

Hon Michelle Lensink MLC

Minister for Human Services

Hon Rachel Sanderson MP

Minister for Child Protection

Friday 15 March 2019

Services to be consolidated into new intensive support system for at risk children and families

The State Government will consolidate services and staff from several departments to establish a new system of intensive support services, designed to disrupt patterns of child abuse and neglect.

The new Intensive Support Unit will be set up within the Department of Human Services to deliver and commission intensive family services that intervene early, reducing the need for children to enter out-of-home care.

Minister for Human Services Michelle Lensink said the reform was about using evidence to ensure South Australia has a service system that delivers the best possible outcomes for children and families.

“We know from research that some children are born into families with very high levels of multiple and complex needs, such as domestic and family violence, mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness and criminal activity,” said Minister Lensink.

“We need services that are evidence-based and designed to deal with these complex needs through appropriate therapeutic support, which includes intensive face-to-face work with highly skilled staff, such as social workers and allied health professionals - in people’s homes, schools, hospitals, health services and community settings.

“Services need to be part of a connected system that ensures people are getting the right type and intensity of supports, at the earliest possible time, in the places where they live.

“The Liberal Government is designing and trialling some new services – such as the \$2.8 million intensive family support pilot currently being developed for the northern suburbs – but we are also refining our government commissioning and intensive service delivery models so that we are sure we’re investing efficiently and effectively.”

Under the new plan, some services currently being delivered by the Department for Education – such as Child and Family Referral Networks and Child Wellbeing Practitioners – will move into the new unit, along with commissioning of various non-government intensive family support programs currently managed by Education, Child Protection and Human Services.

The new unit, which will be established by July this year, will employ more than 200 people, with a service delivery value of approximately \$37 million (including \$15 million in non-government contracts).

“We know we must get better at information sharing, data and system mapping and ensuring referral pathways lead to appropriate service interventions,” said Minister Lensink.

“We are also paying particular attention to the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the system, and have set specific goals in terms of developing Aboriginal cultural governance, community co-design and improving the workforce’s cultural knowledge.

“We know that some of our workforce is currently working with levels of family complexity that are beyond what they are necessarily prepared for, so we will be focusing on increasing skills in trauma-informed practice and looking at how else we can support the people who do this challenging work, day in day out.”

Minister for Child Protection Rachel Sanderson supported the announcement.

“The 2016 Nyland Royal Commission found that one in four South Australian children are reported to Child Protection by age 10, which is a devastating figure,” said Minister Sanderson.

“This problem is not unique to South Australia – it is very similar in other states and countries – but we have an obligation to respond in a way that disrupts the intergenerational transmission of trauma and mistreatment.

“With these changes we will – over time – see a reduction in cases of child abuse and neglect, less need for out-of-home-care, and healthier family environments where children can thrive.”

Relationships Australia SA Chief Executive Officer Claire Ralfs also backed the plan.

“These sector wide service improvements will increase the safety and wellbeing of South Australian families and children.” said Ms Ralfs.

“We see first-hand the increasingly complex needs of families and we appreciate that improvements and efficiencies in the system are required so, it makes sense to bring commissioning of the various intensive family services together in the one department.

“The consolidation of contracting will support government and non-government agencies to share information, use common screening and risk assessment processes and generally collaborate more effectively.”

University of Adelaide Director of BetterStart Child Health and Development Research Group John Lynch said no child protection system in Australia had been able to cope with the number of children entering the system.

“Prevention is the only sustainable solution because treating the problem through out of home care cannot stem the flow of very young children entering the system,” said Prof Lynch.

“South Australia now has better insights into the issues facing child protection than any other Australian jurisdiction.”

Detail of the new strategy, and the research that supports it, can be found on the EIRD website at www.dhs.sa.gov.au/eird.