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AUTHORISED:

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**Submission by the Department of Families,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
to the
House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Family and Human Services
Inquiry into the impact of illicit drug use on
families**

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INTRODUCTION

1. The use of illicit drugs poses risks for families and children. While illicit drugs may only be used by an individual family member, their use may affect the functioning and wellbeing of the whole family.
2. Illicit drug use can impact on family relationships, financial security, mental health and access to services. Children with parents who use drugs are particularly vulnerable and often require special assistance. Alternately, children may find themselves taking on caring responsibilities for their parents. Their parents may be unable or unwilling to care for them so relatives, such as grandparents, and other carers may require special assistance to help them look after children for whom they are not legally responsible.
3. In general FaCSIA does not have responsibility for health or direct law enforcement in relation to illicit drugs. These are the responsibility of other Commonwealth agencies, and state and territory governments. However, FaCSIA does contribute to some strategies, especially those of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), such as the National Illicit Drug Strategy.
4. State and territory governments have a major role in family support, for example, through their responsibilities for child protection, out-of-home care, intensive family support services and preschool. They are also major providers of housing, hospitals, education and accommodation support and community access aspects of disability services. The Australian Government is concerned about the continuing impacts on children of dysfunctional families and is working with state and territory governments to improve outcomes for children in such situations.
5. FaCSIA's purpose is to improve the lives of Australians by helping to build the capacity and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, including Indigenous families and communities.
6. Many of FaCSIA's programs provide general support for all families. It has a number of programs and services explicitly targeted at families affected by illicit drugs. It also has a wide variety of supports for vulnerable families which are not specifically directed at families adversely affected by illicit drug use, but which do assist such families. FaCSIA is also working with other Australian Government agencies to better target programs and services. This submission is therefore likely to be of most assistance to the Committee in considering its third term of reference:
 - ways to strengthen families who are coping with a member(s) using illicit drugs.

7. Unless otherwise stated, the programs and payments covered in this submission are administered by FaCSIA.

STRENGTHENING AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES COPING WITH ILLICIT DRUG USE

8. The Prime Minister launched the National Illicit Drug Strategy "Tough on Drugs" in November 1997. The Strategy provides a balanced and integrated approach to reducing the supply of and demand for illicit drugs. Since its launch, the Australian Government has committed more than \$1 billion to the Strategy. Development and implementation of the National Illicit Drug Strategy is occurring in consultation with the Australian National Council on Drugs, state and territory governments, non-government organisations and the community sector.
9. The FaCSIA component of the Strategy is the Strengthening and Supporting Families Coping with Illicit Drug Use Program (Strengthening Families). This program has a specific focus on supporting families affected by illicit drug use (including parents, partners, grandparents, kinship carers, children of drug-using parents and drug users).
10. In the 2004 Budget funding of \$13.6 million over four years was announced to extend the Strengthening Families measure. There are currently 21 services being provided on a local and national basis by 20 non-government organisations. From July 2005 to December 2006 the program assisted 7728 families and 2692 training/education sessions were conducted.
11. An important component in the delivery of all Strengthening Families projects is an emphasis on collaboration and partnership with a wide range of government and non-government agencies. These include agencies such as Centrelink, child protection services, family support services, alcohol and drug treatment services, hospitals, general practitioners, women's health services, corrections, probation and parole, early childhood programs, schools and mental health services. Many projects conduct network meetings for agencies delivering services to families affected by substance abuse.
12. A strong partnership approach has also been important when working with Indigenous communities to establish effective referral pathways with key agencies. This focus has been an important aspect of case managing clients with substance abuse issues.
13. A number of projects provide intensive long-term support to families and have a specific focus on the needs of children affected by parental drug use.

The evidence indicates that children of drug using parents are often a hidden group who are exposed to multiple difficulties such as violence, attachment disorders, mental health issues, housing crises, criminality and isolation.

14. In addition to working directly with children and young people, some projects have adopted an early intervention approach in working with young mothers who have substance abuse issues to engage them during the post-natal period through providing support groups for new mothers and their babies. These approaches involve close liaison with hospitals and child protection services.
15. A broad definition of family has been applied across the program. This has given projects the flexibility to work broadly with partners, siblings, grandparents, kinship carers, extended family and others.

Examples of services provided under the Strengthening Families program

- Focus on the Family continues to train volunteer facilitators to take the 'How to Drug Proof Your Kids' to local communities across Australia. Parents are equipped to implement effective parenting strategies to prevent harmful drug use by children and young people.
- The Queensland Injectors Health Network has employed family support workers in the Brisbane metropolitan area and Maroochydore Shire to enhance the NIDS drug treatment programs. An early intervention, prevention and harm reduction focus is taken in providing counselling, advocacy, support, referral and education services. The program offers ongoing case management with both individual and family therapy, complemented by education and support groups (based on Triple P parenting program).
- Family Drug Support's 'Stepping Stones Program' offers a 27 hour structured course to help families learn how to cope and develop resilience in dealing with drug issues. Partnerships have been developed with a range of state government and non-government drug and alcohol agencies, community drug action teams across several states.
- Victoria's Odyssey House 'Counting the Kids' program provides a specialist family support service to children and their families where parents have substance dependencies. The program provides primary care and intervention for complex families, including in-home family support services, therapeutic group work and school holiday programs. Secondary consultations and training forums are provided to the child, family and drug treatment sectors on service provision to families.

