

**House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy
and Legal Affairs**

Child Support Programme
Public hearing: 28 August 2014

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Family and domestic violence strategy trials - evaluation

Question reference number: 3

Member: Mr Christensen

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Question:

CHAIR: Another recurring issue regarding staff qualifications has been an issue raised with us particularly by a lot of women's groups such as the Council of Single Mothers and their Children. Also, a range of women's legal centres have raised concerns about the adequacy of domestic violence awareness amongst staff engaged in the Child Support Program and whether they are adequately trained to identify the signs of domestic violence; whether they are reacting appropriately to that. I just want to understand the mechanisms that are within the child support system at the moment to ensure that these people are being identified correctly.

Ms Lewin: The department has developed a family and domestic violence strategy and we have been trialling that. So between April and June a risk identification and referral process was trialled to help officers both in the face-to-face network and in the smart centres on the phones to identify any risks early. That was trialled across 11 different business areas in 10 sites to basically make people more alert to things that might present as a concern and perhaps things that would be unlikely to be volunteered or overtly discussed. So it was a model which had trigger questions with the idea of identifying intervention points for people early in the process. Every person responded to that question in the affirmative. All those questions then staff were able to offer referrals. It could be an internal referral to allow social worker services; it could be a referral to some other external national service or a local specialist service. Listings of those various services were made available to our offices. There is an evaluation of that trial currently underway.

CHAIR: That is great. I think a lot of those groups would be very welcoming of that news. Is there a possibility we can get—if it is not confidential—a copy of the evaluation of that or something along those lines?

Ms Lewin: I understand the evaluation has not been completed yet, but we can have a look at when that will be available.

Answer:

Where an application for child support assessment is lodged, it is mandatory that service officers undertake a proactive risk assessment with both parents. These are screening questions for potential family and domestic violence concerns. Where a customer is identified to have family and domestic violence concerns, a referral will be provided to an appropriate support service. All staff are provided training on identifying trigger statements from customers, both new and existing, managing the conversations appropriately, offering appropriate support services and initiating actions to ensure future management is appropriate.

In addition, the department is trialling a new risk identification and referral process at key intervention points across Child Support, Centrelink and Medicare services. The Family and Domestic Violence Risk Identification and Referral Scoping Study Evaluation is attached. The department's Family and Domestic Violence Strategy is also attached for your information.

The Family and Domestic Violence Risk Identification and Referral Model Phase One Scoping Study

Evaluation Paper

Prepared by
Family Support and Stakeholder Engagement
Families Division

Background

Family and domestic violence (FDV) can have a serious impact on families and individuals, the community and the workplace. In 2011, the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments endorsed the *National Plan to Reduce Domestic Violence against Women and their Children, 2010–22*. This was followed by the Australian Law Reform Commission report *Family Violence and Commonwealth Laws – Improving Legal Frameworks*. This report recommended a number of actions, some of which related to the Department of Human Services (the department).

In July 2013, the department launched its Family and Domestic Violence Strategy (the Strategy). The Strategy outlines guiding principles for the department in managing FDV related issues and is supported by project plans which translate these principles into practical steps to support customers and staff.

Risk Identification and Referral Model

One part of the Strategy is the development of a Risk Identification and Referral model (the model) to systematically identify and support customers with FDV concerns. A scoping study was undertaken as an initial test of the model in a small number of sites, in order to inform the design and implementation of a larger pilot. Phase one of the scoping study involved:

- The development of a risk identification question that could be proactively asked of customers at specified intervention points. An expert panel, with representatives from Social Work Services, academia and providers of specialist FDV services, assisted with the development of the model and risk identification question.
- The identification of targeted intervention points where FDV was thought to be more likely to present as a concern for customers.
- Staff training in using the model.

The scoping study ran for six weeks in 10 sites, and involved 11 customer intervention points, such as applications for child support or changes from a partnered to a single parenting payment. The sites provided services to customers in the face-to-face and call channels across the Centrelink, Child Support and Medicare programmes.

Staff were instructed to proactively ask the risk identification question of all customers at the identified intervention points. After a brief introduction, staff asked customers:

“Are you, or has anyone else, been concerned about your or your family’s safety?”

The model was also used to clarify customer concerns where FDV was inferred (referred to as the reactive process), as well as to offer support to customers who overtly disclosed FDV concerns without staff prompting.

Staff were required to acknowledge customers who indicated they had FDV concerns and to offer an appropriate referral. Internal referrals to Social Work Services were offered where responses to the customer concerns fell within the ambit of departmental business, the customer was in distress or had complex or immediate concerns for their safety. External referral services such as 1800RESPECT or MensLine Australia were offered in other circumstances.

Key Findings

The scoping study demonstrated that the model assisted with the identification of customers with FDV concerns:

- Customers reacted positively, in general, to being asked the question
- The intervention points selected for the scoping study are points where customers experiencing FDV are likely to interact with the department.
- The question proved effective in helping customers to disclose that they had FDV concerns.

The findings for the call and face to face channels are summarised below.

Call Channel

The intervention points were:

Child Support

- Applications for a child support assessment (new customers).
- Customers electing to end a child support assessment or end collection of arrears.
- Applications to change the collection method.
- Change of assessment applications.
- Customers referred to the Litigation team.
- Customers referred to the Departure Prohibition Orders team.

Centrelink

- Customers who indicated they were unable to provide their partner's Tax File Number.
- Family Tax Benefit customers where the partner had not lodged a tax return.
- Customers seeking to change from a partnered payment to a single payment or advising of any other separation event.
- Customers requesting that their partner not have permission to make enquiries on their behalf.

