

Re. Submission - **A new approach to programs for families and children**

To whom it may concern,

I'm writing in support of the proposed new national program streamlining approaches to family support, and assisting organisations to secure ongoing funding, making it easier for them to focus on the services they provide and meet desired and meaningful outcomes.

I write in support of this proposed change in approach to family and childhood services from a personal perspective.

Earlier this year, our young person experienced a frightening and acute mental health crisis as a result of school bullying. He was unable to attend school, experienced severe depression, social anxiety and suicide ideation.

Though our journey has been extremely difficult, we had access to services that have meant that early intervention was possible. This was due in part to the help offered by our GP, the school wellbeing team, and a private psychologist, who we were lucky to be able to afford.

In addition to the above supports, we were referred by the school to Berry Street, and their Family Matters program. A service provided for no charge; Berry Street offered us the opportunity to work together as a family to improve our relationships at this very difficult time. While other supports focussed solely (and necessarily) on our young person's wellbeing, Berry Street assisted us greatly as parents to better understand and respond to the situations we were facing. Our sessions with a Berry Street therapist in parent sessions as well as a family sessions has given us the support we needed (and continue to access) to support our young person, learn parenting skills and develop the confidence to handle moments of crisis.

Our engagement with Berry Street has been incredibly beneficial, life-changing and fundamentally invaluable to us as a family.

Support for families and parents when young people are in crisis, a holistic approach to family care and access to services providing early intervention support at low-cost or no cost are key to the proposed structures and outcomes outlined in the discussion paper.

I would also advocate for extended mental health care plan sessions with psychologists for children and young people in need, due to the pressure this puts on families financially.

I applaud organisations like Berry Street who provide such vital supports to our families and communities. To see these organisations better supported through longer-term funding arrangements and ability to deliver connected and integrated services will help families like ours to grow and thrive.

Regards,

