

# Strengthening and supporting Australian families



## *The Government's direction for a new National Families Strategy*

**T**he Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Jocelyn Newman, announced in the 1999-2000 Budget that the Commonwealth would work with the States and Territories, community organisations and business, to develop a national framework to strengthen and support families.

The strategy will emphasise prevention and early intervention and will be based on the best available evidence concerning factors that strengthen family capabilities and relationships. It will also emphasise the provision of information and support for families when it is most needed, particularly at points of transition and continuing stress. The strategy will seek to coordinate efforts across government and to build on existing services in partnership with all sectors of the Australian community.

The strategy will focus on three major areas over coming months:

- the needs of children in early childhood;
- positive pathways for youth; and
- marriage and relationships.

It will also pay special attention to workplace and families, and the important role of childcare, particularly for the under fives, in meeting the developmental needs of children.

On 23 June 1999, the Prime Minister launched the Government's response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs' report *To Have and To Hold: Strategies to Strengthen Marriage and Relationships* (June 1998). The report highlighted the importance of pre-marriage education in developing relationship skills and strengthening families. ➤

## ***New National Families Strategy***

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In response, the Prime Minister announced, as a first step in the development of the National Families Strategy, the establishment of a new Marriage and Family Council. The Council will provide advice to government on improving the effectiveness of relationship education.

The Prime Minister also announced a pilot program offering vouchers for marriage education and information kits to people preparing to get married. Currently, only one in five couples take advantage of pre-marriage education services. The new initiative will allow couples intending a life together to have access to the important information and skills available through pre-marriage education.

Over the next few months, the Minister for Family and Community Services will be consulting with the community sector, business and all levels of government on the key focus areas of the strategy.

***In June 1998 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs' report 'To Have and To Hold' was tabled after a two year inquiry into government-funded family relationship services.***

***The report clearly shows the high price of marriage and relationship breakdown in Australia on many levels but particularly the emotional and financial. The costs are borne by children, adults, families, communities and businesses over a long period.***

***Recognising the increasing stresses on families and the changing social trends in relation to marriage, separation and divorce, the report suggests that it is timely to renew the focus on preventive action to promote strong and healthy marital relationships. This will have long-term benefits for children and young people as they mature.***



The Prime Minister has asked the Family and Community Services Minister, Jocelyn Newman, to lead the development of the National Families Strategy.