

Are you an individual or making a submission on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation

Organisation name

Penrith City Council

Position

[REDACTED]

Is your organisation....?

- A provider currently funded under one or more of the 5 programs in scope for this consultation

What type of service or support do you mostly provide?

- Prevention or early intervention services

What state or territory does your organisation deliver services and supports in?

- New South Wales

Where does your organisation deliver most of their services and supports?

Major city

1. Does the new vision reflect what we all want for children and families?

Yes, the new vision succinctly outlines the desire for both improved outcomes for children and increased capacity and confidence in families.

2. Are the two main outcomes what we should be working towards for children and families? Why/Why not? - Outcome 1: Parents and caregivers are empowered to raise healthy, resilient children - Outcome 2: Children are supported to grow into healthy, resilient adults.

Both outcomes are good targets as they prioritise early intervention and growing parent's capacity and children's growth, reducing the likelihood/severity of difficulties arising, rather than focusing on providing support once a crisis has

already occurred.

The current wording of 'healthy, resilient children' could perhaps be improved by the inclusion of specific reference to children's emotional development.

3. Will a single national program provide more flexibility for your organisation?

Currently our organisation only receives funding through the CaPS program and as such we do not experience the level of administrative burden that organisations funded under multiple programs encounter. A move to a single national program may therefore make minimal difference from an administrative perspective, assuming reporting obligations are broadly similar in scope.

The proposed longer term funding agreements would however provide greater organisational flexibility, allowing us to commit to longer term projects and providing greater certainty around employment stability for staff.

4. Does the service or activity you deliver fit within one of the three funding streams? Do these streams reflect what children and families in your community need now – and what they might need in the future?

Our service fits within stream 2, the overview of which provides scope for all the services we currently provide or are hoping to provide to families.

5. Are there other changes we could make to the program to help your organisation or community overcome current challenges?

Flexibility to deliver programs based on changing community need, with less focus on providing specific pre-determined programs each reporting period.

6. Do you agree that the four priorities listed on Page 4 are right areas for investment to improve outcomes for children and families?

Yes:

1. Investing early in family wellbeing through activities like playgroups, middle years programs (6-12 years), and parenting programs can not only reduce disadvantage and the risk of harm, but are also more cost effective than later, more intensive interventions.

2. A focus on connected, integrated services working together would be beneficial to families. Many families report significant stress attempting to access support services or have limited knowledge of what supports are available. Strong connections between co-located services allows families to be more efficiently connected to supports best suited to them.

From an organisational perspective, stronger integration can improve collaboration between service providers, increasing the quality of supports and programs offered to families.

3. An understanding of and responsiveness to community needs is a prerequisite to providing relevant and effective support services to families.

4. First Nations children and families continue to experience poorer outcomes than the broader population, while often having lesser access to support services, especially in regional or remote areas. ACCOs are best placed to understand the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

7. Are there any other priorities or issues you think the department should be focusing on?

Support for CALD families and their children born in Australia (who are not considered to be CALD under the current definition) to access co-located support services, especially for families without a strong grasp of English.

8. Do the proposed focus areas – like supporting families at risk of child protection involvement and young parents match the needs or priorities of your service?

The proposed focus areas are generally a good match for the needs and priorities of our service; however, they could be improved by the inclusion of a stronger recognition of the importance of supports for children aged 6-12, and the frequent under-resourcing of this age group.

9. Are there other groups in your community, or different approaches, that you think the department should consider to better support family wellbeing?

Our service frequently partners with and mentor childcare educators to increase their capacity to support children's emotional development and wellbeing. Many children spend a significant amount of their time in the care of childcare educators, and equipping these educators with similar knowledge and skills to that offered to parents can provide consistency across environments for children.

10. What are other effective ways, beyond co-location, that you've seen work well to connect and coordinate services for families?

We provide some of our parenting groups in an online format, after usual business hours. This has made our programs more accessible to families for whom travelling, arranging childcare, or work commitments may make in-person

sessions impractical.