- The Women's Health Care Association in Perth through the Pregnancy, Early Parenting and Illicit Substance Abuse Children's project (PEPISU) has conducted support groups for new mothers and their babies, children's art therapy groups, a recreational physical activity program and a training program for other service providers.
- DrugBeat SA aims to assist parents and partners of drug users to understand the recovery process and to provide effective support to the family member. The program works with the family as a whole and consists of therapeutic and support groups, individual counselling, family therapy, education and information.
- Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (Tasmania) - the project aims to assist grandparents and other kinship carers raising children of drug-using people. Services provided include support and counselling (including regional support groups); case management (including brokerage for specialist services); advocacy; information and skill development for grandparents; and referral.
- The Aboriginal Kinship Program in Adelaide assists Indigenous families by providing intensive case management to families and individuals affected by illicit drug use. Key strategies include case management, linking clients with other support agencies and brokerage funds. Work is also focused on case managing Aboriginal people who use illicit drugs through agencies such as corrections, police, prisoner support services and community health services.
- Centacare's Family Coping Program works with a number of Indigenous communities in the top end of the NT including Wadeye, Nguiu (Tiwi Islands), Nauiyu (Daly River), Belyuen, Bagot and Palmerston Indigenous Village. The program provides skills training, information and education to reduce the psychological and physical harm related to drug use. Strong partnerships have been developed with key referral agencies, including schools in remote communities, community councils and correction.

VULNERABLE FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

16. Child protection policies and procedures in Australian states and territories recognise that parental illicit drug use is a risk factor for children and young people and can contribute to notifications to child protection services. Parental illicit drug use is increasingly a factor in an assessment that a child

or young person should be placed in out-of-home care¹, due to parental inability or unwillingness to provide appropriate care for them.

17. For example, a study covering Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland indicated that in each state, substance abuse, domestic violence and physical abuse were the three most prevalent problems in the family backgrounds of children in out-of-home care who have multiple and complex needs.² Furthermore, child death reviews in a number of Australian states and territories have identified illicit drug use as an issue of concern.³
18. The Australian Government is concerned about the continuing increase in the number of child abuse cases⁴; however responsibility for improving child protection services rests primarily with each state and territory government.
19. The Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference has agreed to progress a national approach to child protection, focusing specifically on prevention and early intervention, data development and workforce issues. Joint work to date includes the:
 - National Plan for Foster Children, Young People and their Carers, which aims to improve outcomes for children and young people in foster care, including Indigenous young people; and
 - National Framework for Creating Safe Environments for Children, which focuses on a national approach for increasing the safety of children in their dealings with community service organisations.
20. Under the Australian Constitution, support for children and young people in out-of-home care is primarily the responsibility of state and territory governments. Each state and territory has its own legislation, policies and practices in relation to foster care and foster care payments.
21. The Australian Government's family assistance payments (detailed on pages 12 to 14 of this submission) are available to families caring for children who are not able to live with their parents (such as foster, relative and kinship carers) regardless of whether their care is on a formal or informal basis, providing they have ongoing, day-to-day care and

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; *Child Protection Australia 2005-06*

² Osborn, A. and Delfabbro, P. (2006) An analysis of the social background and placement history of children with multiple and complex needs in Australian out-of-home care. *Communities, Families and Children Australia*, 1(1)

³ *Annual Report January-December 2005*, NSW Child Death Review Team; *Recommendations from the Murray-Mackie Study into the deaths and near deaths of children known to care and protection and the Government response*, Katy Gallagher MLA, ACT

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; *Child Protection Australia 2005-06*

responsibility for the child or young person. Parental substance abuse is a factor in many of these situations.

22. Indigenous children remain over-represented in child protection statistics. Indigenous children are six times more likely to be subject to a care and protection order than non-indigenous children. There is a strong, repeatedly documented association between substance abuse and violence in Indigenous communities⁵. While there is no doubt that illicit drug use is occurring in Indigenous communities, it is the easy access to cheap legal substances such as petrol, alcohol and aerosols that are of most immediate concern in many Indigenous families and communities.

Australian Government Child Abuse Prevention and Support

23. The Australian Government provides over \$10 million a year to fund a range of child abuse prevention programmes and projects.
24. The *REACH Program*, (\$4.3 million) is intended to improve the capacity of families and caregivers to respond appropriately to children's needs for care, development and safety through timely access to community resources that can support them in their parenting role. 41 services are funded to support children, parents and caregivers who are at risk. REACH encourages early intervention approaches to prevent child abuse, neglect and other poor outcomes for children.
25. The *Indigenous Children Programme* (\$5.63 million) aims to deliver better outcomes for Indigenous children and families through culturally sensitive early intervention and prevention programs and services, particularly for families with children at risk of neglect or abuse. These include improved access to child care, increased resources, better parenting support and strengthened social and community networks.
26. The Australian Institute of Family Studies is funded to run a *National Child Protection Clearinghouse* (\$0.59 million). The Clearinghouse disseminates information on child protection activities and research to professionals and organisations in the field.
27. The NAPCAN Foundation receives \$0.24 million for the annual National Child Protection Week.

