



15 October 2015

Family and Community Services  
TEIReform@facs.nsw.gov.au

## Targeted Earlier Intervention Programs – Sector Consultation Paper Response

### About the Illawarra Forum

The Illawarra Forum, established in 1990, is the peak body working for community services and organisations in the Illawarra and the Shoalhaven. It supports community organisations, promotes expertise and innovation in community development, fosters industry development and provides advocacy for social justice. The Illawarra Forum is an independent organisation governed by a committee of management elected annually by the membership.

The Illawarra Forum represents the non-government community services industry in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven, which consists of approximately 300 organisations which provide support to vulnerable people across the region including:

- Community development and community capacity building programs.
- Individuals and families with multiple layers of social and financial disadvantage
- Services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault
- Community health services, including mental health and drug/alcohol services
- Social housing providers
- Homelessness services
- Home and community care services
- People with disability
- Youth work programs
- Community legal centre services

The Illawarra Forum represents a range of services as a generalist peak body for community services in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven, therefore this submission contains comments on the general factors that affect all services.

The submission has been prepared following consultations with Illawarra Forum members.

### General

Illawarra Forum members appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the Reform of TEIP services at this early stage.

The problematic reform of Specialist Homelessness Services is still very much in the front of mind for many providers, and members were anxious that this reform may be similar, and that the outcome might be similarly disastrous for many organisations.

During our consultations, members expressed concerns at the process of the reform, particularly in regards to the grouping together of nine programs with different funding streams, target groups and objectives. Members queried the criteria used to select programs considering their vast difference, and suggested that these differences may make concurrent reform of all programs difficult.

Members also suggested that it is difficult to fully reform the TEIP program without the inclusion of the Brighter Futures and Intense Family Preservation programs, as the effective provision of these programs impacts heavily on TEIP services.

Members expressed concern that there appears to be a disconnect between the Department's view of TEIP programs and service delivery on the ground, a fact which was highlighted in the Reform Aims listed on page 18. Members believe that they are already successfully delivering services that met the Reform Aims, and that sometimes they are working in a parallel existence to NSW Family and Community Services (FACS) and are achieving these aims despite the aforementioned disconnect.

The Illawarra Forum, and cannot stress highly enough the value of a community development response to building stronger, more resilient families and communities. To ensure healthy and vibrant communities, it is crucial that community consultation and planning is resourced effectively. There needs to be an acknowledgement of the time and resources required to conduct needs analyses and design & deliver effective, community led programs. This process needs to be valued and adequately resourced.

Resourcing of all TEIP programs should also be considered in the reform process. The discussion papers notes that 'the challenge for Targeted Earlier Intervention Reform is to design a contemporary, client focused service system **within existing resources** that delivers maximum impact to achieve demonstrable outcomes'. A more realistic approach to the reform would be to identify the services required, and then resource then effectively. Outcomes for children, families, and communities will only be achieved by devoting adequate resources to service delivery.

### **What are the Barriers?**

Members agreed that there was scope within the current TEIP system, particularly around service system design and FACS program guidelines, to make positive changes that would improve client outcomes.

The following barriers were identified as being counterproductive to improved client outcomes:

- **Competitive tendering**

Competitive tendering places organisations and individuals in situations where they may become cautious about sharing information or resources in case it affects them negatively in future rounds. It is counterproductive to collaboration and integrated service delivery. Short funding cycles may also impel services to come up with short term solutions and small wins, which may in fact hinder the long term planning that is needed to create and sustain healthy and vibrant communities.

**Recommendation:**

- **Promote an environment of partnership and collaboration by removing competitive tendering**

- **Regular changes to program models, reporting and funding.**

Many services have multiple funding sources that require different reporting models. In addition to this, many programs are undergoing reform, often in silos, with government departments appearing to be unaware of changes occurring in other departments. This means that time is been taken away from service delivery to fulfil reporting obligations.

This lack of coordination between Local, State and Federal government funding is a real barrier to improved client outcomes. The apparent lack of communication and coordination at government level makes it difficult for service providers to meet community needs as their funding outcomes are often tied to the priorities of different government departments.