Of the 205 customers who called the department at one of these intervention points and identified as having FDV concerns:

- 152 were offered a referral to a support service or services.
- 41 indicated that they were already receiving assistance.
- 12 declined a referral.

Face to Face Channel

The following intervention points were tested:

Centrelink

- Customers who indicated they were unable to provide their partner's Tax File Number.
- FTB customers where the partner had not lodged a tax return.
- Customers seeking to change from a partnered payment to a single payment or advising of any other separation event.
- Customers requesting that their partner not have permission to make enquiries on their behalf.

Medicare

- Customers asking to include a child on their Medicare card, or to transfer a child to another card.

Of the 50 customers who identified as having FDV concerns during a face to face encounter with staff:

- 42 were offered a referral to a support service or services.
- Five indicated that they were already receiving assistance.
- Three declined a referral.

Child Support staff have previously had experience in discussing potential FDV concerns, and work entirely in the call channel, which also contributed to greater use of the model in the call channel.

The Scoping Study results would suggest minor refinements for some intervention points to the model. For example, for some Child Support intervention points, the proactive model was found to be more effective in interactions with receiving parents than with paying parents.

Feedback from staff participating in the study also suggests that the call channel may provide further scope to convey information to customers with FDV concerns, such as through recorded messages while customers are in the telephony queue.

While the scoping study showed positive results in assisting customers with FDV concerns in the face to face channel, the smaller number of customers who identified as having FDV concerns suggests the need for further testing of intervention points. In particular, given the nature of the programme, results for the Medicare programme

in the face to face channel were not as strong. It would be beneficial to explore interventions points for this programme via our on-line channel.

Next Steps

The number and overall proportion of customer interactions reporting FDV concerns shows that the issue is an important consideration in the department's work and further work on the model could deliver benefits to customers and staff.

In order to develop a more in-depth understanding of customers facing FDV issues and the best way to target the model, it is recommend that the project progress to a phase two pilot. In designing and conducting the pilot, key considerations should include:

- Developing and incorporating a process for customers interacting with the department in the online environment. This would provide another contact option for many customers who are more comfortable in the on-line environment and who have concerns about volunteering information either through the call or face-to-face channels.
- Minor refinements for some intervention points to the model. For example, for some Child Support intervention points, the proactive model was found to be more effective in interactions with receiving parents than with paying parents.
- Further testing for specific customer cohorts. For example, focusing on particular cohorts such as customers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Indigenous Australians.
- Investigating the benefits of introducing information about FDV and the supports available as an 'on hold' message, with the IVR and considering self-service referral options to raise awareness of FDV.
- To assist staff handling customer enquiries in the future, investigating how the information obtained through the model could be used on a customer record in a similar way to the Sensitive Issue Indicator¹ in the Child Support programme.
- Further consideration of the resource implications for the department in delivering the model. This includes cost, staffing requirements and service delivery trade-offs, such as the impact on average handle time of a customer contact.

¹ For Child Support programme customers with known FDV concerns, the department uses a Sensitive Issue Indicator (SII), which is a type of safety concern flag. The SII is designed to enable staff to quickly identify whether there are additional considerations and sensitivities required in dealing with the customer.



Australian Government

Department of Human Services

Family and Domestic Violence Strategy



Introduction

The Department of Human Services (the department) recognises that family and domestic violence is a widespread issue which has a serious impact on the community, the workplace, families and individuals. The integration of the department in 2011 has provided an opportunity to build on existing frameworks and develop a consolidated strategy to address family and domestic violence as it affects both customers and staff.

Background

Over recent years, the Australian Government has introduced a range of initiatives to determine how it can better address domestic and family violence.

April 2009

The Australian Government's National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children released its report *Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009–2021 (Time for Action)*. *Time for Action* argues for a sustained new level of investment in primary prevention and the justice system to create respectful relationships, fair outcomes, and safe communities. This is to be complemented by more effectively planned, targeted and evaluated approaches to services that respond to victims and their families in all their diversity, holding perpetrators accountable for their violence, and working to stop men's violence against women and their children.

July 2010

The Attorney-General requested that the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) inquire into and report on the treatment of family violence in Commonwealth laws. The ALRC was requested to consider what, if any, improvements could be made to relevant legal frameworks to protect the safety of those experiencing family violence. As part of its inquiry, the ALRC considered social security law, child support and family assistance law, immigration law, employment law, superannuation law and privacy provisions.

February 2011

The Australian Commonwealth, State and Territory governments endorsed the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (the National Plan). The National Plan shows Australia's commitments to upholding the human rights of Australian women through the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, the *Declaration to End Violence against Women* and the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. The aim of the National Plan is to bring attitudinal and behavioural change at the cultural, institutional and individual levels, with a particular focus on young people. The Australian Government has committed over \$86 million to initiatives under the National Plan, to improve the lives of women who have experienced violence, and most importantly to stop violence from occurring.

February 2012

The Attorney General released the ALRC's final report, *Family Violence and Commonwealth Laws—Improving Legal Frameworks*, recommending a number of specific actions and legislative changes to be implemented by responsible departments. Some of the ALRC's 102 recommendations are directed at this department or will have an impact on the department's processes and practices. The Family and Domestic Violence Strategy (the Strategy) has been developed to align with the ALRC report.

The Department of Human Services' approach

Development of this Strategy has been informed by approaches already in place within Centrelink and Child Support, together with consultation and research findings. Research undertaken includes a review of Australian and overseas literature on family violence, a comprehensive literature review by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and broad consultation with internal and external stakeholders.

