

Recent government family initiatives

Launch of new strategy

The Prime Minister launched the *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy* on 16 April 2000. The Strategy brings together work commissioned by the Prime Minister in June 1999 on the development of the *National Families Strategy*, with the *Stronger Communities Strategy* announced at the Regional Australia Summit in October 1999 by the Honourable Jocelyn Newman, Minister for Family and Community Services. The Strategy pursues the dual objectives of strengthening families and the communities in which they live.

The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy highlights the priorities of:

- early childhood;
- strengthening marriage and family relationships;
- balancing work and family; and
- building community capacity.

Helping young people in positive ways is also a priority, and the Prime Minister's *Youth Pathways Taskforce* will be reporting on this in June 2000.

The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy recognises that strong communities depend on strong leadership and that they need skills and knowledge. Strong communities also depend on expanding partnerships between public and private sectors and a core of committed volunteers.

These priorities are being addressed through nine new initiatives which are based on a solid understanding of the importance of developing local solutions to local problems and the importance of working in partnership with the social coalition.

Information on the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy can be found on the Department of Family and Community Services Web site at www.facs.gov.au/

Pre-marriage education pilot update

The last issue of *Family Matters* outlined the pre-marriage education pilot announced by the Prime Minister in June last year. The voucher trial is now up and running in Perth and Launceston, and the distance education kit will be available later in 2000.

A comprehensive evaluation is being conducted concurrently with the pilot. The evaluation will assess whether either or both forms of assistance increase the numbers of marrying couples undertaking pre marriage education, and whether the particular services provided improve the skills and understanding of couples receiving them.



Marriage and Family Council

The Prime Minister also announced the establishment of the Marriage and Family Council in June last year. The members were appointed in December 1999 and the Council met for the first time in February 2000.

The Council will provide expert advice on marriage and relationship education, work and family, and other areas of family policy closely associated with the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. The Council is chaired by Ms Pauline Frick, Executive Director of Centacare, Whyalla.

Research papers

The Department of Family and Community Services has commissioned background papers on three of the priority areas of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy.

A Review of the Early Childhood Literature, by The Centre for Community Child Health (Professor Frank Oberklaid et al.).

This paper reviews the major risk and protective factors that may influence children's developmental outcomes in the preschool years. These factors are associated with a range of poor outcomes in later childhood and even into adulthood. The paper also discusses the preventive and early interventions that may impact on these outcomes.

Australian Couples in Millennium Three: A Research and Development Agenda for Marriage and Relationship Education, by Professor W. Kim Halford.

Professor Halford's report discusses the major determinants of strong couple relationships, the current state of knowledge about relationship education, the limitations of current approaches to relationship education, and proposals to make it more effective.

Work and Family: Current Thinking, Research and Practice, by Dr Graeme Russell and Lyndy Boxman.

This paper identifies the characteristics of the workplace and society that impact on the strength and wellbeing of workers' families, trends in the provision of family-friendly policies, innovative policies and practices, and what social arrangements can facilitate workers' ability to meet family needs.

If you would like to receive a copy of the papers contact Kate Doyle, at the Department of Family and Community Services. Phone (02) 6212 9204. Email kathryn.doyle@facs.gov.au. The papers will be released shortly.