abuse and 37% report alcohol abuse (Teesson et al. 2004).

People with a disabling mental illness are less likely to participate in the workforce than the general

population (51% compared to 82%) and significantly more work part time (49% compared to 28%) (Teesson et al. 2004).

Experiences of child abuse and neglect often lead to poor wellbeing in adulthood including mental health issues, drug and alcohol problems, and greater risk of violence and criminal behaviour (Lamont 2010).

In 2013-14, there were around 143,000 children receiving child protection services (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015). Of these, 99,210 were the subject of an investigation, 55,067 were on a care and protection order and 43,000 were in out-of-home care.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were seven times as likely as non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to be receiving child protection services in general, or to be the subject of substantiated abuse or neglect, and over nine times as likely to be on a care and protection order or in out-of-home care (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015).

Rates of children in substantiations, on care and protection orders, and in out-of-home care have increased since 2009-10 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015).

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Reflections, Questions and Comments at Forum

How do you get the balance between Alan's 3 "P's" without immediately leaping to Prevention?

Do we need to know what percentage of expenditure goes to each of the 3 "P's"?

How do we calibrate expenditure across the 3 "P's"?

Struck by highlight of history – policy discontent, market and services.

How do we really create an expectation on the market/s that doesn't further increase vulnerability?

Service system can't keep mopping up the gaps left by governments expecting more with less.

Like the utopian thinking reference because previous thinking of work and family balance has meant that there has been an institutional response e.g. schools moving to longer hours. Also agree we need to focus on gender issues – take account of gender roles and family responsibilities.

Rebalancing of expenditure is needed like the work in Orange NSW where whole of community interventions are aimed at building a mentally healthy Orange with a culture of "belong and contribute". Need to build social capital, commitment and cohesion.

But how do we get the expenditure to move?

In previous generations one in every four or five would have died. We now have a much more optimistic picture due to improvements such as vaccination, infant health, light touch services, better water.

Need a collective impact work approach.

Example of irrational spend on incarceration.

First rule = don't become hyper rational.

We need to maintain intergenerational contract but remove irregularities such as segmented thinking and isolation of family policy.

Model of innovation is have an idea, evaluate, and act.

Need to look at what has worked in the past and why e.g. Playgroups Australia.

Need to undertake a National Survey on what parents want to say to government.

Need to consider what kind of media families are consuming with a particular focus on violence in families.

Connection with parents is important – parents spend too much time on devices.

Commented on point of 22-24 year olds with qualifications not in employment – could include reasons such as decline in education standards.

Need to have good data on social determinants of health e.g. poverty. Need this to build a consistent message. Collaboration and integration.

Families are often invisible in systems and communities. Playgroups are invisible to other services as well.

Focus on traditional families to enhance their capacity to care for their own.

Employers need to get the message that strong productive workers come from strong productive families.

Need to be able to articulate a clearer family voice.

Young people are very vulnerable as jobs move to greater instability.

Competition for the middle band getting tighter leads to a risk that we will break the generational contract.

Government needs to say and be clear what its limits are.

Siblings are important especially as families are getting smaller and increasing diversity of families.

Needs to be a shift to a change discourse.

While positive having an increased life expectancy, it also comes with problems.

Global market is a big market and low skilled jobs churn will create issues for the caring economy.

There are some good things happening in business.

Women are still working part time, child care affordability is still an issue.

Do we understand how families are making decisions – where do parents want to be? Who, how and what?

In Europe, kindergartens are within the enterprise, need to address school and young parents, what kind of culture do we infuse into men that makes them think reacting with violence is okay.

In Italy the percentage of young unemployed people is much higher with country's history of many years of recession. Restructure necessary to reduce influence of unions and make it easier to hire and fire people, reduce huge public debt, generous health care system and education system.

Need radical rethinking of way we think of the ageing society – both a problem and an opportunity.

Need a more robust form of intergenerational contract.

What are the right places for best traction for government dollars?

How is it best to use the levers of PPL and employment?

