

At the time of going to press with this issue of *Family Matters*, changes were announced by the Prime Minister concerning the composition of the Cabinet and the Ministry.

The Honourable Warwick Smith, previously Commonwealth Minister for Sport, Territories and Local Government, was announced as the new Minister for Family Services. The Institute congratulates the Minister on his appointment; we look forward to working with him in his new portfolio.

The previous Minister for Family Services, the Honourable Mrs Judi Moylan, has been appointed as Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women. I would like to thank Mrs Moylan, in her former role, for her support of the Institute; we look forward to working with her in her new portfolio also.

The process of analysing data collected from a range of studies from the Institute's current research program continues. The next few months promises to be a time when a considerable amount of new information about families flowing from the program will become publicly available.

As well as yielding contemporary information about changing family formation patterns, the Institute's *Australian Families Across the Life Course Study* will provide information about relationships across the life course, how parents are managing their responsibilities for their children, how families with special needs children are coping, as well as about the principal pressures that parents in today's families are facing.

Institute work on families in later life, on retirement and on patterns of family



DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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support across the generations, is yielding results that attest to the importance of families for the wellbeing of individuals throughout the lifespan, and to the essential strength of families.

Our research on families who have experienced divorce is providing new information about parenting after divorce. In addition, it will provide valuable data to help assess some of the impact of the Child Support Scheme as well as being informative about the likely effects of the recently proposed changes to the Scheme on resident parents and their dependent children. New work on older people and divorce, on the views of children in divorcing families and on the role and management of violence in divorcing families promises to add to our knowledge of ways in which families experiencing divorce can be more effectively supported.

Recently we released a *Family Briefing Paper*, reprinted in this issue of *Family Matters*, drawing on initial results from studies of the work preferences of Australian women. The major findings from

these studies will be incorporated into a book on families and employment family across the life course to be published by the Institute next year.

With most projects in the Institute's current research program due to be completed by the middle of 1998 we are in the process of identifying core issues for future policy-related family research. In a new and changing environment the Institute is keen to look ahead to identify those issues which will be important for the formulation of family policy in the twenty-first century and to which research can make a significant contribution. To this end we will shortly be embarking on a series of consultations with a range of stakeholders to help us formulate short-term and medium-term research priorities.

Enhancing Early Literacy

Readers of *Family Matters* will have been aware of the controversy which surfaced in the media during September 1997 concerning standards of literacy among Australian Grade 3 and Grade 5 school children. The controversy followed the release by the then Commonwealth Minister for Schools, Dr David Kemp, of the results of a national survey of the reading and writing in Australian schools. Results from the survey were interpreted as suggesting that about a third of Grade 3 and Grade 5 children cannot read or write to an adequate standard.

The national literacy survey results released by the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs were strongly disputed by



**The 6th Australian Family Research Conference,
hosted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies,
will be held in Melbourne from 25–27 November 1998.**

As in past years, the 1998 Australian Family Research Conference will provide a valuable forum for those interested or involved in family research and policy to learn of recent research and developments in family studies.

The conference will be of direct relevance to those from a wide range of disciplines including

sociology, psychology, family law, public policy, social work, economics, child care, the health professions, service providers, and all levels of government.

The conference will consist of research papers, symposia, keynote addresses, posters, workshops and panel discussions.

Papers on any aspect of family research – including family trends, family life and relationships, children and parenting, family policies, living standards, support programs and family law – will be considered for inclusion in the conference program.

If you would like to be a presenter at the conference, please forward

a 250-word abstract of your paper, along with professional details, to the Research Manager of the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Full details of the conference and an official Call for Papers will be published in the next (Autumn 1998) edition of *Family Matters*.