

**EXTRACTS FROM FAMILIES AND SOCIAL SERVICES IN AUSTRALIA
REPORT TO THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY, VOLUME 1, AGPS,
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Summary of recommendations

1. There should be a mechanism at the Federal government level which brings together planning for income security and personal social services across functional departments and provides for co-operative data collection and program evaluation as between the Commonwealth and the States.
2. An intergovernmental planning mechanism should be established to continue the co-operative collection of data and planning information commenced by this Committee.
3. The creation of a mechanism in each State which provides a focus for co-ordinated policy development for personal social services across functional departments.
4. The capacity of State welfare departments should be strengthened to undertake planning functions consistent with recommendation 1.
5. The role of local government in planning and service delivery for social services should be determined within each State in consultation with the Commonwealth.
6. Commonwealth and State governments should determine public policies and set down funding guidelines for government financing of non-government agencies in statutory service provision, innovative and experimental service provision, research and policy development and co-ordination activities.
7. It is recommended that:
 - (a) priority be accorded to the activities of the Commonwealth-State working party on the collection of co-ordinated national welfare statistics;
 - (b) adequate data about the characteristics of the population be collected on a regular basis through the national census and through other State and Commonwealth surveys; and
 - (c) governments at all levels ensure that the value of statistical collections is explained and that there is publicly available feedback.
8. The question of providing improved funding information should be referred by the Minister to her colleague the Treasurer with a request that he in turn takes up the issue with his State colleagues.
9. A minimum network of social services which should be provided by the public purse should be agreed upon by the Commonwealth and States in consultation but in the first instance the following minimum service listing should be considered as a basis for shared planning and funding. This would include the current granting programs of the Department of Social Security:
 - (a) information/referral services;
 - (b) emergency housekeeper services;
 - (c) homemaker and budgetry skills—advisory services;
 - (d) day care and occasional care;
 - (e) out of school and holiday care programs;
 - (f) parent counselling, education and support services;
 - (g) crisis care, emergency accommodation and counselling services; and
 - (h) services to the handicapped (in particular to assist the socialisation and integration where possible into general community activities).
- N.B. Services to include particular provision for special groups, e.g. Aborigines, migrants etc., where appropriate.
10. Negotiations should be undertaken between the Commonwealth and each State government about the activities to be undertaken with government financing by the non-government sector and local government for social service provision. These agencies would then enter into an agreement with the State as to the nature, extent and quality of the service to be provided.

11. A funding program of three to five years should be mutually agreed upon by the Commonwealth and the States for the minimum network of social services. As a first step the present welfare grants programs of the Department of Social Security should be integrated into a single social service grants program. As a second step the services listed in the minimum network should be included in this program. Funding arrangements for constituent parts of the program may vary and are to be mutually agreed between each State government and the Commonwealth.

12. The Commonwealth and each State government should carefully examine the detailed information provided in each chapter and in particular chapters 2, 3 and 5 and Appendix 1 and assess the implications these may have for policy development.

13. Commonwealth and State governments make regular budget provision for co-ordinated expenditure on research into welfare service provision which at least matches the outlay on provision for research into health services.

Chapter 2—Families in Australia today

Changing role of youth

The role of youth within the family is ill defined and highly variable. They are not depended on and only just dependent. The Committee has gained the impression that their position might best be seen as a yearning for independence in the face of dependence enforced by society.

(i) Labour force participation

Enforced dependence is most clearly seen in the decreasing labour force participation of youth and in their increasing unemployment rates.

The decreasing labour force participation of youth coincides with their increasing participation in higher education. The training function has been transferred from families to institutions.

Indeed, socialisation in general is now a function a family shares with a number of social institutions. With society plural and continually changing, and with the family more individualised, the chance of the values transmitted by various social institutions being inconsistent with those of an individual family is increased. Consequently the effectiveness of the family's authority as a source of information and social control is reduced.

Erikson¹, among others, has addressed himself to these and other problems faced by youth, placing emphasis on their striving for independence.