Written comments

<p>Q.1. What key issue or issues need to be addressed to improve family wellbeing, especially for the most disadvantaged families (i) in the next 3-5 years and (ii) in coming decades?</p>	<p>Early intervention and prevention for children experiencing abuse and neglect is paramount. The OECD 'Integrated Social Services for Vulnerable Groups' 2015 (p60) Report suggests Family Centre models which bring together a no cost, fully co-located, range of services is perhaps the most common universal family social service model in operation. This model is showing significant promise in improving the family wellbeing of disadvantage families.</p> <p>Ensure a minimum family income – increase tax free threshold.</p> <p>Allow real choice for families whether commercial paid childcare or parent/grandparent care.</p> <p>Housing affordability needs to be improved.</p> <p>Most families need more time to be a family – linked to Alan's point about community capability – if families don't have time to be a family, then they won't have time to build/sustain community capability. Community capability is linked to social capital – all three types – bridging and linking are perhaps even more important than bonding.</p> <p>Mental Health including trauma and AOD.</p> <p>Attachment – parenting knowledge and skills from pre-pregnancy, systems and policies to support parents in transition.</p> <p>Reconciliation.</p> <p>To follow on from what Bernadine and (English bloke – can't remember his name – but he was the chief social worker for NZ) spoke about at the child aware conference. How could we view our work differently if we looked at family issues through the philosophy of restorative process? Family group conferencing in child protection, for example, - but there are many others.</p> <p>Looking at restorative cities, such as Whanganui, Halifax, Leeds, how have they been able to justify the change of focus (I think I recall mention of juvenile detention centres having closed because there were no longer sufficient numbers of young people being locked up). This cost saving (if indeed such a study has been done) could be very attractive to DSS. Val Braithwaite (ANU) may have information on this. Mary Ivec (ANU) may too.</p> <p>Families need to contribute to the discussion about their experiences of poverty and about what factors would improve their circumstances that better supports for struggling families are required – and current discussions about cutting family tax B are not going to help families / community.</p> <p>That investment in children and families who are struggling will pay off in the long run – fiscally, social inclusion ...</p> <p>Concerned about the lowering rate of participation in community – is this related to lowering work / life balance?</p>
<p>Q.2. Why is this an important issue to solve?</p>	<p>In Australia, family support is primarily a Federal responsibility and yet the Family Support Program is partially withdrawing funding for a number of Family Centres established under the Communities for Children initiative.</p>

	<p>The European experience suggests this is a highly regressive step and we should not allow federal/state responsibility juxta positioning to stand in the way of upscaling rather than downsizing the effective early intervention and prevention such centres deliver for families at risk.</p> <p>Intergenerational transmission of trauma and disadvantage will not fix itself – young children should have the chance to succeed.</p>
<p>Q.3. How appropriate is it for government to address this issue? E.g. do other sectors have some or all responsibility?</p>	<p>While early childhood development is now a state responsibility something in the order of 80% of improved outcomes for children stem from improved parenting and primary caregiving in the early years (Eming Young, 2008).</p> <p>Governments can't directly create social capital, but can support the work of non-government, civil society organisations and business.</p> <p>Vital – also vital to work across portfolios, levels of government with community, business, and not for profit.</p>
<p>Q.4. What are your specific policy or program ideas to address this issue?</p>	<p>We ought to be investing in upscaling Family Centres modelled on initiatives that are showing indications of improved outcomes for families. Such centres need to be integrated with state Children's Centres which have a focus on child development but also engage parents and care givers to a lesser degree.</p> <p>Promote the traditional family as the most effective for members and cost effective for government.</p> <p>Create a development bank to increase manufacturing jobs for younger people.</p> <p>Encourage marriage as social research finds it produces the best outcomes.</p> <p>Need to first of all be clear about how people define/think about their community/ies – this data may already be out there. Then need an understanding of where the strengths are in each community in terms of social capital, where the deficits are. Once you have this information you will be in a position to figure out what might be done to turn the deficits into strengths.</p> <p>Mental health given appropriate support – funding.</p> <p>Focus on transitions – to parenthood, to school, to work, to parenthood – time when even disengaged populations access services.</p>
<p>Q.5. What are the likely benefits and costs of addressing this issue? E.g. economic, social, political, cultural.</p>	<p>The economic, social and cultural benefits of effective investment in early childhood have been well documented by economist James Heckman et al. We are talking about circa 1000% return on investment in the early years in relation to the costs providing incarceration, mental health, alcohol and drug and family violence services.</p> <p>Need to reframe paid parental leave in terms of infant health, development, attachment and all of family wellbeing.</p>
<p>Q. 6. Do you have any other comments to make?</p>	<p>Cost of children experiencing child abuse and neglect or living in separated families is significant and is creating a perpetuating problem into the next generation. Improved parenting and primary care giving for families at risk of child abuse and neglect is highly challenging in the context of intergenerational trauma and conflict. Needs a scale and intensity of</p>

	<p>services that mirrors something like what a residential rehabilitation program offers to substance misusers, but minimally disrupts existing family routines and supports. An integrated Family Centre can offer early intervention and prevention in a cost effective manner given the outcomes that can be achieved.</p> <p>Need fresh thinking for how to 'promote and prevent' for complex populations, especially where there is intergenerational trauma.</p>
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