⁵ Atkinson, J "Stinkin Thinkin: Alcohol, violence and government responses" *Aboriginal Law Bulletin*, vol.2, no.51, pp.5-6; Bolger, A. (1991), *Aboriginal women and violence*, North Australia Research Unit, Australian National University, Darwin; Fitzgerald, T. (2001), *Cape York Justice Study*, Vol 1, Volume 2: The situation of Cape York Indigenous communities, Volume 3: Appendices and Attachments, November; Robertson, B. (2000), *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Taskforce on Violence Report*, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development, Queensland.

Stronger Families and Communities Strategy

28. The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS) is an Australian Government initiative designed to enable local community organisations to identify and provide services needed in their local community. Funding of \$490 million has been committed for 2004–2009 to provide a greater focus on early childhood initiatives and resources.
29. There are four streams to the current Strategy:
 - *Communities for Children*
 - *Early Childhood - Invest to Grow*
 - *Local Answers*
 - *Choice and Flexibility in Child Care.*
30. The *Communities for Children* initiative helps children aged 0-5 years to have the best possible start in life by providing practical assistance to their families and communities. The initiative is based on the principles of early intervention and prevention.
31. Under *Communities for Children*, a lead non-government organisation (NGO) works in collaboration with service providers, community members, community organisations, business and all levels of government to develop and implement a strategic plan tailored to community needs. The bulk of the funding is allocated by the NGO to other local service providers to deliver the activities identified in the plans.
32. While there are no activities that are solely dedicated to dealing with the impact of illicit drugs under the *Communities for Children* model, some sites do have some activities that are aimed at helping families experiencing these and associated problems.
33. The aim of *Invest to Grow* is to contribute to improved outcomes for young children and to build the Australian evidence base about effective prevention and early intervention in early childhood. *Invest to Grow* funds a range of early intervention and prevention programs for young children, their families and communities. Although there are no projects specifically directed at addressing the impact of illicit drug use on families, many of the projects assist families dealing with these issues. *Invest to Grow* funding also supports the development of resources for parents, community groups, professionals and government organisations to support positive early childhood development.
34. As part of *Invest to Grow*, the Australian Government provides funding for the Raising Children Website. The website provides parenting information for families with children aged 0-8 years. It provides information about early childhood development, behaviour, nutrition, sleep, health, daily care, play,

learning, communication and safety. A companion DVD is under production and is planned to be provided to every new parent from September 2007.

35. *Local Answers* aims to strengthen families and communities by funding local, small-scale time limited projects that help communities build skills and capacity. While over 480 projects are currently funded under Local Answers, a few projects (less than 5 per cent) include activities to assist communities and families dealing with the issue of substance abuse. In most cases, the substance abuse is not limited to illicit drugs and the projects use early intervention and prevention approaches aimed at increasing awareness in families and the community.
36. *Choice and Flexibility in Child Care* includes In-Home Day Care and Long Day Care Incentive Scheme Programs and extension of the Quality Assurance System.

Examples of activities being delivered in Communities for Children sites include:

- **Parenting and family support programs** which assist families that may not access main stream services with information, playgroups and skills including a workshop on substance abuse.
- **Peer development** which strives to improve services to families and children through peer development opportunities by working with families who are, among other things, experiencing difficulties due to mental health and drug and alcohol use.
- **Conception, Birth and Early Years Project** which aims to improve health outcomes for children 0-5 years of age with a focus on reducing the negative outcomes associated with alcohol, tobacco and drugs. Key outcomes are to increase the level of awareness of the harms associated with these drugs during pregnancy.
- **Parenting Programs Project**, an intervention project which focuses on providing culturally sensitive programs to build family capacity, including for ATSI and CALD families, parents and carers with mental health and drug and alcohol problems.
- **Family Outreach Service** which focuses on reaching families at risk or coming into crisis and those affected by multiple complex problems, including alcohol and drug dependence.

Grandparent Initiatives

37. The ABS Family Characteristics Survey 2003 identified that there were 22,500 grandparent families caring for 31,100 children aged 0-17 years in Australia in 2003⁶. While there are no specific figures, parental illicit drug use is an issue in many of these situations.
38. The Australian Government has introduced the following measures to assist grandparents who have primary responsibility for the care of their grandchildren:
- Waiving the Child Care Benefit work/study/training test for grandparent carers;
 -
 - Providing a special rate of Child Care Benefit called Grandparent Child Care Benefit for grandparents on income support, covering the full cost of approved child care for those children;
 -
 - Providing all children in grandparent/relative care with access to a Health Care Card;
 -
 - Expanding the eligibility criteria for the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (see page 22 of this submission) to include young people in grandparent care;
 -
 - Providing \$400,000 per annum until 2009–10 to enable legal aid commissions to provide or expand dispute resolution processes, such as family conferencing, that involve grandparents and/or extended family members;
 -
 - From 1 July 2007, strengthening Social Security Legislation to make it easier for Centrelink to ensure that income support payments for principal carers, including grandparents, are provided to the person who is actually providing the majority of day-to-day care for the dependent child; and
 -
 - In addition, the family assistance payments listed on pages 12 to 14 are also available to grandparent carer families in the same way they are available to other families.

