



FINANCIAL COUNSELLORS' ASSOCIATION
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

FCAWA SUBMISSION

*A New Approach to Programs for
Families and Children
December 2025*

About FCAWA & Financial Counselling

FCAWA

The Financial Counsellors' Association of Western Australia (FCAWA) is the peak body and voice of financial counselling in WA. We advocate for financial wellbeing and promote excellence in the sector to achieve our goals of financially resilient communities and reduced hardship for all.

We provide Financial Counsellors with training, resources, events and professional support so they can deliver free, independent and confidential help to people facing financial hardship. We also advocate for systemic change, working with government, regulators, and agencies to make financial systems fairer and more compassionate.

As a not-for-profit organisation, FCAWA:

- Provides continuous professional development, resources, and support for Financial Counsellors.
- Advocates for a fair and equitable marketplace.
- Works to raise the profile of Financial Counsellors.
- Advocates to increase access to financial counselling.
- Works to improve hardship processes for people in financial difficulty.

Financial Counselling

Financial counselling is a free, independent and confidential service provided by qualified professionals to people experiencing financial hardship. Financial Counsellors support individuals, families and small businesses to stabilise their financial situation through budgeting and money planning, understanding rights and negotiating with creditors, exploring options such as bankruptcy, accessing grants or concessions, and connecting with other support services including mental health, AOD, legal and family violence supports.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which FCAWA's Head Office is located, the Whadjuk people of Noongar Boodjar.

We recognise their continued connection to the land and waters of this beautiful place, and acknowledge that they never ceded sovereignty. We respect all Whadjuk Elders and their Ancestors, and all First Nations peoples.

Executive Summary

The Financial Counsellors' Association of Western Australia (FCAWA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposed reform of child and family programs.

FCAWA strongly supports the Government's intent to simplify funding arrangements, strengthen early intervention, and improve collaboration across services. We encourage the Department to recognise that financial wellbeing is central to family wellbeing. Economic insecurity and financial stress are key drivers of relationship breakdown, family violence, and child protection involvement.

Recent national data underscores the scale of these pressures. The *Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (BCEC) and Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) Child Poverty in Australia Report 2025* found that more than one in six Australian children live in households below the poverty line, with financial stress disproportionately affecting single-parent families and those reliant on income support. These findings reinforce the need for early, integrated financial wellbeing supports as part of family-strengthening initiatives¹.

Evidence from the *Healthier Wealthier Families (HWF)* pilot, led by the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH), demonstrates that embedding financial counsellors within early years and health services measurably improves family and child outcomes². Families accessing the program reported improved financial knowledge, reduced stress, and an average increase of A\$6,504 in household income, alongside improvements in caregiver mental wellbeing and service engagement³.

FCAWA recommends that this model be scaled nationally under the new Prevention and Early Intervention stream.

Response to Consultation Questions

Vision and Outcomes

FCAWA supports the vision that all children and young people are supported by strong families who have the skills and confidence to nurture them. However, the framework should explicitly include economic wellbeing as a determinant of resilience.

Recommendation

1. Expand the vision to include *social and economic wellbeing* and recognise financial capability and freedom from economic abuse as protective factors contributing to children's resilience.

¹ Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre & Victorian Council of Social Service. *Child Poverty in Australia: Towards a Fairer Future*. BCEC Research Report No. 23/2025, Curtin University, Perth, 2025.

² Centre for Community Child Health. *Healthier Wealthier Families Pilot 2023 – evaluation of integrated financial counselling through maternal and child health services*. Murdoch Children's Research Institute, 2023. Available at: <https://www.ccch.org.au/our-work/project/healthier-wealthier-families/>

³ Gilders C, Goldfeld S, et al. *Feasibility and acceptability of integrating financial counselling into maternal and child health services: the Healthier Wealthier Families pilot study*. *Australian Journal of Primary Health*, 2023. PubMed ID: 37993153.

Program Structure

FCAWA supports a single national program that reduces duplication and supports cross-sector collaboration. The Prevention and Early Intervention stream (Stream 2) directly aligns with financial counselling and capability work, which provides early support before crises escalate.

While FCAWA welcomes the inclusion of financial wellbeing as a priority area, the current *Financial Wellbeing and Capability* funding stream within DSS is insufficient to meet community demand. Increased investment is required to build capacity and ensure families can access timely, skilled financial counselling when and where they need it. Financial counselling must be recognised as an essential, cross-stream service rather than contained within a single siloed funding program.