The department recognises that while both men and women can be perpetrators and victims of family and domestic violence, the overwhelming majority of such violence in Australia is perpetrated by men against women. Family and domestic violence can affect women of any background, although there are particular vulnerabilities and impacts relating to age, ability, socio-economic status, culture or religion. It is also important to highlight that family and domestic violence is a major cause of homelessness in Australia and is the most common reason people seek assistance from specialist homelessness agencies. In 2011–12, 34 per cent (77,178) of all people receiving assistance from homelessness agencies were escaping some form of family or domestic violence.

The focus of this Strategy is on service delivery, however, the department will work closely with other agencies to support a whole-of-government response to family and domestic violence. The department acknowledges the human rights framework to address violence against women, with Australia being a signatory to the *United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (1979) and the *United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* (1994). The department will liaise with the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) to ensure that the implementation of this Strategy ties in with the National Plan which is underpinned by Australia's human rights responsibilities. The department is also aware of the intersection between the National Plan, Closing the Gap and the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020.

The department's position is that family and domestic violence is everyone's business and will not be tolerated. The Family and Domestic Violence Strategy has been developed in the context of departmental integration and the over-arching reform of service delivery. A key part of the department's commitment to service excellence is a strong focus on helping those most in need. Through the implementation of this Strategy, the department will be able to help people experiencing family and domestic violence by providing information, resources and support in the context of social and health-related service delivery.

Principles

This Strategy is underpinned by four principles which represent the department's policy positions in relation to family and domestic violence.

The principles are derived from research and consultations, with consideration of the good practice guidelines as outlined by the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse.

PRINCIPLE 1

Family or domestic violence is unacceptable in any form. The department's first priority in responding to customers and staff who are experiencing family violence will be their safety and wellbeing. The department will provide a supportive service environment and a safe place of work respectively for customers and staff who have been impacted by family violence.

PRINCIPLE 2

The responsibility for family or domestic violence always lies with the person who uses the violence. The department will avoid placing blame, responsibility or an onerous burden of proof on persons subjected to family and domestic violence.

PRINCIPLE 3

Family and domestic violence is traumatic and disempowering, and can be difficult to disclose. The department will respond with respect and sensitivity to customers and staff affected by family or domestic violence and maximise their ability to make informed decisions free of coercion.

PRINCIPLE 4

In order to best address the cycle of violence, the department will offer appropriate support services and referrals to all customers affected by family and domestic violence, whether they are at risk of, experiencing or users of violence. In doing this, the department will accommodate differences in respect of gender, sex, sexuality, culture, age ability and background.

Legal framework

The department's definition of family violence will be consistent with the recommendation made in the ALRC report *Family Violence and Commonwealth Laws—Improving Legal Frameworks* and the new definition incorporated into the *Family Law Act 1975* on 7 June 2012. Subject to any legislative changes, the core definition of family and domestic violence should be **conduct that is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling, or intended to cause the family or household member to be fearful**. Such behaviour may include **but is not limited to**:

- physical violence
- sexual assault and other sexually abusive behaviour
- economic abuse
- emotional or psychological abuse
- stalking
- kidnapping or deprivation of liberty
- serious neglect where there is a relationship of dependence
- damage to property, irrespective of whether the victim owns the property
- causing injury or death to an animal irrespective of whether the victim owns the animal
- verbal abuse
- spiritual or cultural abuse, and
- behaviour by the person using violence that causes a child to be exposed to the effects of behaviour referred to above.

The department's position is that the term 'family' is often interpreted as being restricted to members of a family connected by kinship or marriage. 'Domestic' on the other hand, encompasses a variety of other relationships and living situations characterised by a similar level of intimacy and/or dependence. By using the term 'family **and** domestic' violence in formal documentation the department is making a clear statement that the definition should be equally applicable to all of the following circumstances:

- past or current intimate relationships, including dating, co-habiting, carer (where care is provided to someone with a disability, medical condition or is frail aged) and spousal relationships, irrespective of the gender, sex or sexuality of the parties and whether the relationship is of a sexual nature
- family members
- relatives and guardians
- children of an intimate partner
- those who fall within Indigenous concepts of family, and
- those who fall within culturally recognised family groups.

Privacy

The Family and Domestic Violence Strategy will be implemented with due consideration for the need to protect the personal information of both customers and staff who have disclosed family or domestic violence. Privacy safeguards will be put in place and adhered to in the context of all information sharing, recording and referral processes that are developed or refined as part of the Strategy implementation process.

Strategic themes

Five strategic themes have been identified to form the basis of the Family and Domestic Violence Strategy. In alignment with the broader objective of developing comprehensive, connected services, the strategic themes have been designed to operate together to enable the department to offer a seamless and coordinated service response to people experiencing family and domestic violence.

1. Information
2. Risk identification
3. Referrals
4. Our people
5. Training

Information

The department will ensure that there is ready access to accurate and consistent information about family and domestic violence and how it may be relevant to child support, family assistance, early release of superannuation benefits on compassionate grounds and social security matters.

Aims

- To ensure people have a clear understanding of how their experience of family and domestic violence is relevant to specific benefits and services.
- To make people experiencing family and domestic violence aware of the range of services and support available to them through the department and their local community.
- To encourage people experiencing family and domestic violence to come forward and seek assistance.
- To work with stakeholders to ensure that adequate and appropriate information about family and domestic violence and its relevance to benefits and services is provided.

Actions

Information provided to customers will define family and domestic violence as well as outlining the nature, features and dynamics of family and domestic violence including its particular impact on one or any combination of the following: Indigenous people, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and/or intersex people, those from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, older persons and people with disability.