Carer Initiatives

39. The Australian Government recognises the vital and increasingly important role carers play in the family and community. High priority has been given to improving support for carers, including a number of initiatives that have

⁶ ABS *Family Characteristics Survey*, 2003.

improved financial support, provided better access to respite care, and improved information services.

40. While these initiatives are not specifically targeted at carers or families adversely affected by illicit drugs, they are available to carers of people whose use of illicit drugs has resulted in a disability to medical condition requiring substantial care.
41. The Australian Government offers two forms of financial assistance – Carer Payment and Carer Allowance – to those who care at home for people with disabilities, severe medical conditions, or those who are frail aged.
42. Carer Payment provides income support to people who, because of the demands of their caring role, are unable to support themselves through substantial workforce participation. Carer Allowance is an income supplement available to people who provide daily care and attention at home to a person with a disability or severe medical condition, or who is frail aged. It can be paid in addition to a social security income support payment.
43. In addition, Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres and Commonwealth Carer Resource Centres provide information about the availability within local areas of respite care (in-home, community and residential), counselling and other community services, and possible financial entitlements.

COAG Mental Health Initiatives

44. Families affected by the impacts of illicit drug use may also be affected by mental health issues. These may either be as a direct result of using illicit drugs or they may be a factor affecting a person's decision to use illicit drugs.
45. FaCSIA is responsible for implementing three of the 19 new mental health measures of the COAG National Action Plan on Mental Health. These three measures total \$554.7 million over five years and represent 30 per cent of the total new funding for mental health.
46. Under the *Mental Health Respite Programme*, \$224.7 million is available for flexible respite care options for carers and families who are caring for people with a mental illness/psychiatric disability and/or intellectual disability. Under this program, priority will be given to elderly parents over 65 years of age (for Indigenous carers over 50 years of age) who live with and care for children (including adult children) with a mental illness/psychiatric disability or intellectual disability.

47. Under the *Personal Helpers and Mentors Programme*, \$284.8 million is available to provide 900 personal helpers and mentors to assist people with a severe functional limitation resulting from a mental illness to manage their daily activities and access a range of appropriate and integrated community and social supports, accommodation, health, welfare and employment services. The programme will target people aged 16 years and over whose ability to live independently in the community is severely impacted because of a mental illness. It will create opportunities for recovery through helping overcome social isolation and increasing connections to their community.
48. Under the *Community Based Programmes*, \$45.2 million is available to fund a diverse range of practical projects to support families, children and young people with a particular focus on Indigenous families and those from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.
49. These measures will be integrated with existing clinical and non-clinical services.

Playgroups

50. Playgroups are informal gatherings for parents and caregivers with children under school age. They usually meet once a week for two hours during school terms. Playgroups provide opportunities for children's social, emotional, physical and intellectual development while also providing opportunities for parents and caregivers to develop social and support networks to encourage and assist them in their parenting role.
51. These programs are not directly aimed to address drug use, however in delivering these programs, particularly Intensive Support Playgroups, service providers may well be dealing with families for whom such use is an issue.

Playgroup models

- **Community Playgroups** are self-managed by the parents and/or caregivers who attend the playgroup. Currently around 105,000 families and 145,000 children access over 8,500 Community playgroups across Australia.
- **Supported Playgroups** are initiated and facilitated by a paid coordinator and are available to families who might not normally attend a playgroup. They target culturally and linguistically diverse families, Indigenous families, families with mental health or disability issues (either the parent or the child), teenage and young parent families, and families who are socially isolated or disadvantaged. A total of \$1.7 million over three years to December 2008 has been allocated. Funding for each

Supported Playgroup is available for approximately 12 months, after which time it is anticipated that the majority of these playgroups, or the families attending them, will make the transition to a Community Playgroup or to some other form of community participation.

- **Locational Supported Playgroups** is a new playgroup model being introduced in the 2007–08 Budget as part of the \$13.8 million *Expansion of Playgroups for Indigenous Families (EPIF) Initiative*. Thirty Locational Supported Playgroups targeting Indigenous families will be progressively implemented over four years. These playgroups will be initiated and facilitated by a paid coordinator and will be located in places which encourage integration with other community services such as child care, pre-schools and community health centres. This model recognises that significant time is needed to build capacity in Indigenous communities before families can move to a non-facilitated playgroup environment.
- **Intensive Support Playgroups** aim to promote positive early childhood development and contribute to increased child safety and wellbeing for particularly disadvantaged families with young children whose housing circumstances are impacting on their capacity to parent effectively. A family support worker provides extensive support to assist these isolated and disadvantaged families to stabilise their circumstances by building linkages to a wide range of community services. There are 15 Intensive Support Playgroups. The EPIF Initiative also includes funding for Intensive Support Playgroups. Additional funding for nine current Intensive Support Playgroup sites which service Indigenous communities will be provided to improve and extend services, plus six new Intensive Support Playgroups targeting Indigenous communities will be progressively introduced over the next four years.

PAYMENTS TO FAMILIES

52. The Australian Government sees families as being fundamental to a strong, cohesive society. The Government is committed to supporting and strengthening families and recognises that families today have a diversity of parenting responsibilities and care arrangements. In helping to meet the financial needs of families, the Australian government makes a substantial contribution to the well being of children and young people by providing family assistance payments.
53. Family assistance payments are generally paid to parents, because they have the legal responsibility for, and ongoing care of, their children. In cases where the parents are unable to fulfil their caring responsibilities (for

example in cases of substance abuse), family assistance payments can be made to the person or organisation which has ongoing care of the children.

