We are pleased to initiate this consultation on the development of the Government’s Strategic Framework and State Plan for secondary services, inclusive of family support services. Secondary services represent a critical investment in families and individuals, designed to protect and build resilience to prevent the worsening of their circumstances. It is a complex area involving many diverse services, staff and clients which obliges our concerted efforts to consult broadly.

The Department is working with the Community Sector Child Protection Advisory Group (CSCPAG) to steer the consultation towards the development of the Strategic Framework and State Plan. The membership of the CSCPAG is as follows:

- Mr Tony Pietropiccolo, Centrecare (Chair)
- Ms Sue Ash, Western Australian Council of Social Service Inc.
- Major Grady Bailey, Salvation Army
- Mr Ian Carter, Anglicare WA Inc.
- Mr Chris Hall, UnitingCare West
- Mr Basil Hanna, Parkerville Children and Youth Care Inc.
- Ms Tricia Lee, Wanslea Family Services Inc.
- Ms Erica McKinnon, The Family Inclusion Network
- Ms Anne Moore, Women’s Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services
- Mr Ashley Reid, MercyCare
- Ms Dawn Wallam, Yorganop Aboriginal Child Care Corporation
- Ms Rae Walter, Ngala
- Dr Lucy Davies, Department for Child Protection
- Mr Steve Glew, Department for Child Protection
- Ms Deborah Gould, Department for Child Protection
- Ms Fiona Lander, Department for Child Protection

You may wish to contact members of a CSCPAG to discuss issues relating to the provision of secondary services, however, we are seeking your response to the consultation paper which can be submitted to:

Email: david.cain@dcp.wa.gov.au
Post: Policy and Learning
       Department for Child Protection
       PO Box 6334
       East Perth WA 6892
       Fax: (08) 9222 2990

The final date for receipt of responses is Friday 17 April 2009.

Terry Murphy            Tony Pietropiccolo
Director General        Chair
Department for Child Protection Community Sector Child Protection Advisory Group

February 2009
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1. Introduction

The Strategic Framework and State Plan will bring together the significant array of secondary services that the Department for Child Protection and other government agencies directly provide or fund through the community services sector. A framework that spans current and future directions should improve the planning and provision of services, and remain responsive to the community’s needs.

There are various challenges that individuals and families experience throughout their lives. Some of these challenges stem from a specific circumstance or event, while others are more enduring and are influenced by broader social issues like poverty or substance abuse. Many individuals and families address these challenges through their existing skills, resources and social networks. Others struggle, under the weight of many problems. An increase in the number and complexity of their problems can raise people’s vulnerability or risk to other more long-term consequences. These may include mental health issues, substance abuse, violence or other harmful behaviours passed on across generations.

The Department for Child Protection and the community services sector have a significant role to play in supporting individuals and families at risk or in crisis. However, the complexity and range of issues means that the Department cannot address them alone. A long-term strategy is needed, built on partnerships with other government agencies and the community services sector, to assist in achieving fundamental stability in families and the best possible outcomes for children.

Consultation

The purpose of this consultation paper is to seek the views, knowledge and experiences of stakeholders. In developing the framework and plan, it is important that stakeholders provide comment on what they believe to be the priorities and future directions of secondary services. This will ensure the development of a relevant framework, in which stakeholders feel they have an investment.

The Government’s Strategic Framework and State Plan will be identified through:
1. input and advice from the Community Sector Child Protection Advisory Group (the steering group),
2. responses to the consultation paper,
3. targeted consultations and workshops with key stakeholders, and
4. input of government agencies through the Child Safety Directors’ Group.

We invite stakeholders to provide a written response to this consultation paper by Friday 17 April 2009. Responses can be submitted by:

- Email: david.cain@dcp.wa.gov.au
- Post: Policy and Learning
  Department for Child Protection
  PO Box 6334
  East Perth WA 6892
- Fax: (08) 9222 2990
A range of workshops will also be held in consultation with the WA Council of Social Service Inc. To register your interest in participating in a workshop, please email david.cain@dcp.wa.gov.au before Friday March 6 and you will be provided with the dates and venues once the details have been finalised.