Information materials will explain how the experience of family and domestic violence affects benefits and services, including relevant information about:

- instances where exemptions may apply
- entitlements to certain payments
- privacy and information protection
- support and services provided by the department, and
- referrals to social workers and expert service providers.

Information will be provided to customers consistently and through a range of accessible formats as appropriate including online, mobile and hard copy materials.

The department will work with community service providers (including General Practitioners and other health services) to raise awareness of the range of services and support offered by the department to people experiencing family and domestic violence.

Risk identification

As the lead Commonwealth service delivery agency the department has the opportunity to take a proactive approach to identifying and responding to family and domestic violence concerns experienced by our customers as part of a broader needs assessment. In researching and preparing for this Strategy, the department found evidence to suggest that people respond well to routine screening for family and domestic violence concerns. It is acknowledged that, given the size of the department's customer base, ongoing testing and refinement will be required to ensure that screening for family and domestic violence is carried out appropriately and effectively.

Aims

- To ensure those customers most in need due to family and domestic violence are identified early and receive the support they require in terms of payments, service offers and referrals.
- To identify key points where new services may need to be developed by the department in order to address family and domestic violence concerns.
- To ensure that risk identification approaches are designed to be effective and appropriate within self-managed services and online applications.

Actions

- The department will develop and trial a screening and risk identification model which will be implemented to identify family and domestic violence concerns at defined intervention points, such as the risk identification screening undertaken for all new applications for child support.
- The model will include clear prompts for staff to identify the type of need (based on level of customer risk, distress and available support) and the appropriate referral and support options.
- The service delivery approach will include specialised or additional services for disadvantaged customers, particularly: Indigenous customers, customers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or emerging communities, customers who are marginalised on the basis of sexuality, gender diversity and/or sex diversity and customers with disability.
- The screening and risk identification model will be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis to ensure improvements and further developments are made as required.



Referrals

Through effective collaboration with other agencies and third party providers, the department is in a position to provide referrals to a wide range of services for people impacted by family and domestic violence.

Aims

- To serve as a gateway for people experiencing family and domestic violence to access the services and support they need.
- To maintain and strengthen the department's role as an important community focal point.

Actions

- The department will have a framework of supported referral options in conjunction with the risk identification process for family and domestic violence. When family or domestic violence concerns are identified, customer service staff may refer the customer to a social worker or other expert service provider in the community.
- Reciprocal and consistent engagement at a local, state and national level with community service providers and other stakeholders will ensure that the department is able to help people experiencing family and domestic violence to access the support they need.

Our people

The department acknowledges its responsibility to provide a supportive, flexible and safe workplace for staff affected by family and domestic violence to enable them to continue their employment and receive further assistance as appropriate.

Aims

- To create a culture of awareness of family and domestic violence across the department.
- To implement appropriate and flexible human resources policies and procedures across the department which meet the needs of individual workplaces and employees experiencing family and domestic violence.
- To support staff who may be affected by their interactions with customers or other staff members who are experiencing family and domestic violence.

Actions

- Consistent department-wide response to provide support and flexible working arrangements where a staff member is identified as being at risk of or subject to family and domestic violence.
- Safety planning, to ensure individual staff members are safe at work.
- De-brief options and other support mechanisms in place to support staff who interact with customers or other staff members who are experiencing family and domestic violence.
- Information will be made readily available and accessible to ensure that staff are aware of the process for disclosing family and domestic violence and the support that is available to them.

Training

Through a three-tier training structure, the department will ensure that all staff receive appropriate and targeted training on dealing with family and domestic violence concerns. Training packages developed by other departments and service providers may be used as a basis for the department's training structure.

Aims

- To ensure that understanding, identifying and responding to family and domestic violence concerns is an integral part of all relevant training programs.
- To provide our people with the support, skills and awareness necessary to provide an appropriate service to customers affected by family and domestic violence.
- To establish clear communication lines, roles and responsibilities for managers and employees in relation to family and domestic violence.

Actions

Tier 1—Universal awareness and understanding training for all

- All staff should have an awareness of the nature, features and dynamics of family and domestic violence including the particular impact of family violence on: Indigenous people, those from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and/or intersex people, older persons and people with disability.

Tier 2—Targeted family and domestic violence training

- All staff providing customer services will have access to the resources and expertise necessary to be able to:
 - identify the existence of family and domestic violence concerns, and
 - respond appropriately by:
 - advising people about the impact of family and domestic violence on their case or claim, and/or
 - referring people to resources, social workers or other service providers.
- Delivery of targeted training will be prioritised for:
 - staff providing risk identification and referral such as Employment Services Assessment and Job Capacity Assessment officers, and
 - community engagement and outreach staff such as Indigenous and Multicultural Service Officers.
- Managers, Team Leaders and People Team consultants will be equipped with the training and information to respond appropriately, in line with departmental protocols, where employees are affected by family and domestic violence.

Tier 3—Specialist family and domestic violence training

- Social workers and other staff providing intensive services will continue to receive specialist family and domestic violence training.



Income information on the Department of Human Services website

The screenshot shows the Department of Human Services website. The browser address bar displays 'http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customers/enab'. The page title is '25.1 Income estimates for a y...'. The main content area is titled 'Income used in calculating child support payments'. It explains that each parent's income is considered in the same way and then combined to work out the costs of raising children. It also mentions that a broad range of income amounts for both parents is taken into account to work out child support payments. The page includes a section for 'Related services' with a link to 'Child support assessment'. Below the main content, there is a footer with navigation links and contact information.