**Recommendation:**

- **Government departments take a more holistic, integrated approach to programs and funding**
- **Streamline reporting so that data collected can be written once and used often**
- **Extend funding cycles to at least five years. TEIP services could then better design, implement and evaluate effective programs for their community.**

- **New 'innovative' pilot projects**

The Illawarra Forum notes that there is a trend for funding rounds to target 'innovative pilot projects'. Pilot projects often prove effective at addressing an issue, but they are by definition short-term, one-off projects. Once a pilot has been completed, even if evaluation proves its effectiveness, it is difficult to get long term funding as most departments will not fund a project which has been run before.

This appears short-sighted and not the best use of resources. This can damage the service provider's relationship with the community, as expectations have been which cannot be met, possibly creating future trust issues.

**Recommendation:**

**Recognise that innovation often exists within previously funded programs. Capitalise on pilots which have proven success and focus on what works rather than compel constant change and innovation. The value-add from this approach is that organisations will build trust and will invest time and resources, not just in the project but also in the community.**

- **Data Collection and Analysis**

Generally, services evaluate their programs and make changes where needed, and members noted the excessive data recording currently required by FACS does not assist this evaluation process. Members suggested the data currently collected by FACS doesn't appear relevant or to demonstrate a service's successful delivery of a program. Services often 'double up' on their evaluation efforts in order to a) meet FACS funding requirements and b) obtain meaningful data to evaluate their services.

Members were disappointed there is no meaningful feedback from FACS in relation to data submitted, and FACS analysis and narrative on the data is not evident. Members were interested to learn how FACS was analysing and using their data for planning, review and reform.

**Recommendations:**

- *Work with services to ensure that data collection is relevant, easy to analyse and enables more effective evaluation*
- *Give feedback to services regarding the data and its analysis*

- **Staff Changes**

Members commented that due to many internal changes, their FACS project officer (CPO) changed regularly and some CPOs did not appear to have reasonable knowledge or experience of service delivery at 'the coal face'. Some FACS staff lacked awareness of communities and services in the area, or of current FACS reforms and policy changes.

**Recommendations:**

- *Ensure that new staff members are kept up to date with any policy changes or reforms that affect the community services industry*
- *Encourage new staff members to 'pound the pavement' in their initial weeks to meet with services in their area, get to know the communities in which they deliver programs, and gain an understanding of the challenges service providers face on a day to day basis*

### **How can FACS programs be improved to respond better to issues in our region/district?**

Our consultation revealed a strong feeling among participants that communities' power to identify needs has been somewhat taken away by current governments priorities. Participants felt that our funding bodies are working on the 'supply and demand' model of identifying needs rather than acknowledging that each community has differing needs and therefore require different services.

#### **Assessment of Community Needs**

The recent Federal Department of Social Services Grants round has highlighted issues which can occur when community needs are assessed remotely on the basis of data analysis. While we acknowledge that is a useful tool in determining community needs, we believe that data such as census or SEIFA statistics should not be used in isolation.

**Recommendations:**

- *Use data analysis in conjunction with in-depth community consultation in order to implement a person-centred, community based solution approach.*

#### **FACS guidelines**

Members identified that some FACS guidelines are restricting their ability to respond to families in their community. Service providers stated that often they had to work around FaCS' guidelines to provide what families needed, rather than the guidelines supporting their practice.

Funding guidelines can be out of date or the programs not relevant to the families in the area. The Illawarra Forum is concerned about the focus on outputs rather than outcomes that is often required in FACs reporting because it means that FACs are sometimes missing out on the real story of programs' effectiveness; and the reporting can be quite restrictive for services.

**Recommendations:**

***Discard the detailed funding guidelines and replace them with high level objectives. This gives services on the ground the flexibility to design and tailor programs that best suit their communities in addressing the objectives. This would save on administration costs for services and FACS ,and result in services achieving increased client outcomes.***

**Where are the Gaps?**

Members commented that there is a significant gap in crisis services for families. Children and young people in age ranges which fall outside of the Brighter Futures program may not come to the attention of services and may miss out on support due to the strong focus on Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) reporting.