The paper highlights themes and issues that are central to the formation of the Strategic Framework and State Plan. Please consider the questions below and use them as prompts throughout the paper to frame your response.

1. What should be the vision and outcomes for the Strategic Framework and State Plan?

2. What principles should underpin the Strategic Framework?

3. What tangible priorities and developments are required over the next four years in order to successfully deliver secondary services?

4. What should be the future directions for secondary services?

5. Other comments?

2. The current environment

The Department for Child Protection

The Department for Child Protection’s mission is: “to provide for the protection of and care for children and young people, and to support at-risk individuals and families in resolving crises”. The Department has the central role in providing for the protection and care of children and young people throughout Western Australia, however, this is ultimately best achieved in partnership with other Government agencies and the community services sector.

Section 21(1)a of the Children and Community Services Act 2004 describes the functions of the Chief Executive Officer of the Department for Child Protection as including “to consider and initiate, or assist in, the provision of social services to children, other individuals, families and communities”. Directing and encouraging children and families to engage in social services to best address their problems is one of the primary objects of the legislation.

As part of, and in addition to, its statutory functions, the Department for Child Protection provides core service funding to the community services sector to respond to the issues and challenges faced by vulnerable children, families and individuals. This partnership enables a wide array of services and programs to be delivered throughout the State.

A social service as defined by the Act refers to a range of different services, for example preventative, protective, counselling, therapeutic, crisis services etc.
The 2006 Ford Review examined the key functions and systems of the former Department for Community Development, resulting in a significant focus on child protection reform in Western Australia. The Ford Review made 79 recommendations to address deficits in the child protection system, and each has been addressed through a comprehensive reform program.

Recommendation 34 of the Ford Review requires the Department for Child Protection to coordinate the development of a Strategic Framework and State Plan for family support services for vulnerable and at risk children and young people, their families and communities. It should be noted that the Department has broadened recommendation 34 to include a framework and plan for all secondary services, inclusive of family support services. Additionally, recommendation 37 states that, in developing the Strategic Framework and State Plan for family support, consideration be given to expanding the role of the non-government sector. Special attention should be paid to ensuring that services provided to Aboriginal families and communities are culturally appropriate.

Following the Ford Review, the following three service areas were defined by the Department for Child Protection:

1. Supporting children and young people in the CEO’s care.
2. Protecting children and young people from abuse.
3. Supporting individuals and families at risk or in crisis.

These areas reflect the elevated priority that the Department has placed on its protection and care responsibilities. While the Department’s role in the first two areas is clear, it is important to recognise that it also has a key responsibility in supporting individuals and families at risk or in crisis; the delivery of secondary services. Secondary services are aimed at individuals and families who are at risk, in crisis or vulnerable. These services assist at risk families and individuals to resolve crisis and promote their own safety and wellbeing, and that of their family members. While the Department’s name makes its child protection role clear, it is important to acknowledge that it views child protection in a wide context, including family support. It also retains responsibility to provide services such as financial counselling and supported accommodation to individual adults external to any family role.

Whole-of-government

A whole-of-government approach to secondary services requires a commitment by all stakeholders to link current and future policies and service planning to the vision and priorities outlined in the Strategic Framework. This approach requires clarity about the role of each agency, a willingness to contribute to the development of the framework and plan, and awareness as to how their future contributions will connect favourably with the proposed service strategies of other agencies.

Responding effectively to issues requires a shared responsibility between government agencies. The Department views its role as either collaborating in, or leading, a broader multi-agency response. Examples of these issues are described over the page.

The Strategic Framework will relate to all relevant government agencies, with the Department for Child Protection taking the lead role.