Income used in calculating child support payments

Each parent's income is considered in the same way and then combined to work out the costs of raising children. Each parent's share of the total income shows how much of the children's costs they should meet.

A broad range of income amounts for both parents is taken into account to work out child support payments. We add up these amounts to get your [adjusted taxable income](#), which is based on your last completed financial year of income.

It is important you tell us about changes to your income as soon as they happen because we may not be able to backdate the change.

If the income we have for you is wrong

Child support assessments use your adjusted taxable income from a previous year. You can ask us to use an estimate of your adjusted taxable income for the current year if:

- we are already using an adjusted taxable income from your tax return or an adjusted taxable income that you previously advised us about for your current assessment, and
- your current adjusted taxable income has reduced by 15% or more from the income used in the assessment

If you lodge an estimate and your circumstances change, for example, your income increases or decreases, you must lodge a new estimate for a different amount.

You may not be able to lodge an estimate for any part of your assessment period that is based on 1 of the following:

- an agreement
- a determination made under the change of assessment process
- a court order

The best way to make sure your child support is correct is to lodge your tax return on time every year. All child support parents need to lodge a tax return or tell us their income. If you are not required to lodge a tax return, lodge a [Child Support Income Declaration](#) form.

If you have not lodged a tax return for 2 years and we cannot work out your income from other information we have, we will use a default income of at least two thirds of an average weekly earnings figure published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics each year.

If you lodge your tax return late, unless there are exceptional circumstances, we will not be able to backdate a reduction to the default income.

Earning extra income after separation

If you earn extra money after separation, you may be able to apply for some of that extra income to be excluded from your child support assessment. You do not need to go through a formal change of assessment process.

This means that some of the extra income you earn after separation—for example, from second jobs or overtime—can be excluded from your child support assessment for up to 3 years after separation.

In order to have this extra income excluded, you need to show you did not earn that income before separation and the income would not have been earned in the ordinary course of events.

Both parents can apply to have additional post-separation income excluded from the child support assessment. Fill out the [Application for post-separation income to be excluded](#). However, remember:

- income can only be exempt for 3 years after separation
- excluded income can be no more than 30% of your adjusted taxable income

Having this extra money excluded from the assessment can help parents with many post-separation costs such as buying a new car, setting up a new home or buying items to support the children during care.

Department of Human Services

[Payment Finder](#) [Service Finder](#) [Print large version](#)

| General subjects | Customer information | General information | Corporate information | Sections |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------------|--|--|
| Accommodation, renting and homelessness | All payments and services | Accessibility | About us | Customers |
| Australians overseas | Change of circumstances | Complaints and feedback | Budget | Corporate |
| Crisis and special help | Customer news | Contact us | Careers@Human Services | Business |
| Managing your money | Customer service changes | Find us | Freedom of information | Community |
| Self Service | Estimate | Online security | Information Publication Scheme | Health professionals |
| Tax time | Express Plus mobile apps | Our Service Commitments | Publications and resources | Search all |
| What to do following a death | Forms | Privacy | Media | Site survey |
| View all subjects | Income reporting | Reporting fraud | | Please take a moment to complete our survey. |
| | Information in your language | Reviews and appeals | | |
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Department of Human Services ABN 90 794 605 008 Page last updated: Thursday 10 October 2013

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Overview of Estimates of Income for Child Support Purposes

- One of the two pillars of the child support assessment formula is the income of the parents of the child (percentage of care is the other).
- A parent's income for child support purposes is determined by reference to their income for the most recently concluded financial year. In most cases, the basis of the parent's income is their taxable income, as assessed by the Commissioner of Taxation. A number of other income components (for example, some tax-free pensions, benefits and allowances, Reportable Fringe Benefits, Net Investment Losses) are added to the parent's taxable income. The combined total of these amounts forms the parent's Adjusted Taxable Income for the relevant year.
- The Adjusted Taxable Income of both parents is used in the child support assessment to assess the amount of child support they are to pay or receive for the relevant child support period. Whenever a new child support assessment is made, the parties to that assessment are notified in writing of the new rate and the particulars (including the Adjusted Taxable Income amounts) used to make that assessment.
- If either parent's Adjusted Taxable Income for the current financial year is at least 15% less than the Adjusted Taxable Income amount used in the child support assessment, they may elect to estimate their current Adjusted Taxable Income for child support purposes. However, an election can only be made where:
 - the parent's taxable income has been assessed by the Commissioner of Taxation for the previous financial year; or
 - the parent's taxable income has not been assessed but the parent provides a declaration of their taxable income to the Child Support Registrar (the Registrar) before electing to estimate their income; and
 - there is no Income Amount Order (child support agreement, court order, or child support 'departure' decision which sets the parent's Adjusted Taxable Income amount or the annual rate of child support) in place for any day in the financial year.
- The election must be made for all of the remaining days in the financial year. If the election is made part way through the financial year, the estimating parent must also provide an estimate of their "year to date" Adjusted Taxable Income (that is, their Adjusted Taxable Income from 1 July of that year to the day before they elect to estimate their income).
- If the Registrar is not satisfied that the estimated Adjusted Taxable Income amount or the year to date Adjusted Taxable Income amount (or both) are accurate, the Registrar may refuse to accept the election. If the Registrar does not refuse to accept the election, the child support assessment will be amended to give effect to the estimated Adjusted Taxable Income from the day the election was made until the end of that financial year. The days that the estimated Adjusted Taxable Income is in effect is called the 'estimate period'.
- A parent can update their election by making a new election for the remaining days in the financial year at any time during the estimate period if their Adjusted Taxable Income changes. Subsequent elections may be greater or less than the original estimated amount. Likewise, if the Registrar becomes aware that the estimated Adjusted Taxable Income is no longer accurate, the Registrar may review the election and substitute a more accurate estimated amount for the remaining days in the financial year.