54. The Australian Government recognises these care arrangements by providing carers of other people's children (usually grandparents, other kinship carers or foster carers) with access to financial assistance on the same basis as all other families. Family assistance can be provided whether or not the carer has gained formal legal responsibility for the child, providing they have the day to day care and responsibility for the child.
55. People caring for other people's children are eligible for the full range of Australian Government family payments such as Family Tax Benefit (FTB), Parenting Payment, Child Care Benefit (CCB) and, for those grandparents on an income support payment, Grandparent Child Care Benefit (GCCB). In addition, these carers can obtain a non-income tested foster child Health Care Card for the children in their care.
56. Although eligible, some carers may not receive the Australian Government payments to which they are entitled, because they are unwilling to apply for them. For example, grandparents may be reluctant to apply for Family Tax Benefit for fear the children will be taken back by the parent so the parent can continue to receive this income. Providing additional financial assistance to grandparent and other kinship carers inevitably involves withdrawal of assistance from parents, as the Australian Government does not make payments twice for the same child.
57. In recent years, the Australian Government has substantially increased assistance to families through increased rates of payment and more generous income testing arrangements to improve rewards from work.
58. Family Tax Benefit provides substantial financial assistance to families to assist with the costs of raising dependent children. Approximately 2.2 million families and 4.2 million children benefit from FTB Part A and Part B. On average, families receive around \$8,300 from FTB each year and families with incomes below \$40,000 receive maximum support under FTB Part A. FTB Part B provides extra assistance to single income families including sole parents.
59. A universal non-means-tested Baby Bonus provides financial assistance to families to help offset the costs associated with the birth or adoption of a child. The Baby Bonus is currently a \$4,133 one-off payment, not income tested and is paid regardless of whether the mother was formerly working or not. The payment will increase to \$5,000 in July 2008.
60. The person claiming the payment must have ongoing care of the child. The Baby Bonus may be paid to a person other than one of the parents, where

the child comes into the person's care within 13 weeks of its birth, and the person will have ongoing care of the child for no less than 13 weeks. For live births on or after 1 July 2007, parents will be required to formally register the birth of their baby with the relevant Births, Deaths and Marriages registry before the Baby Bonus payment is made.

61. Maternity Immunisation Allowance encourages parents/carers to immunise their young children by providing a one off payment if children are fully immunised at 18 months of age. The current rate for this payment is \$229.70 per child.
62. Double Orphan Pension provides financial assistance to guardians or approved care organisations in meeting the costs of caring for children who are orphans, or who have parents incarcerated. The base rate for the payment is \$49.40 per fortnight. An additional component may be payable to increase the carer's Family Tax Benefit entitlement to the level payable for the young person immediately before they became a double orphan.

Welfare Reform

63. The Australian Government is considering how it can better ensure the substantial financial assistance provided to families with children, is used to meet children's needs.
64. While most families use the benefits and practical support provided by the Government to help raise their children, there are a small minority who use their benefits to fund dysfunctional behaviours such as drug and alcohol abuse. To this end, the Government is looking at how to assist these families through income management assistance.
65. Payment of the Baby Bonus by instalment will be mandatory for all claimants under the age of 18 years from 1 July 2007. There is a provision for claimants over the age of 18 years to elect for it to be delivered in instalments if that is the preferred payment arrangement. Currently, it is paid as a lump sum to the majority of claimants, usually parents. Payment by instalment may occur for any claimant where a social worker believes a lump sum payment is inappropriate, such as when a mother is vulnerable or experiencing difficulties for various reasons. This might include reasons related to substance abuse.
66. The Baby Bonus proposal will be supported by the development of an education resource to be available in high schools on the financial responsibilities of parenthood. The resources will focus on educating potential parents on the financial costs and responsibilities associated with raising a child and provide information to assist them to manage the

significant payments that can follow the birth of a child including the Baby Bonus and Family Tax Benefit.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Family Relationship Services Program (FRSP)

67. The FRSP aims to improve the well being of families and children by supporting positive family relationships through prevention and early intervention services, and post separation services.
68. Under the FRSP an integrated set of core activities such as information and referral, community development, education and skills training, counselling, mediation and contact services is delivered to assist families in strengthening family relationships or minimising the negative outcomes of family separation.
69. FRSP services are provided through more than 100 community organisations operating in approximately 350 outlets across Australia. The FRSP is currently undergoing substantial expansion following the New Family Law System budget package announced in May 2005.
70. The 2005–06 FRSP National Report, based on information from service providers, identified more than 6,000 cases in which the primary presenting issue was substance abuse. The report also found an increasing number of complex need cases in which issues such as drug abuse, mental health and substance abuse determine the service activities delivered. The focus of FRSP is supporting family relationships and services are not positioned to address primary addiction issues.

