

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY AND LEGAL AFFAIRS
INQUIRY HEARING 28 JUNE 2012 – FOETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER**

Question:

Dr Ayres (DEEWR): ... There is a range of programs and support for parents, children and students in various circumstances—disability support, for example, inclusion support in early childhood and so on. Whilst we do not have a specific targeted set of programs around FASD, children and families that are affected by it certainly would be supported through those sorts of programs. That is certainly the intention.

Dr Stone: Can I ask you to provide the committee with a catalogue or a list, if you like, of those programs you just discussed?

Answer:

While individual support for children with special needs is primarily the responsibility of state and territory governments and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), DEEWR provides funding to support the inclusion of children with special needs in early childhood education and care, as well as funding to support children with disability in schools around Australia.

Support for children prior to school

DEEWR provides support to ECEC services through the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP) to promote and maintain high quality care and inclusion for all children in eligible child care services. The Australian Government provided \$95.9 million funding for IPSP in 2011-2012. The IPSP has a number of discrete elements, described below.

Inclusion Support Program (\$20.1 million)

The Inclusion Support Program aims to support ECEC services to remove the barriers to access for children with additional needs through the provision of inclusion support. Children with additional needs include children with disability and Indigenous children. Inclusion support is provided through Inclusion Support Agencies (ISAs), which manage a network of Inclusion Support Facilitators that provide practical advice and support to assist ECEC services to build their capacity to include all children, including those with additional needs. These supports include, but are not limited to, facilitating and access to professional support, to Specialist Equipment, Flexible Support Funding, the Inclusion Support Subsidy (ISS) and Bicultural Support.

The ISS is a contribution to the costs associated with employing an additional educator for services with a child or children with ongoing high support needs. For home based services, ISS provides a payment in recognition of the additional care and attention required by children with ongoing high support needs in their care and the impact of this on an educator/carer.

Professional Support Program

The Professional Support Program (PSP) provides professional development and support to build the skills of the child care workforce to enable it to provide high quality child care. Under the Professional Support aspect of the program, funding is provided for a national network of Professional Support Coordinators (PSCs) and Indigenous Professional Support Units (IPSUs).

PSCs and IPSUs facilitate professional development that is based on evidence and good practice to support eligible child care service educators, carers and managers to provide quality child care for all children. One objective of the PSCs is to provide professional development to support the inclusion of children with additional needs.

In addition to professional development for ECEC staff in mainstream child care services, the IPSUs support the staff and managing bodies in Indigenous focused Budget-Based Funded services to provide quality care through facilitating professional development and providing guidance and support. IPSUs also advise PSCs on culturally appropriate professional support that meets the needs of eligible child care services with Indigenous staff or children.

National Partnership Agreements – early childhood

The Australian Government has a number of National Partnership arrangements with the states and territories which provide funding to improve outcomes for young children. This funding can be used to support children with disability:

- *National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education* – \$955 million over five years from 2008-2013 to ensure that all children will have access to an early childhood education (preschool/kindergarten) program by 2013. The program to be delivered by a four-year university trained early childhood education teacher, 15 hours a week, 40 weeks (or 600 hours) a year in the year before formal schooling, at a cost which does not present a barrier to participation.
- *National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development* - \$564 million over six years from 2008-2014 to improve outcomes to address the needs of Indigenous children in their early years. Element 1 will provide \$292.6 million to states and territories for the construction, refurbishment and service delivery of Children and Family Centres in 38 targeted communities in a mix of remote, regional and urban locations. They will be concentrated in areas where there is demonstrated need for these services, high disadvantage and a high proportion of Indigenous children under five years of age. The Children and Family Centres will deliver integrated services, including early learning, child care and family support programs. Element 2 (increased access to antenatal care, pre-pregnancy and teenage sexual and reproductive health, \$107 million) and Element 3 (increased access to and use of maternal and child health services by Indigenous families, \$90 million) are being managed by the Department of Health and Ageing.

Support for children at school

Over 2009-12, the Government is providing approximately \$65.5 billion to state and territory government and non-government education authorities to support all students through the National Education Agreement, under the intergovernmental funding agreement agreed by the Council of Australian Governments in 2008. The Australian Government is the major government funder of non-government schools, providing around 42 per cent of total funding for these schools (\$8.2 billion in 2012-13).

While the Australian Government works collaboratively with state and territory governments in developing national priorities for education, it does not have a direct role in the administration or operation of schools. The funding framework provides flexibility for states and territories to allocate Commonwealth funding to areas which they believe will produce the best outcomes for students. State and territory governments are responsible for ensuring schools are appropriately resourced in order to achieve the mutually-agreed objectives and performance benchmarks of the NEA.

Students who have medical, developmental and psychological conditions may need additional support to enable them to engage in learning on the same basis as all other students. Education authorities administer funding in their jurisdictions and have the flexibility to determine how best to allocate resources and support services required to meet the needs of students and schools.

In some school communities servicing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, foetal alcohol spectrum disorder can have a significant impact on the way schools operate. Australian Government

funding arrangements to education authorities provide the flexibility for school systems to apply funding in the best way to address the needs of students and school communities.

National Partnership Agreements – school education

National Partnership Agreement for More Support for Students with Disability

The *More Support for Students with Disability* initiative will provide \$200 million in additional funding over two years to government and non-government education authorities to support their work with students with disability and/or learning difficulties. \$154 million will be provided to government schools and \$42.6 million will be provided to non-government schools under this initiative.

Education authorities will be able to use funding to increase support for students with disability by building the capacity of schools and teachers to better meet their individual needs. This will be accomplished through selection of a range of activities that may include the provision of coordinated services by health specialists within a school (e.g. occupational therapy), adapted curriculum tailored to students' needs based on the latest expert advice and provision of assistive technology to support students' learning in the classroom. Services will be delivered in the 2012 and 2013 school years. Students with disability will benefit from funding that will provide real and tangible improvements to their individual learning experiences. Parents and families will also benefit from knowing their child's school will be better equipped to assist them to achieve their educational potential.

Other National Partnership Agreements

The Australia Government also has a number of National Partnership arrangements with the states and territories which provide funding for both government and non-government schools and systems and are focused on improving the educational outcomes of all students. Funding can be used to support students with disabilities. These partnerships focus on a number of key priority reform areas:

- literacy and numeracy
- improving teacher quality
- improving educational outcomes in disadvantaged communities
- trade training centres in schools
- youth attainment and transitions.

The total amount of funding to be provided in 2012-13 under National Partnerships for school education and youth services is around \$1.4 billion.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014

The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments to implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan. The Plan includes 55 core actions that will be progressed at the national, systematic and local levels between 2010 and 2014 as part of a longer strategy to close the gaps between the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and other Australian students. More detail can be found on the SCSEEC website:

http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/atsieap_action_plan_201014_press_release,33444.html

Parental and Community Education Program

The Australian Government is also providing support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through the Parental and Community Engagement (PaCE) Program. The program supports initiatives that assist families and communities to 'reach-in' schools and other educational settings to engage in their children's education through participation in educational decision-making, developing partnerships with education providers, and supporting and reinforcing their children's learning at home, with the aim of improving the educational outcomes for their children. The funding allocation for PaCE for 2009-2012 is \$84.311 million.