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- The estimating parent's estimated Adjusted Taxable Income will be reconciled against their actual Adjusted Taxable Income after their income tax return is assessed by the Commissioner of Taxation at the conclusion of the financial year. If the parent's actual Adjusted Taxable Income is greater than the amount they estimated, the child support assessment will be amended by replacing the estimated Adjusted Taxable Income with the parent's actual Adjusted Taxable Income for all of the days in the estimate period.
- If the paying parent underestimates their income, they will have paid less child support than their income allowed and they will be required to pay the difference in arrears. If the receiving parent underestimates their income, they will have received too much child support and they will be required to repay the overpaid amount.
- If the estimating parent's actual Adjusted Taxable Income is less than the estimated amount, the child support assessment will not be amended.
- The *Child Support (Assessment) Act 1989* provides that child support is to be assessed using a formula. That formula takes into account the extent to which each parent provides care for the child and the income of both parents.
- Child Support law allows either parent to object to the acceptance of an estimate election and/or to the reconciliation of an estimate. If the Registrar refuses to accept an estimate election, only the estimating parent may object. Similarly, if either party to a child support assessment believes the assessment to be unfair (whether because of an estimate of income or otherwise), they may seek a departure from that assessment by applying for a Change of Assessment.
- Parents can submit an estimate of income:
 - online at the my.gov.au website (if they have linked their Child Support services account)
 - over the telephone by calling 13 12 72
 - in writing (letter or form).

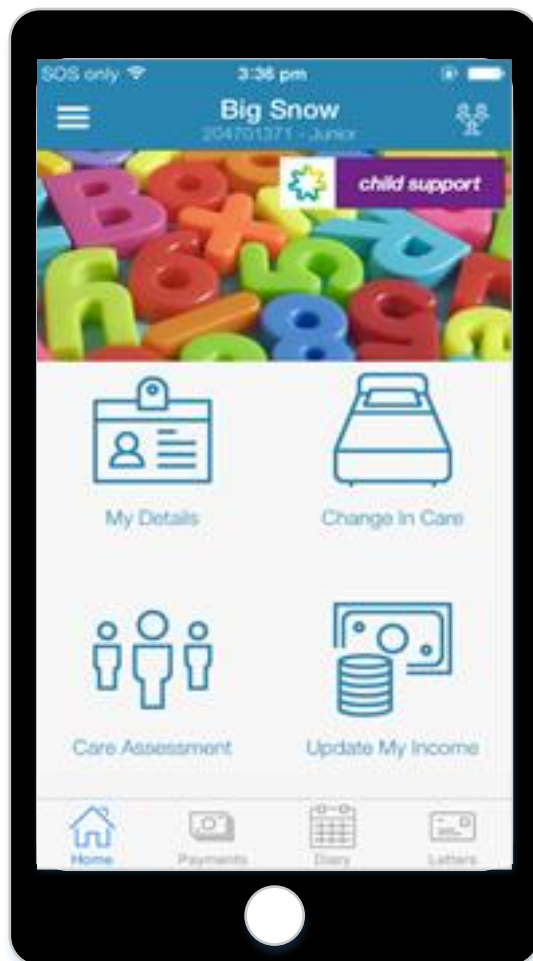


Australian Government
Department of Human Services

Child Support Mobile App Overview

27 November 2014

Introducing the Child Support App



The development of a Child Support App is the obvious next step in extending the self service options to our customers, and is a welcome addition to our existing Express Plus suite of Apps for Centrelink and Medicare.

The Child Support App will include a range of existing features and services currently available in Child Support Online Accounts, as well some new functionality, taking advantage of the mobile device platform to further expand self service to customers.



Why develop a Child Support App?

Staff and customer engagement highlighted the potential of a Child Support App to:

- Increase compliance of paying parents with convenient services and quick payment methods to pay down liability ;
- Reduce customer aggression;
- Reduce red tape for customers and reduce demand to Child Support smart centres;
- Allow customers the choice to self-manage;
- Support a behaviour of 'want' to pay;
- Improve the digital service delivery of Child Support;
- New opportunities to integrate payment functionality.



What can the Child Support App do?

The new Express Plus Child Support mobile app lets customers do most of their online Child Support business using their mobile device. It combines the functions currently available on the Child Support online account, and some new features.

Features include:

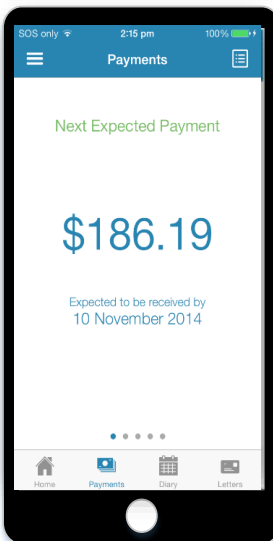
- an exciting new look and feel, where customers can personalise the app with their own images
- simple navigation to view or update services
- faster access to common information and transactions (Profile and Payment view)
- the ability to view payment details
- the ability to view letters
- the ability for customers to keep track of important events for their children, where they can view and save events or appointments in a personal diary with the date, time, location and reminders.
Note: information is only viewable on the device and not provided to the department
- the ability for customers to advise of changes in care arrangements
- the ability to view and update their bank details, and
- a vault to store important documents.

