

A New Approach to Programs or Families and Children

Summary of yourtown's advocacy submission 2025



What is it about?

The Department of Social Services is seeking feedback on a new approach to programs for families and children through its discussion paper. Drawing on more than sixty years of experience, yourtown outlines the need for integrated, flexible, and community-driven services that support children, young people, and families across Australia. The submission is informed by **yourtown's** frontline work in early intervention, prevention, and crisis support, and highlights practical recommendations to shape future policy and service delivery.

Why is it important?

Families and children are experiencing a range of complex and overlapping challenges, such as mental health concerns, housing instability, parenting pressures, and safety issues. Many current programs are too rigid, fragmented, or narrowly focused. As a result, families often cannot access the support they need, particularly when their circumstances do not fit into early intervention or acute care categories. **yourtown's** submission advocates for a holistic, evidence-informed approach that empowers families, builds resilience, and ensures all children and young people can access the right support, at the right time and in their preferred way.

Some of yourtown's key messages:

1. The vision and outcomes for families and children must be specific, inclusive, and adequately resourced.

Aspirational goals are not enough. Empowerment and resilience depend on practical tools, financial stability, and integrated supports for families, with communities playing a central role alongside parents and caregivers.

2. Integrated, multidisciplinary service models are essential to meet real-world needs.

Families rarely present with single issues. Services should provide wraparound support by combining early intervention, therapeutic, and crisis responses. Multidisciplinary hubs and coordinated networks are needed both in-person and online.

3. Flexible funding and investment in workforce capability are critical for service continuity and quality.

Longer-term funding, streamlined reporting, and dedicated resources for workforce development will help services adapt, innovate, and maintain high standards of care across diverse communities.

4. Targeted support is needed for the 'missing middle', referring to children and young people with moderate needs.

Many children and young people fall through the cracks because their needs are too complex for early intervention but do not meet criteria for acute care. Investment in flexible, multidisciplinary models will ensure timely and appropriate support for this cohort.

5. Community voice, co-design, and cultural safety must be embedded in all aspects of program design.

Genuine participation of children, young people, families, and communities in governance and decision-making leads to more relevant, effective, and culturally safe services. This is especially important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

6. Digital and after-hours support are vital for accessibility and continuity of care.

Services such as Parentline and Kids Helpline show the importance of flexible, on-demand support, especially for families in rural, remote, or isolated circumstances. Digital platforms should be embedded alongside face-to-face options.

7. Holistic measurement and reporting frameworks are needed to capture real impact.

Reporting should move beyond outputs to include qualitative data, longitudinal case studies, and outcome indicators. This approach will better reflect the lived experience and long-term change for children and families.

8. Support must be available for children and young people at all key developmental stages, not just in early childhood.

Expanding early intervention beyond the 0–5 age group ensures that children and young people up to 18 years can access timely support as their needs emerge. Services should be designed to respond at every transition point, helping to prevent issues from escalating and promoting long-term wellbeing.



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