The recent change in assessment criteria for the Brighter Futures program from families at risk to families who meet ROSH criteria has left a significant gap in the TEIP service system.

Some service providers who are funded for prevention programs find that they are working with families who are on the edge of ROSH as there are no services in the area to refer these families to. This gap is acknowledged on page 14 of the Sector Consultation Paper.

Members identified a large gap in essential services for families including affordable housing, transport, supported accommodation, and mental health services. These important systemic issues must be addressed so that TEIP services can address long-term issues for families.

**What can be done to support local collaboration, decision-making and learning?**

It is important to have a district and regional overview when it comes to planning and service coordination, but any such overview must reflect the varying needs of individual communities within that region.

The Illawarra Forum challenges the notion that local collaboration, decision-making and learning isn't already happening at an area level. Members who participated in the consultations agreed that collaborations were important for client outcomes and many already exist in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven. As one member stated "I can't do everything for my clients alone, I need the help of others."

**Recommendations:**

- ***Develop a service coordination model in consultation with communities to ensure a blanket approach is not taken - what works in one community may not in another.***

Throughout our consultation, one theme which consistently arose was that collaborations and partnerships work best when there is a dedicated organisation, person or hub to take responsibility for the convening and ongoing implementation of service coordination.

**Recommendations:**

- *Adequately resource an organisation or individual to facilitate service coordination*
- *Acknowledge the time needed to get collaborative projects off the ground. Ensure they are given the time to build the right foundation of relationships, trust and common goals and ensure they are resourced adequately both humanly and financially*

The Illawarra Forum recently worked with service providers across the Illawarra and Shoalhaven to develop the “Roadmap for the Future of Community Services”, an initiative which was supported by the then Minister for the Illawarra, Hon John Ajaka MLC.

During the development of the Roadmap, we identified 52 partnerships operating across the Illawarra and Shoalhaven. While some of these partnerships are not focussed TEIP services directly, it is evidence that services understand the importance of working together. Indeed, the development of the Roadmap itself is an example of an initiative which demonstrated coordination and an ongoing commitment to working together to improve outcomes for community services organisations, and the communities they serve. A copy of the Roadmap and report are attached.

Some best practice collaboration models in the Illawarra which were noted by our members during our consultations included:

- **Families NSW – Child and Family Network** – The NSW Governments strategy to enhance the health and well-being of children up to 8 years of age. Families NSW is the joint responsibility of the Department of Health, Department of Education and Communities and the Department of Family and Community Services. The local Families NSW Network is well attended by services, however the attendance of FACS staff has reduced over time.
- **Partners in Recovery (PIR)** – PIR workers are embedded in other services, enabling them to be at the forefront of service coordination and to add value to the host organisation by influencing an inclusive ethos.
- **NSW Family and Community Services (FACS) One Place Service Centre** – The three FACS service streams - Housing Services, Community Services and Ageing, Disability & Home Care- are working out of the same premises at Coniston, offering a ‘one stop shop’ option for clients. In addition, the Centre offers space for non-government organisations work out of the same office, thereby increasing opportunities for communication and service coordination between government and non-government organisations. Clients benefit because they may come into the centre for one service and then be introduced to services they may not know about.
- **The Illawarra Regional Development Consortia, Inc. (IRDCI)** - Comprised of 17 Neighbourhood Centres from Helensburgh to Ulladulla plus not for profit organisations which operate on a community development approach including Coomaditchi Aboriginal Artist Co-op and the Wollongong Women’s Centre. The IRDCI aims to strengthen Community and Neighbourhood Centres’ functions in the Illawarra region, to ensure that community development is valued and kept on the agenda and to provide a collective framework for funding. It was cited as a good vehicle by which to drive better service coordination in our communities. Many Neighbourhood Centres

have operated in communities for a long time and have built social capital in terms of trust, relationships, inter-agency collaboration etc.