Initial Release Functionalities

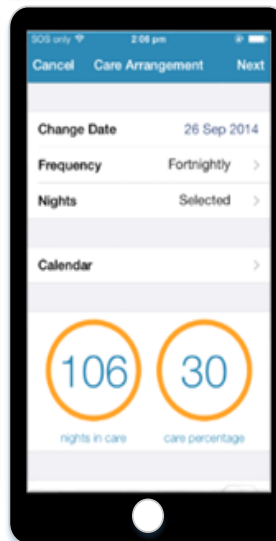
Make Payments



View Payments



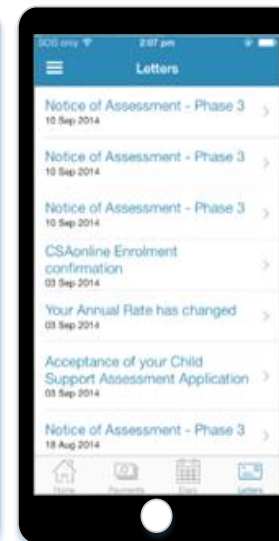
Change in Care



Diary



Letters



The initial release is targeted for late November with the following services being available in the Child Support App:

1. **Change in Care Service**
2. **Update My Details**
3. **Multi-Case Support**
4. **View Case Assessment Details**
5. **Local Diary**
6. **Online Letters**
7. **View Payments**
8. **Make Payment**
9. **Vault**

We've engaged the Reserve Bank of Australia to develop the ability for a Payer to make payments via their smartphone

Payers and Payees can view all their payment information including amounts and due dates quickly on their mobile

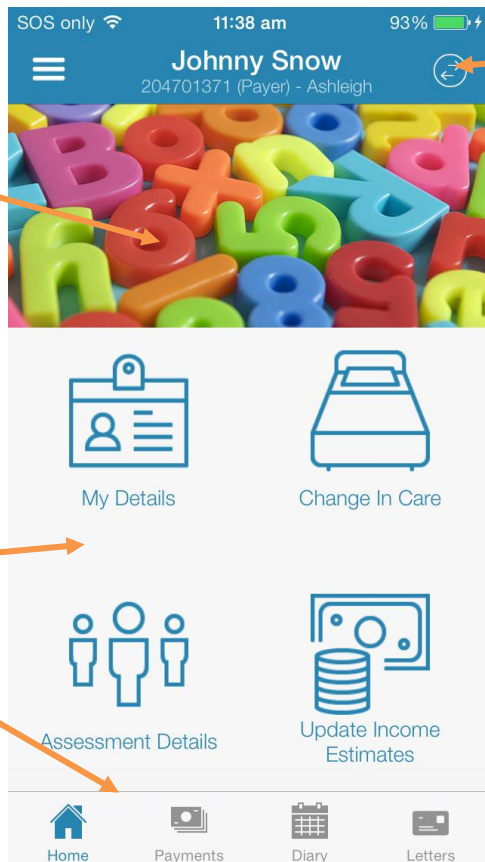
A simple calendar tool allows customers to notify the department of change in care arrangements

Customers can keep track of important events for their children including birthdays, sports events and appointments

Letters and attachment can be viewed 'on the go'. An alert will display in the app when a customer has new mail.

'Look and Feel'

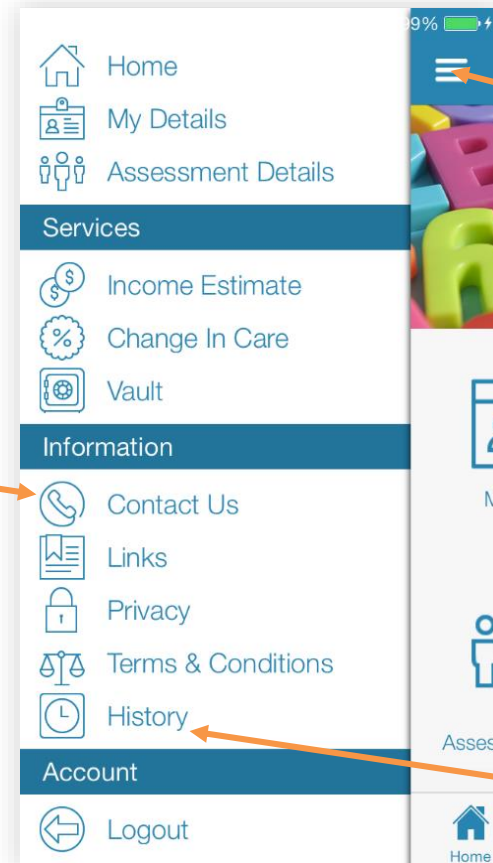
Customers can use their own photos to personalise the app



Most popular services are displayed on the home screen

Multi-case customers can easily switch between cases. Only information pertaining to the selected case will display.

Customers can quickly and easily contact the department



Side menu includes a number of tools and functions as well as important information

Quickly view a list of completed transactions and last log in details

Change in Care

The change of care tool allows the user to view and make amendments to the current shared care arrangement. Any amendments to a shared care arrangement will be updated upon confirmation of the change by a Child Support officer.