Indigenous Family Violence Prevention

71. There are many causal factors of family violence in Indigenous communities. Anecdotally drug and alcohol use is a major contributor to family violence in Indigenous communities.
72. The AIHW report 'Family violence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples', of November 2006 included the following statistics from the 'National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2004'⁷:

⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Family violence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*, p 34

- It was estimated that 42 per cent of Indigenous people had experienced verbal and/or physical abuse and/or were put in fear by someone under the influence of alcohol in the past 12 months;
 - Just over one in five (21 per cent) Indigenous people reported that they had experienced verbal and/or physical abuse and/or were put in fear by someone under the influence of illicit drugs in the past 12 months; and
 - Approximately 19 per cent of Indigenous Australians reported having abused someone while under the influence of alcohol in the past 12 months.
73. The *Family Violence Partnership Program (FVPP)* is designed to work in partnership with state and territory governments and Indigenous communities to fund projects that will reduce and prevent Indigenous family violence and child abuse. FVPP also funds projects that work with victims of family violence to provide safety, counselling and support. 38 projects receive funding under FVPP, there are projects located in all states and territories except the ACT. Projects are located in urban, regional and remote areas and are diverse in their format and delivery. The Government allocated \$12.63 million in 2006–07 for this program. This program also provides \$6 million over 2 years to support the Council of Australian Governments Package to Address Family Violence and Child Abuse in Indigenous Communities (see page 22).
74. The *Family Violence Regional Activity Program (FVRAP)* aims to provide practical and flexible support for grassroots projects that have been identified by Indigenous communities as a local priority to address family violence, sexual assault, child abuse and/or child protection. Projects that reflect the importance of protecting women and children, and breaking the cycle of violence are considered to be of particular importance. The allocation for FVRAP in 2006–07 was around \$4.824 million.

HOUSING AND EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

75. Families experiencing the impacts of illicit drug use may require assistance with housing or be at risk of homelessness.
76. The Australian Government makes a considerable contribution to improving housing affordability for low-income Australians through the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) and the Commonwealth Rent Assistance program.

77. Through the CSHA, the Australian Government has committed around \$4.75 billion in grants to the state and territory Governments over five years to supply affordable public and community housing to low income earners.
78. *Rent Assistance (RA)* is a non-taxable income supplement payment added on to the pension, allowance or benefit of eligible income support customers who rent in the private rental market. Any eligible family receiving FTB Part A at more than the base rate gets RA with their FTB.

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)

79. The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is a joint Australian government/state program which provides emergency and transitional accommodation and other support to people who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless. The states and territories have responsibility for day-to-day administration of the program.
80. In 2005–06, SAAP funded 1,300 non-government, community and local government organisations to provide support and/or transitional accommodation services. SAAP recurrent funding for the year totalled \$324 million, with the Australian Government contributing \$179 million or 55 per cent.
81. In 2004–05 19,400 clients (19 per cent) reported a substance use problem.⁸ These clients were more likely to be male (59 per cent), with an average age of 32 years old. 4,800 clients (five per cent) reported problems with both substance abuse and mental health.
82. Indigenous people comprised 18 per cent of clients who reported a substance use problem. People born overseas in a predominantly non-English speaking country comprised four per cent of the substance use group.
83. SAAP services find it harder to meet the needs of clients with substance abuse problems as they are more likely to request specialist services not available at SAAP agencies.

Emergency Relief Program (ERP)

84. The Emergency Relief Program (ERP) provides immediate assistance to people in financial crisis to deal with their immediate crisis situation in a way that maintains the dignity of the individual and encourages self-reliance. Funding is provided to a range of community and charitable organisations to

⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Homeless SAAP Clients with mental health and substance abuse problems 2005-05*

assist them to carry out their normal emergency relief activities. Assistance from emergency relief providers is usually in the form of purchase vouchers for goods, part-payment of accounts, or material assistance such as food or clothing.

85. Approximately 800 community organisations, operating through more than 1300 outlets, receive funding through the ERP. Total funding for the ERP in 2006–07 is \$31.2 million (excluding GST).

The Home Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program

86. The Home Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program, with funding of \$1.298m in 2006–07, provides early intervention services for families at risk of homelessness and offers assistance to families experiencing difficulties with maintaining their tenancies or home ownership. The HOME Advice Program is an early intervention program, aiming to help families before they get into crisis. It offers assistance with financial issues, family health and well-being, and employment and training participation. Families can seek assistance directly from the HOME Advice Program service provider, or be referred by a Centrelink social worker.

CHILD CARE

87. The Australian Government recognises that access to quality child care is an integral part of any family's choices in raising their children and achieving a balance between work and family responsibilities. Child care also provides children with learning opportunities that enhance their social and cognitive development.
88. Families affected by illicit drug use may access child care. It is important that the children of parents that use drugs are adequately cared for and that parents are assisted with the cost of this care.
89. The Australian Government is expected to spend around \$11 billion on child care in the next four years. Principally this will go towards CCB and the Child Care Tax Rebate (CCTR), which support parents who use child care with the overall cost.
90. CCB is a means tested payment therefore targeted at lower income families that helps to reduce the cost of quality child care for more than 1,000,000 children a year using approved child care. The CCTR covers 30 per cent of out-of-pocket expenses, that is, regular fees for approved care, less CCB entitlements, for parents who meet the work/study/training test.