- **The Southern Suburbs Integrated Case Management (SS ICM) Project** - Excellent example of the value of providing integrated case management across NSW, Local Government and Australian Government departments, and non-government human service agencies. The project used an integrated case management approach, facilitated by a Coordinator, to improve the well-being of families with multiple and/or complex needs who have exhausted other avenues of support. The project focussed on postcodes which exhibit significant concentrations of households with complex issues. The selection criteria focussed the project's efforts on families with significant and recurring issues of domestic violence, children at risk, housing insecurity and criminal justice issues.

### **Funding the continuum of TEIP services**

*"FACS view is that it is essential that the continuum of services – from community development to prevention early intervention and intensive services – is maintained and that services are matched to client need." P14*

The Illawarra Forum welcomes this commitment to providing the full spectrum of TEIP services. It is essential to appreciate the value of a community development response to building families and communities as a whole, ensuring healthy and vibrant communities. However, the paper also states that this must be done within existing resources:

*"The challenge for TEIP reform is to design a contemporary, client focused service system within the existing resources.....".* A more realistic approach to the reform would be to identify the services required, and then resource then effectively. **Outcomes for children, families, and communities will only be achieved by devoting adequate resources to service delivery.**

There seems to be a discrepancy in the Sector Consultation Paper as to where to target current funding along the continuum of TEIP. For example, the paper suggested numerous times targeting early intervention projects as this is where significant saving/investments can be made (p.7 and p.12); while elsewhere in the paper,( p.18) there is a recommendation to *"target to areas of greatest need, whether that is locational or population group based."*

It is clear that there needs to be additional funding committed to TEIP programs as there are significant gaps in the system and funding has been removed from the system with the changes to 'Brighter Futures' assessment criteria.

The Illawarra Forum strongly advocates that transferring resources around the program will not work, neither by geographical need (taking funding from one suburb based on ABS data and designating it to another suburb) or moving it from Primary/Universal based programs to tertiary programs.

As one member said *"It can't be a case of moving around the deck chairs on the titanic."*

#### **Recommendations:**

- ***Devote funding for TEIP services on the basis of need. Additional investment in TEIP services is a saving for the taxpayer in the future; as the paper highlights,***

***'There is strong and compelling evidence that early intervention services are both more effective and less costly than late intervention and crisis responses'' p7***

- ***Investigate other forms of funding such as Social Benefits Bonds. Trials are currently underway in NSW of Social Benefits Bonds with family support programs run by the Benevolent Society and Uniting Care Burnside.***

***'A Social Benefit Bond (also known as a social impact bond) is a financial instrument that pays a return based on the achievement of agreed social outcomes. Private investors provide capital to a service provider to achieve improved social outcomes. If these outcomes are achieved, there are cost savings to Government that can be used to repay that upfront investment plus a financial return' (DPC, Social Investment Knowledge Hub).***

TEIP seems like an ideal programme in which to use innovative social return on investment funding models.

### **Reform**

Members appreciate the opportunity to participate in the reform process so early on in the Reform. Some members felt concerned, however, because the key points in the TEIP reform are very similar to the Specialist Homeless Services Review and there is anxiety that there may be similar outcomes.

#### **Recommendations:**

- ***Consider the following points in the reform process to ensure that TEIP services can continue to provide high quality support to families throughout the process;***
  - ***Provide clear timelines well in advance***
  - ***Conduct real consultation***
  - ***Roll over funding well in advance to ensure that quality staff can be retained throughout the review process***
  - ***Make only necessary changes that have an evidence base***
  - ***Ensure that reform changes are planned and resources adequately to have minimum disruption to families using TEIP services***

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Targeted Earlier Intervention Programs Sector Consultation Paper. Please contact me for further information or clarification.

Yours faithfully,



Nicky Sloan

CEO

Illawarra Forum Inc

Tel 02 4256 4333

Mob 0407 933 279

Email [nicky@illawarraforum.org.au](mailto:nicky@illawarraforum.org.au)

This submission is also endorsed and supported by:

Careways Community Inc

Warilla Neighbourhood Centre

Nowra Family Support Service Inc