---

### Key Issues

- Homelessness
- Welfare needs of juvenile justice clients
- Financial support
- Unruly neighbours
- Young people with borderline disability
- Truancy
- Anti social behaviour by children and teens
- Family and domestic violence
- Substance abuse
- Mental health
- Indigenous community issues

### Other key (and lead) Agencies

- Department of Housing and Works
- **Department of Corrective Services**
- Community services sector
- **Western Australia Police**
- Disability Services Commission
- **Department of Education and Training**
- Non-Government Schools
- **Western Australia Police**
- Department of Corrective Services
- Non-Government Organisations
- Local Government Authorities
- Western Australian Police
- Department for Communities
- Department of the Attorney General
- **Drug and Alcohol Office**
- **Department of Health, Mental Health Division**
- **Department of Indigenous Affairs**
- Department of Health, Office of Aboriginal Health
- Department of Housing and Works
- Department of Education and Training
- Non-Government Schools
- Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Federal Government)

## Community services sector

The community services sector responds to communities throughout Western Australia. These agencies have an intrinsic knowledge of, and connection with, individuals, families and communities, demonstrated through the number and variety of voluntary activities and professional services they provide. The funding received by these agencies is often from multiple levels of Government, corporate sponsors, public and private donations. Their resources are buoyed by the enormous contribution of their volunteers.

A key feature of the community services sector is its capacity to work creatively and flexibly to develop relationships of trust with client groups. This non-statutory profile often makes it the first point of contact for people experiencing risk or crisis who might otherwise hesitate to seek help.

The Western Australian Council of Social Service Inc. (WACOSS) has a vital leadership role, representing the voice of the community services sector in Western Australia. The WACOSS Strategic Directions for July 2008–June 2011 include:

1. developing policy that promotes the wellbeing of all Western Australians.
2. strengthening the capacity of the sector.
3. influencing government, business and community to achieve progressive social change.
4. WACOSS being self determining and viable.
Integrated approach

Integration is seen as an important feature in the way that services are provided. An integrated service approach generally:

• improves the experience of those people seeking assistance.
• allows for a personalised and comprehensive approach to addressing complex and inter-related challenges.
• unifies service approaches towards shared outcomes.
• strengthens the links between services.
• streamlines service delivery.

A common vision and overarching principles guiding the provision of secondary services should help to achieve greater integration.

The framework and plan will articulate an integrated range of secondary services available in the community, and the ways in which individuals and families can access these in a seamless way regardless of their first point of contact.

3. Strategic Framework and State Plan

A strategic framework is an agreed structure and associated systems to organise service activity and improve outcomes for clients. A strategic framework must take into account the need for integrated service delivery tailored to clients’ circumstances. It will identify priorities, principles and aims. The development of a Strategic Framework and State Plan should seek to address the following, among other, issues:

1. As the Department’s reform agenda continues, particularly the way in which it enacts and delivers its statutory responsibilities, greater focus is needed to determine the strategic priorities for secondary services. Within this, the Department views its priorities as Responsible Parenting Services, partnerships with the community services sector and whole-of-government partnerships.
2. Clients and services will benefit from drawing the ‘threads’ of secondary services together into an integrated framework.
3. Contemporary national and international approaches show commitment to the value of coordinating policies on secondary service delivery.
4. An early intervention focus will direct services to respond to the needs of children early in their lives, early in the formation of families and early in the development of problems.
5. The Department will clarify its role and determine when it has a lead role or when a shared responsibility model is appropriate.
6. Highlighting the importance of secondary services in a Strategic Framework and a State Plan will better define the roles and responsibilities for government departments and the community services sector strengthening relationships and improving outcomes for clients.

Strategic Framework

The Strategic Framework will relate specifically to the Department for Child Protection’s direct service delivery and to the services it funds through the community services sector. It is expected that other government agencies will be guided by the framework and commit to its intent through participation in the State Plan. The aims of the strategic framework are to:

• outline a shared vision and principles between the Department and the community services sector in supporting individuals and families at risk or in crisis.
• set priorities for action according to children’s needs and vulnerability throughout the state.
• set out the roles and responsibilities of the Department, whole-of-government and community services sector in addressing risk and crisis.
• outline key strategic directions for the service system in terms of practice standards.
• identify the enabling structures and forums for communication between agencies.