91. *Special Child Care Benefit (SCCB)* is an extra 'pool' of funds that covers up to, but generally the full cost of child care fees for:
- a child at risk of serious abuse or neglect;
 - exceptional cases where a family is faced with an event that reduces its capacity to pay the fees normally charged.
92. Families and children experiencing the impacts of illicit drugs could be eligible for SCCB, depending on their circumstances. As SCCB is initially approved by the child care service, families or services assisting families experiencing one of the above circumstances should discuss eligibility and approval conditions with their child care service provider.
93. *In-Home Care*, where an approved carer provides care in the parent's home, provides further choice and flexibility for families whose child care needs cannot be met by existing service providers. This may occur where, for example, the parents work non-standard hours, are living in remote locations, for multiple births or for parents or children who are chronically ill.
94. *Mobile child care services* visit rural and remote areas and may provide child care sessions, playgroup, vacation care and toy library services. These services assist in meeting child care needs of Indigenous families living in rural and remote areas.
95. The *Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Child Care* fee assistance program provides eligible parents with extra help with the cost of approved child care while undertaking activities such as job search, work, study or rehabilitation to help them to enter or re-enter the workforce. In the recent Budget, an additional \$15.4 million over four years was provided. This will assist around 20,000 more families 2007–08.
96. *JET Crèches* are funded through the Child Care Services Support Program (see below). JET Crèches were originally established to assist eligible, jobless parents wishing to undertake study, work or job search activities to help them enter or re-enter the workforce. JET Crèches are funded where no other suitable child care is available and are set up to run alongside training courses for targeted vulnerable groups.
97. There are also *Flexible/Innovative Services* which are predominantly centre based. These services do not meet the operating requirements for Child Care Benefit and are recurrently funded on a per place basis. Some of these services are in predominantly Indigenous areas and can include:

- Purpose built child care centres providing long day care, playgroups, preschool, outside school and vacation care, plus nutrition and parenting support services;
 - Mobile services attached to a long day care centre (or operating independently) offering short term long day care in a number of community venues, playgroups or toy library services.
98. There are currently 22 *Child Care Links* projects situated in areas of disadvantage around Australia, including some Indigenous communities. These projects are expected to build the capacity of child care workers to support parents using child care, including increasing parents' knowledge and understanding of services, facilities, information and available supports within the area.

Child Care Services Support Program

99. Funding of \$298 million has been allocated for 2007–08 to the Child Care Services Support (CCSS) Program. The objectives of this program are to:
- promote, support and enhance quality child care;
 - assist services to improve access for children and families with special and/or additional needs;
 - support the sustainability of child care for all Australian children and families including in areas and/or under circumstances where services would not otherwise be available; and
 - develop, maintain and disseminate information to assist families to make informed decisions about child care and the related support programs and services provided or funded by the Australian Government.
100. Children from families experiencing the impact of illicit drug use can need additional support in accessing and participating in child care. The *Inclusion and Professional Support Program* which is part of the CCSS provides advice, training and resources to child care staff to help them meet the diverse needs of all children.
101. Professional Support available to child care services includes advice and training in supporting families in crisis, establishing effective relationships with families and understanding the legal and social context of children with additional needs.
102. Inclusion Support Agencies provide a network of skilled inclusion support facilitators that work directly with child care services to provide practical

assistance to child care staff in supporting children with additional needs; this includes advice about behavioural issues, cultural diversity and communications skills.

103. The *Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS)* model was developed in the late 1980s to meet the social and developmental needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. They provide a range of child care programs, including long day care, playgroups, outside school hours care, vacation care and cultural programs. In addition, they have a flow-on effect benefiting Indigenous communities, as families are able to participate in the economic and social life of the community.
104. *Indigenous Playgroups and Enrichment Programs* provide culturally appropriate activities for children below school age. Enrichment programs provide culturally appropriate activities and nutrition programs for school age children including teenagers.
105. *Indigenous Outside School Hours Care* services provide organised activities including cultural programs and provide care before and after school and during periods of school vacation.
106. In the 2007–08 Budget, funding was provided for an additional 20 new innovative child care service hubs in rural and remote locations with high Indigenous populations.

YOUTH

107. The Australian Government funds a range of programs that help disadvantaged young people (particularly those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness) to improve their level of engagement and to overcome barriers to participation with their families and the community.
108. *Reconnect* aims to provide early intervention into youth homelessness. Reconnect assists young people aged 12-18 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to stay connected to family, education, training, employment and community. There are 100 Reconnect services around Australia and these services provide support to young people and their families. Although not specifically funded to work with young people who are using drugs, Reconnect providers often have contact with such clients. Reconnect providers have access to 'brokerage' enabling them to 'buy in' expertise from drug/alcohol services.