(ii) Independence

An expression of the desire of youths not in the labour force to be independent of the social interactions of the family can be seen in the growing numbers of youth drop-in centres and refuges. The State and Commonwealth governments are establishing an increasing number of programs for youth. For example the Commonwealth has recently established a Youth Affairs Bureau within the Department of Environment, Housing and Community Development.

Those youths who have entered the labour force express their independence through increased social and geographic mobility and early family formation.

The median age of Australian bachelors marrying has dropped from 27 in 1910 to 25.3 in 1947 to 23.3 in 1974. The median age of spinster brides has also dropped from 22.5 in 1947 to 20.9 in 1974.² A very effective procedure for terminating emotional dependence on a family is for an individual to transfer that dependence to a new familial arrangement.

Conclusion

Families in Australia vary considerably in their composition and in the roles enacted by family members. It seems likely that this variability will increase given existing demographic and attitudinal trends.

Services designed to support families in Australia should cope with this variability as well as with central direction of the trends.

In particular it should be kept in mind that:

- (a) There are over two million primary families in Australia supporting well over four million children; 10 per cent of these families contain more than three children, children in these large families constituting 21.3 per cent of all children.
- (b) There is a definite trend away from the institutional residential care of children. Those in such care are being cared for by more institutions, so that the number of children per institution is declining.
- (c) At present, 8.8 per cent of all families have only one parent and it is likely that this percentage will increase. The increasing proportion of one-parent families with divorced heads may mean that services assuming a widowed head are not as appropriate as in the past.
- (d) Increasing participation in the labour force by married women raises the possibility that the families tasks may be increasingly shared between parents or by institutions. That an estimated 285 900 mothers would be interested in a job if suitable child care was available is notable.
- (e) Attitudes towards and roles within marriage are becoming increasingly variable. Services and their legal bases may need to adapt accordingly.
- (f) Increasing numbers of young people are remaining dependent on the family for longer periods due to their increasing participation in higher education and their increasing unemployment. Programs designed for youth need to consider this growing dependence and youth's yearning for independence.
- (g) Although children remain dependent on the family their rights as individuals should also be considered in the provision of services.

Chapter 3

Needs of families

Basic needs of families

The following is a set of goals for public policies to create a favourable environment in order for families to fulfil their four major functions:

- (a) Security of an adequate cash income to purchase through the market those goods which are normally supplied through the market, which are necessary to maintain an acceptable standard of living for all members. (This is affected by wage rates and accessibility to employment, pension and benefit rates and eligibility criteria, and the family allowance system. Hidden cash subsidies to families such as subsidised housing also affect the adequacy of a given income, though not allowing full market choices.)
- (b) Access to additional financial resources in the form of compensation, special grants or credit, in times of added expense or crisis, such as home purchase, removal, illness and birth of children.
- (c) Access to and security of tenure of a dwelling suited to the form and activities of the family, which provides self-contained facilities and allows for the autonomy, privacy and interaction of the family group and its members, in the combination they choose.
- (d) The opportunity to occupy such a dwelling from which community facilities and services and employment are easily accessible to individuals according to their mode of transport.
- (e) The availability of employment, educational and recreational opportunities appropriate to the interests, ages and abilities of all members, including some which allow whole family involvement.
- (f) Access to a variety of practical family support services which suit its patterns and respect its privacy, for the running of the home and the caring for young children, such as homemaker/housekeeper, emergency, occasional, part-time and full-time child care, which may be used either to increase a family's efficiency or supplement its own resources in times of additional pressures. (Accessibility is influenced by factors such as distance, waiting lists, financial costs, information on service, cultural differences between those providing the service and its potential users.)

- (g) The opportunity to obtain information, advice and counselling on family matters, when this is sought.
- (h) The possibility of sharing information, experience and other resources with other families.
- (i) The preservation of individual human and legal rights within the family, such as freedom from exploitation, protection from assault and a fair share of resources over which the individual has independent control.