Recommendations

1. Recognise financial counselling and financial capability programs as core early-intervention activities within Stream 2.
2. Enable partnerships between financial counsellors, early-childhood, health and family-support services, consistent with the *Healthier Wealthier Families* pilot².

Prioritising Investment

FCAWA supports the four priorities outlined on page 4 of the Discussion Paper, especially early investment and connected services. We recommend adding economic security as a cross-cutting priority.

National evidence from BCEC and VCOSS highlights that child poverty and financial hardship are persistent structural barriers to family wellbeing, particularly for single-parent households¹. Addressing these through integrated financial counselling models would advance all four DSS investment priorities.

Recommendation

1. Embed *economic wellbeing* within all four investment priorities and co-invest across portfolios (DSS, Health, Treasury) to scale proven integrated models such as HWF.

Improving Family Wellbeing

As the BCEC–VCOSS report demonstrates, families under chronic financial strain face significantly higher risks of housing instability, intergenerational poverty, and child protection contact.¹ This reinforces the need to embed financial wellbeing as a core element of family support.

FCAWA's members routinely work with young parents and families experiencing financial stress, groups identified as at risk of child-protection involvement.

Recommendations

1. Include families experiencing financial hardship or economic abuse as an explicit priority group.
2. Fund pilot programs embedding financial counsellors in early-childhood, health or family-support settings, following the *Healthier Wealthier Families* model that shows improved child health, parental confidence and financial stability³.



Connected and Integrated Services

Beyond co-location, integration is best achieved through embedded referral pathways, warm referrals, shared-care protocols, and information-sharing agreements. The *Healthier Wealthier Families (HWF)* pilot demonstrates the success of trusted intermediaries (e.g. maternal-child-health nurses) referring directly to on-site financial counsellors².

Recommendations

1. Incentivise partnership models where financial counsellors are embedded or seconded into multi-disciplinary teams.
2. Assessment criteria should prioritise genuine community partnerships and governance models informed by lived experience.

Measuring Outcomes

FCAWA supports outcomes reporting that meaningfully captures family wellbeing but notes that not all financial counselling agencies report through the Commonwealth's Data Exchange (DEX) system. Many services are funded through state, local or philanthropic sources and use different reporting tools.

FCAWA recommends that any future reporting framework include indicators of financial wellbeing and economic safety, given their proven links to family resilience and child outcomes. The focus should remain on outcomes, not reporting software.

Suggested Indicators

- Reduction in household financial stress and arrears.
- Prevention of eviction, utility disconnection or food insecurity.
- Improved access to income entitlements.
- Increased parental confidence and mental wellbeing (as measured in the Healthier Wealthier Families pilot²).

Recommendation

1. Develop a flexible outcomes framework that enables services addressing financial stress to demonstrate impact, regardless of the reporting platform used.

Working Together | Relational Contracting

FCAWA supports relational contracting focused on shared outcomes, trust, and stability. This approach would foster long-term partnerships and reduce administrative burden.

Recommendation

1. Include peak bodies such as FCAWA in co-design and evaluation of relational-contracting frameworks to ensure workforce quality and sustainability.



Conclusion

FCAWA commends the Department for recognising that stronger, simpler, and more connected service systems are essential for children's wellbeing.

The BCEC–VCOSS *Child Poverty in Australia report*¹ underscores that persistent financial stress is both a cause and consequence of child disadvantage. Embedding financial counselling within early-years systems offers a proven pathway to reducing these risks

By embedding financial counselling within early years and family-support ecosystems, as demonstrated through the *Healthier Wealthier Families* pilot², the new national program can deliver measurable, sustainable improvements in outcomes for both parents and their children.

FCAWA would welcome the opportunity to collaborate further with DSS on refining outcome measures, pilot design, and relational-contracting frameworks to ensure that economic and financial wellbeing is fully integrated into Australia's child and family service system.



Further Information

Our Vision

Financially resilient Western Australians with reduced financial hardship.

Our Purpose

- Advocating for financial wellbeing.
- Promoting excellence and compliance in the financial counselling sector.
- Providing the voice of financial counselling in Western Australia.

Our Values

Integrity | Leadership | Support | Innovation

