



NATIONAL FAMILIES STRATEGY: UPDATE

In the last issue of Family Matters we published an article by the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Jocelyn Newman, outlining the government's new National Families Strategy, and we promised to keep readers up to date with developments.

The major initiative to be taken under the National Families Strategy since our last issue has probably been the launch of two pilot marriage education voucher schemes – one in Perth, the other in Launceston. Each pilot will run for 12 months or until all vouchers have been redeemed. All couples getting married during the period of these trials will be given a voucher worth up to \$200 which they can spend on pre-marriage education.

All marriage celebrants in the two trial areas have been invited to participate in the new scheme, and couples can redeem their voucher at an accredited Family Relationships Service Provider organisation of their choice (either religious or secular).

The Department of Family and Community Services has published a fact sheet to coincide with the launch of the pilot voucher schemes. This explains that pre-marriage education is designed to help couples develop strategies and techniques to support and enhance their lives together, and that courses generally cover areas such as communication, conflict management, finance, child rearing

and the expectations that newly-marrying couples may have about their relationship.

For further information about the voucher scheme, or copies of the Department's fact sheet, telephone the voucher hotline on 1800 456 555.

Pre-marriage education

Coinciding with the launch of this initiative, the Australian Institute of Family Studies in September this year hosted a one-day round table in conjunction with the Australian Catholic University to which marriage educators and researchers were invited. The day focused on the aims behind pre-marriage education, the current state of research in this area, and the developments which new research should take in the future.

A summary report has just been published as an Institute Briefing Paper by Robyn Parker, *A framework for future research in pre-marriage education*, Australian Family Briefing, no. 8, November 1999, and copies of this are available on request.

**– Peter Saunders
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