109. The *Newly Arrived Youth Support Service (NAYSS)*, an initiative of Reconnect, provides targeted 'multi function' services to newly arrived young people (aged 12-21 years) who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families. NAYSS assists these young people to re-engage with their family, education, training, employment and the community in ways that are culturally and contextually appropriate. Although not specifically funded to work with young people who are using drugs, NAYSS providers often have contact with such clients.
110. *Mentor Marketplace* aims to improve life outcomes for young people aged 12-25 years, particularly those at greatest risk of disconnection from their family, community, education, training and the workplace. A total of 26 Mentor Marketplace service providers deliver mentoring services across Australia. Mentor Marketplace services are not funded to work specifically with 'drug issues', and would generally refer drug/alcohol issues to a specialist service.
111. *YouthLinx* is a prevention and early intervention program that supports young people aged 11-16 years and their families, to build self-reliance, strengthen family relationships and encourage community involvement. Services are not funded to address 'drug' issues. YouthLinx would generally refer drug/alcohol issues to a specialist service.
112. *Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA)* is a one-off financial support to the value of \$1,000, for young people aged 15-25 years who are about to, or have exited formal state based care and/or informal care such as juvenile justice; out-of-home care and Indigenous kinship care arrangements. TILA is designed to be provided in conjunction with other support services for young people to help alleviate the financial strain associated with the transition to independent living. It is possible that some young people assisted through TILA may be dealing with drug issues but the program does not directly target this group of young people.

INDIGENOUS FAMILIES

Council of Australian Governments Package to Address Family Violence and Child Abuse in Indigenous Communities

113. In July 2006, COAG agreed to build on the outcomes of the Intergovernmental Summit on Family Violence and Child Abuse. COAG agreed that all governments will work together to make Indigenous communities safer by addressing policing, justice, community support and governance.

114. The Australian Government's contribution to this is a \$130 million package of measures to improve law and order and increase Indigenous people's confidence in the justice system. The package includes a range of complementary measures which address key contributing factors to violence and child abuse in Indigenous communities, including alcohol and substance misuse. The Australian Government is seeking support from state and territory governments for these initiatives.

115. The initiatives are as follows:

- law and order initiatives – assessment of adequacy of policing in remote areas, improved policing in very remote areas, national intelligence taskforce and additional sniffer dog teams;
- legal and community initiatives – community legal education, Indigenous Networks, Safe Places, legal services support for victims and witnesses, and amendments to bail determination, sentencing and customary law legislation;
- health initiatives – additional drug and alcohol treatment and rehabilitation services, alcohol management plans, and improving the health and wellbeing of Indigenous children living in remote areas by expediting the roll-out of Child Health Checks in selected communities; and
- other initiatives, including compulsory school attendance, corporate governance, and banning the importation of kava.

Reducing Substance Misuse in Indigenous Communities

116. In September 2005, the Australian Government announced funding of \$9.5 million for an 8-point plan to assist state and territory governments in their efforts to reduce petrol sniffing in Indigenous communities. The plan is aimed at breaking the petrol-sniffing cycle and building healthy, functional communities through:

- consistent legislation;
- appropriate levels of policing;
- further roll-out of non-sniffable petrol;
- alternative activities for young people;
- treatment and respite facilities;
- communication and education strategies;
- strengthening and supporting communities; and

- evaluation.

117. The Strategy provides a regional approach based on what works and will be tailored to individual communities in the region.

118. It is being implemented across Australian Government portfolios in cooperation with the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia. FaCSIA has carriage of five of the eight key elements, with the Department of Health and Ageing having carriage of treatment and rehabilitation, communication, and the roll-out of non-sniffable fuel.

119. This plan has since been expanded by a 2006–07 Budget measure totalling \$55.2 million. The funds will:

- increase the availability of non-sniffable fuel (Opal);
- provide family services and community development support;
- support community patrols and youth diversion activities; and
- provide drug education and alternative education options for disconnected youth.

120. The *Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk (SAID)* was established in early 2006 and enables collation of intelligence and coordination of policing activities in the cross-border regions of the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia, specifically targeting petrol trafficking, illicit drugs and/or alcohol.

Statistics for the first 12 months of operation of the Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk (SAID)

- 197 persons were arrested, 501 charges preferred and 86 summonses issued;
- 17 drug infringement notices were issued, 8 premises were declared drug houses and 32 search warrants were executed; and
- 6.423 kilograms of cannabis, 56 grams of amphetamines, 38 grams of LSD, 6.5 grams of ecstasy, 211.2 litres of alcohol, 7.9 litres of petrol, \$38,635 in cash and 3 motor vehicles were seized.

121. The Regional Partnership Agreement in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) lands is currently being developed and will establish a framework for Government and Anangu communities to work together to

combat petrol sniffing and substance misuse through the development and implementation of alternative activities for the community including:

- regular multi-sports activities for young people throughout the year;
- structured inter-community sports competitions across APY communities; and
- youth recreation activities.

122. In the 2007–08 Budget, \$14.6 million over four years was announced to fund the *National Illicit Drug Strategy – Indigenous Community Initiative* which assists Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to develop local solutions to substance abuse issues, such as drug and alcohol abuse, that often contribute to violence.
123. This initiative, being delivered by the Health and Ageing portfolio, will fund a variety of projects to provide evidence-based Indigenous-specific treatment guidelines, together with alcohol awareness products and other resources to better enable Indigenous communities to tackle the misuse of alcohol and other drugs.
124. The 2007–08 Budget also provided the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations \$50.7 million over four years to fund additional places in the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) programme for activities to prevent and address family violence and substance misuse problems in Indigenous communities.

Indigenous Financial Management

125. Family Income Management and MoneyBusiness help Indigenous people in some remote communities to manage their money more effectively so they can cover essential living costs, manage debt and save. These programs are having an impact on reducing family stress and conflict and improving family relationships. Some of the people benefiting from these programs may be affected by the impacts of illicit drug use.