State Plan
The State Plan will comprise the agreed objectives and priorities for secondary services delivery to be undertaken by government and community service sector agencies. It will be more detailed than the Strategic Framework, and will outline the successive actions stemming from the Strategic Framework. The State Plan will aim to:
• articulate a whole-of-government approach to supporting individuals and families at risk or in crisis.
• set out agreed directions for the development of the Department and the community services sector.
• outline the planning process and priorities for the future provision of services purchased by the Department and other government agencies.

4. Supporting individuals and families at risk or in crisis – secondary services

The public health model
In discussing the role of secondary services it is useful to consider the public health model, where services for children and families are typically grouped into three tiers of service delivery - Primary, Secondary and Tertiary.

Primary services are those universally available to all families and children. There is no requirement for people using these services to have a specific issue or problem, and participation is by choice.

Secondary services are aimed at individuals and families who are at risk, in crisis or vulnerable in one or more ways. They have more complex needs than those provided for through primary services. These services are targeted and aim to prevent the likelihood of specific issues worsening, or provide supports for recovery from a crisis.

One of the key ways of determining whether interventions have been effective is to incorporate ‘follow ups’ with families that enter the secondary system. Contacting families between three and six months after an intervention has been completed provides opportunities to understand if changes are maintained, built upon or have deteriorated.

Secondary services working with families often work from a strengths-based, solution-focused model. The Strategic Framework and State Plan will relate to these services.

Tertiary programs and interventions are made up of both statutory protection and care services. They are targeted at families where abuse or neglect has already occurred or is at imminent risk of occurring. Tertiary services seek to address the consequences of abuse and neglect, and develop strategies or take action to prevent further abuse and neglect from occurring.

3 The Department recognises that there are a number of views on primary services being used interchangeably with universal services, or being seen as different from universal services. For this paper, primary is seen also as being universal.
Features of the service tiers

There are several important aspects of a primary, secondary and tertiary service model. These are that:

- there are numerous stakeholders within both government and the community services sector providing a range of services.
- services can sit within more than one tier.
- the boundaries between each tier can be difficult to determine.
- children and families enter and exit at any tier.
- children and families can be engaged in different parts of the continuum at the same time, and can also move in and out of different tiers.
- As the Ford Review noted, secondary services often have to compete for funding with services within the urgent or emergency tertiary child protection tier which can hinder opportunities for collaboration between the areas.
Supporting individuals and families at risk or in crisis

Secondary services are aimed at individuals and families who are at risk, in crisis or vulnerable in one or more ways. These services are targeted and aim to prevent the likelihood of specific issues worsening, or provide supports to ameliorate a crisis. These services may provide brief episodic support for those children, families or individuals experiencing an issue, or ongoing support or intervention for those children considered to be at risk.

Youth and Family Support Workers, Best Beginnings, ParentSupport, Counselling Services, Homelessness Accommodation & Support Services, Family and Domestic Violence Support Services, Intensive In Home Support, Financial Counselling Services, Domestic Violence Helplines...

Supporting children and you people in the CEO’s care, a protecting children and you people from abuse

These programs and interventions are made up of both statutory protection and care services. They are targeted at families where abuse or neglect has already occurred or is at imminent risk of occurring. Tertiary services seek to address the consequences of abuse and neglect, and develop strategies or take action to prevent further abuse and neglect from occurring.

Child Protection Investigation, Reunification Services, Placement Services, Child Sexual Abuse Treatment Services, Accommodation Services, Psychology Services, legal intervention...

Primary services are available to the general community and utilise broad, population-based strategies. People using these services do not need to have a specific issue or problem, and participation is by choice. They are aimed at continuing the positive functioning and wellbeing of families, specifically to care for their children.