Chapter 4

Legal and constitutional matters . . . to families

State and territory child welfare legislation

As there had been no comparative analysis of legislation within the Australian States and Territories affecting children and families, the Social Welfare Commission made a research grant to Lynne Foreman of the Department of Criminology at the University of Melbourne to undertake such an analysis. The analysis was only intended to cover selected aspects of child welfare legislation, excluding the extensive legislation relating to adoption and Commonwealth Government legislation concerned with the broad spectrum of social welfare.

Readers of this Report are referred to Lynne Foreman's paper as it is impossible to reproduce extensively here her findings. A brief summary only of the main points follows.

The aim of Lynne Foreman's study was to describe succinctly the legislative framework in Australian States and Territories with respect to welfare, 'to determine whether it is child, family or community orientated and how policy is expressed in the legislation'.

Ms Foreman asserts that:

. . . the process of State intervention is based currently upon the premise that the child is part of a family unit which ought to have been organised to protect itself and its members, and if it fails in the fulfilment of this objective then State intervention is justified to remove the child from the prevailing family circumstances. Underlying this premise is the notion that the law upholds the cultural view that the preferred family unit is one that is legally sanctioned, economically independent of the State and generally is able to support, maintain and develop its own internal structure along the lines of socially acceptable criteria.

Nowhere in Australian law is there a clear enunciation of what the rights and responsibilities of the States and the Commonwealth are with respect to child and family welfare. Nor is there a readily accessible overview of the basis for regulating parental rights. Further it is difficult to extract from legislation and case law a simple statement of what the legal rights of parents and children are.

The imprecision and confusion surrounding this topic is to a large extent accentuated in Australia as a result of the constitutional powers vested in both State and Federal bodies. Because of the constitutional split of legislative functions each Australian State and Territory has different child welfare legislation and this is undoubtedly implemented differently.

The result of the study does not break new ground, but reinforces the view, which is probably widely held by those engaged in the provision of services to the child and family in Australia, that our welfare legislation is generally orientated towards responding only when the activities of the child the child's circumstances or a composite situation has occurred which requires State intervention, ostensibly to protect the child from itself or others. The grounds for intervention are basically the same throughout Australia and with some rare exceptions the legislation does not aim to prevent or mend family dysfunction. The element of social control is directed at the child.'

Chapter 5

Current provision of personal social services directed towards the family

Discussion

The aims of the State and Territory welfare departments are broadly similar with commonly repeated sentiments such as:

principles of co-operation, integration of services, research and education and aimed at the prevention of family dysfunction, stating a belief in the family unit
fundamental belief is in the preservation of the family unit as the basis of society and as the place in which the child is best developed¹

the importance of the parent-child relationship, the desirability of maintaining the family unit²

However, despite this commitment to the family, project officers stated that very few services were directed to the family as a whole, but were rather directed to individuals (perhaps within family units) who were in need of assistance. There appeared to be little involvement and follow-up (beyond counselling) to the broader problems of the family from which these individuals' problems may stem or be accentuated. Similarly, project officers could identify few programs which they considered had the family as their client group.

The aims of the State welfare departments do however suggest some differences in their approach to the provision of services. The Victorian, Queensland, Tasmanian and New South Wales departments' aims are mainly or totally the protection of, and provision of services for, children. However, the aims of the welfare departments in South Australia and Western Australia, while retaining the child protection and service provision function, involve a wider concern for the needs of the whole community. There is evidence of a significant extension of services provided by the South Australian department in line with these broader aims.

The aims of the welfare departments also consider their function when families break down and their obligations towards children of these families. It appears that all States and Territories consider that where adoption is not possible, foster care is the best service for them to aim to provide for these children. If residential care is necessary, there is evidence in some States of a growing preference for and use of family group care. These trends and preferences are discussed later in this section.³

Endnotes

Chapter 2

1. E.H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York, 1968).
2. DBS, *Social Indication No. 1, 1976*, No. 13-16.

Chapter 5

1. Department of Youth and Community Services Act, 1973, N.S.W., from the State research report.
2. Aims of the Tasmanian Department of Social Welfare as stated in the State research report.