SOS only 9:13 am 32%

Change in Care Next

Matilda 365 100 ✓
nights in care care percentage

Matthew 365 100 ✓
nights in care care percentage

The Care Arrangements screen displays the nights in care and percentage of care for each child

SOS only 9:13 am 32%

Cancel Care Details Next

Change date 07 November 2014

Frequency Weekly

Nights 2 nights selected

Calendar

105 28
nights in care care percentage

Agreement Court order

Same as the agreement? ☒

Both parents agree? ☒

Select the child to update the care arrangements by adding the nights in care or select night from a calendar

SOS only 2:59 pm 100%

Select Days Done

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday ✓

Thursday ✓

Friday ✓

Saturday

Select the days and the care percentage is automatically calculated

SOS only 9:13 am 32%

Care Summary Done

Changes to care for

Matilda & Matthew

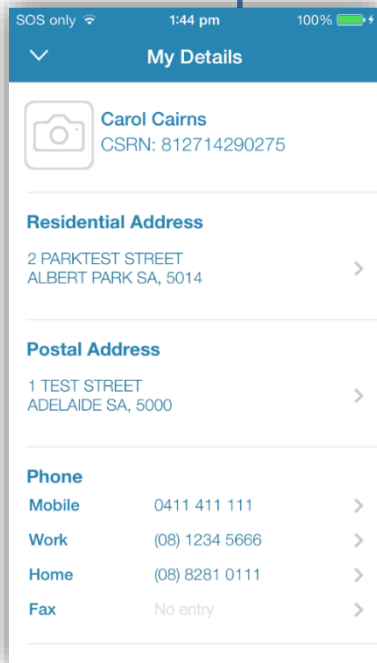
105 28
nights in care care percentage

Once saved, the updated care arrangements are sent to the department for processing

My Details

The Child Support app will allow a customer to view and update their personal contact details including;

- address,
- phone and email address;
- bank account details.



A summary of assessment can also be viewed for each child and includes:

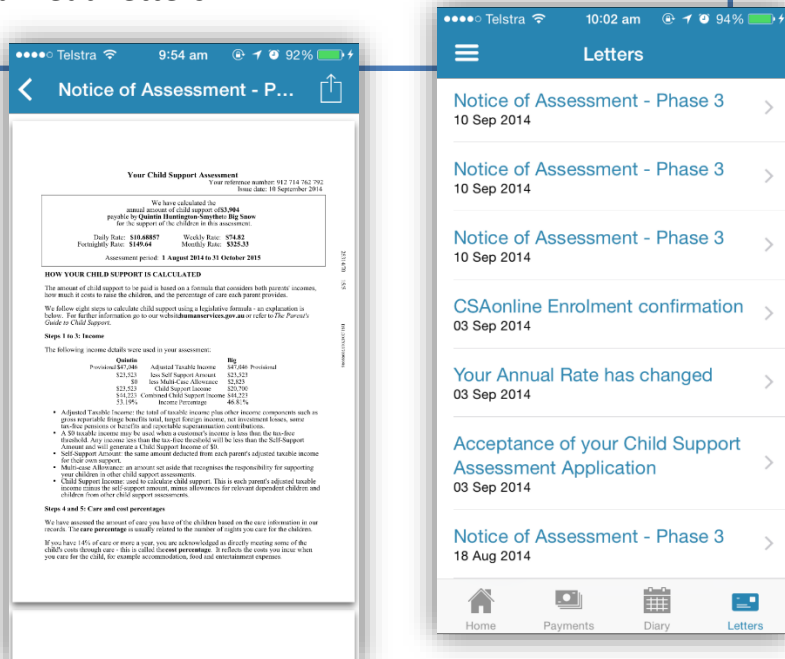
- Case ID;
- name of the other party;
- child name/s;
- how much Payer has been assessed to pay;
- period of assessment;
- Income Amount; and
- annual, monthly and daily rates.



Letters and diary

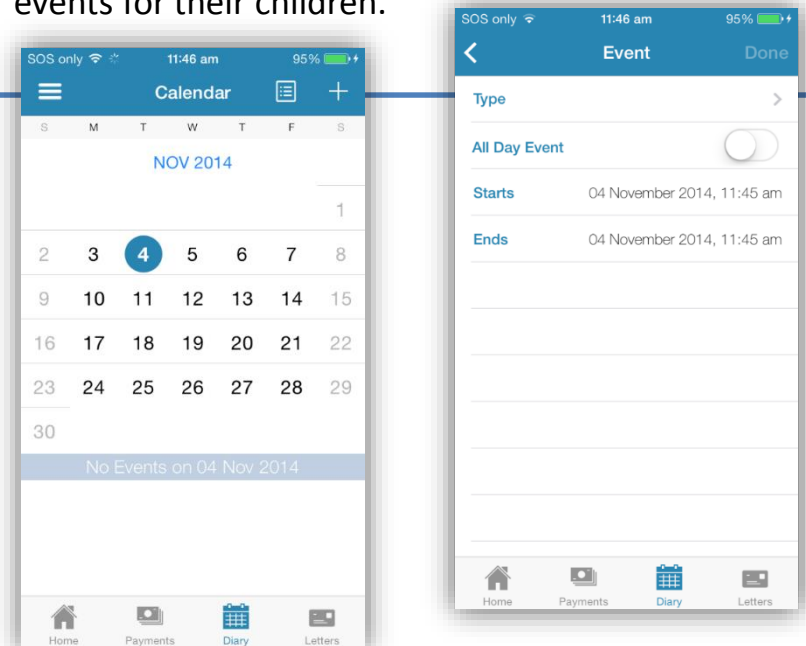
All Child Support letters can be viewed for up to 90 days.

Customers can select from a summary list, and an alert icon will be displayed when there are unread letters.



The diary will display a calendar for the customer to use to view and record view events from a drop down list.

Birthdays, medical appointments, sporting events, student free days and the like, can be recorded in the diary to assist the customer keep track of important events for their children.



Payments

Customers can view payments made and received through the Child Support system.

This includes any historical payment information, overdue amounts and amounts awaiting disbursement by the department.

Payers can also make payments when they choose using their bank or credit card details.

