

Re: Independent review of early intervention policies and practices in response to the Auditor-General's report, Early Intervention Services for Vulnerable Children.

Background: On 6 August 2015, Jenny Mikakos, Minister for Families and Children announced that Deloitte will independently review early intervention policies and practices in response to the Auditor-General's report, "Early Intervention Services for Vulnerable Children", as part of a "Roadmap for Reform".

Key points:

- A focus on early intervention is critical because, as the Auditor General found, major deficiencies in both the "quality" and "quantity" of service delivery in ChildFIRST and Family Services (secondary services) will increase future demand for Child Protection.

For Integrated Family Services providers, such as Caroline Chisholm Society, the challenge is balancing the demand for high volume early intervention services (such as parenting groups) with increasing demand for more complex support (such as home-visiting casework).

We have always and must continue to do both, but the balance of clients is shifting in the direction of addressing demand rather than managing it. That is expensive for everyone, but especially for children of mothers in need of support without fear of judgement or removal.

- The Auditor General also found 1) inadequate and reactive planning, 2) inadequate partnerships and governance, and 3) inadequate performance and outcomes monitoring.

Caroline Chisholm Society agrees with this view. We acknowledge that hours are a measure of contact between support services and families (and thus are a quasi measure of risk reduction), but we measure our case management with an outcomes star. We want to measure outcomes of short term and group work interventions with wellbeing scales but have not yet been able to do so in part due to the ineffectiveness of the IRIS data system. In that context we seek a quick resolution to the performance and planning issues.

- An Expert Advisory Group was also announced for a "Roadmap for Reform: Stronger Families, Safe Children" with press coverage focused on children in care and getting them into home-based care. However, the released information suggests the process will also look at the experience of families with universal systems and secondary services.

To ensure advice on universal and secondary sectors are not lost to the complexity of out of home care, Caroline Chisholm Society welcomes the advisory group appointments and seeks that it and the Department use existing systems (such as peak bodies and their forums) for consultation to receive sectoral advice. If the advisory group is focussed on out of home care and does not hear from clients and workers in universal and secondary services, it will fail to support early intervention resulting in a crisis orientation.

Position:

- Any new funding should be focussed on, 1) early intervention (e.g. groups co-delivered with universal services), 2) greater casework capacity (e.g. Early Intervention and keeping families together) and 3) planning and information systems (e.g. IRIS). We also acknowledge the need to support children entering and leaving care (including the potential for significant reform) and the need for community capacity building which is adjunct to early intervention but critical to effective operation of this service sector.

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