Our program sits within a local government childcare service, with over 50 locations across the LGA. Passing on information about our programs to the directors at these services has allowed us considerably greater reach than online advertising alone. Directors and other childcare staff act as a trusted point of contact to families, while also possessing insight into families that may be struggling or could benefit from additional support. A substantial number of clients have reported engaging in parenting programs and other supports after being recommended to do so by the director at their child's service.

11. What would you highlight in a grant application to demonstrate a service is connected to the community it serves? What should applicants be assessed on?

An organisation's ability to foster and maintain trusting relationships with the communities they operate in. Organisations should demonstrate their willingness and capacity to adapt their focus/approach to meet changing community needs. For existing organisations, providing feedback from service recipients that the program(s) being provided are responsive to their needs.

12. Beyond locational disadvantage, what other factors should the department consider to make sure funding reflects the needs of communities?

The department should also consider demographic factors including areas with a high CALD population, particularly recently arrived migrants. Many migrant families are economically stable, but face disadvantage through language barriers, feelings of disconnection and isolation from their cultural heritage, and lack of awareness of or trust in support services.

13. What's the best way for organisations to show in grant applications, that their service is genuinely meeting the needs of the community?

Organisations can demonstrate they are genuinely meeting community needs through providing quantitative data like satisfaction scores and circumstance scores that demonstrate program participants have experienced positive change. This should be paired with qualitative data, such as case studies or testimonials from participants.

Providing evidence of community involvement in the development and evaluation of services, such as surveys or feedback sessions, would also be beneficial for this purpose.

14. How could the grant process be designed to support and increase the number of ACCOs delivering services to children and families?

The grant process could be designed with a focus on providing scope for ACCO's to tailor their services to respond to shifting community needs, with less of a focus on predetermined deliverables.

The availability of assistance during the development of grant applications could be beneficial in making the process less onerous, especially for smaller ACCOs.

15. What else should be built into the program design to help improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families?

The program design should include a strong focus on community consultation to ensure that the services being offered are culturally safe and meeting community needs.

16. What types of data would help your organisation better understand its impact and continuously improve its services?

The ability to break demographic data down by individual cases in DEX, rather than all clients in all cases in a reporting period being shown together. This would simplify the process of determining how effectively particular activities/programs has been at engaging specified groups, e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

17. What kinds of data or information would be most valuable for you to share, to show how your service is positively impacting children and families?

Being able to provide a mix of quantitative and qualitative data would be beneficial. The current data collection system through DEX is useful for demonstrating client numbers and demographics, however score domains can sometimes be limited in their ability to convey the impact of a program on children and families. The inclusion of qualitative feedback such as testimonials from clients or case studies, could be beneficial for sharing these stories, while giving participants a greater feeling of having a voice in how programs are evaluated.

18. If your organisation currently reports in the Data Exchange (DEX), what SCORE Circumstances domain is most relevant to the service you deliver?

The most relevant Circumstances domain varies depending on whether children, parents or childcare educators are the recipient of a particular service. Child focused programs are usually scored on Mental health, wellbeing, and self-care,

while parent and educator programs are usually scored on Education and Skills Training.

19. What kinds of templates or guidance would help you prepare strong case studies that show the impact of your service?

A template which includes prompts or guidance on what kind of information the department is interested in seeing, and how much depth is expected. Our organisation supports parents, children 0-12 years, and childcare educators, each with different types of support and expected outcomes. As such, it would be beneficial to have access to several variants of a template, or the ability to adjust the template, to most effectively demonstrate the impact of services provided.

20. What does a relational contracting approach mean to you in practice? What criteria would you like to see included in a relational contract?

A relational contracting approach would provide the flexibility to adapt services to best meet changing needs in the community.

21. What's the best way for the department to decide which organisations should be offered a relational contract?

A demonstrated capacity to provide positive outcomes for families and a history of strong community connection.

22. Is your organisation interested in a relational contracting approach? Why/why not?

We would require further information about what a relational contracting approach would look like in practice and how it would differ from other agreements, however the capacity for greater flexibility and responsiveness to community needs offered by relational contracting would be very beneficial.