Low risk/need
Voluntary

Children, families and individuals enter at any point and may be involved in different tiers simultaneously

High risk/need
Statutory response
5. Secondary services target groups

Early intervention - risk and the early years
The research into the importance of the early years of a child’s life on their development and future experiences is clear. Certain adverse conditions pose significant risk to the developing brain, and the healthy neurological development of the brain is dependent on positive early childhood experiences.

The plasticity of the developing brain can be greatly affected by issues like stress, trauma and neglect. Children living in high-stress environments with few protective factors are at risk of developing a range of future behavioural, emotional or psychological issues. Early intervention services are important in identifying vulnerability in children, and ensuring that strategies and interventions are provided to improve developmental and life outcomes.

Building resilience
It is true that not all children and individuals will go on to be significantly affected by the risk factors that they have experienced. Some individuals maintain healthy functioning in spite of levels of disadvantage commonly associated with poor outcomes. This resilience is found within individuals as well as in external protective factors that shield children from the risk factors in their lives.

Raising the number of protective factors around a child leads to reduced risks for child abuse and neglect. These protective factors include those inherent in the child, their family and environment:
- parental resilience
- sound nurturing and attachment
- parental knowledge of child development
- positive social and family networks
- effective problem solving
- communication skills.

Many services and programs provided to children and families focus on improving protective factors in children and parents to raise confidence and safety. Aspects of a strengths-based perspective include:
- a focus on the skills and resources an individual or family has, rather than their deficits
- maximising the individual’s/family’s input into planning and goals
- efforts to reduce the power imbalance between agencies and clients
- the belief that individuals and families are the experts in their own lives.

Risk, crisis and vulnerability
The changing circumstances and composition of families amidst ongoing social change can create multiple risk factors around children, young people, individuals and families.

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4 Sykora (2005)
5 Ghate and Hazel (2002)
Contemporary research finds the following risk factors increase vulnerability of children:

- parental substance abuse
- family and domestic violence
- isolation and social exclusion
- divorce/separation
- overcrowded housing
- mental health issues
- chronic illness/conditions
- low educational attainment
- homelessness
- frequent/close proximity births
- young parenthood
- unemployment
- poverty
- parental involvement in the criminal justice system
- disabilities
- inadequate/inappropriate parenting.

Families and children that experience these issues increase the likelihood of not just immediate negative effects, but also more adverse longer term effects. Sudden life events or situations that can also lead into crisis include:

- loss of employment
- death of a family member
- eviction from housing
- onset of a major health issue
- serious accident
- family conflict
- mental health episode
- being a victim of a crime
- relationship breakdown.

Experiencing a crisis does not in itself make an individual or family at risk. In fact, for many people, experiencing a crisis generates the motivation to make necessary changes in their lives to overcome the crisis and make positive changes. Some of these events will affect most people at some point in their lives. However, over time and with support, the crisis subsides and their lives return to normal. For these people support may not be required outside of their family or usual social networks.

Others who experience these events struggle to work through them or to deal with the crisis. For some, their efforts to solve problems only make things worse. Chaotic childhoods may impact on an individual’s capacity to cope under stress, significantly reducing their ability to seek help or to problem solve in effective, non-harmful ways, leading on to negative consequences in their adult lives.

Working with “hard to reach” families
The term ‘hard to reach’ does not refer to a specific cohort, rather it is a general reference to people who most need certain services, but are least likely to access them.
The term ‘hard to reach’ is used in the United States of America, particularly in the study of early years, where it is loosely used to describe parents who are less likely to access universal children’s services, such as vaccination programs and infant health clinics. The University of Florida defined the ‘hard to reach’ as having the characteristics of:

- teenage and/or unwed motherhood
- not completing secondary school
- being unemployed
- being poor single parents
- facing language barriers.

They also describe a subcategory of ‘hard to reach’ as ‘the reluctant to engage’, and defined their characteristics as being ‘worried about judgements by outsiders’.

Many agencies throughout Western Australia have developed substantial knowledge and experience in working with vulnerable families that are hard to reach and are:

- marginalised, economically disadvantaged or socially excluded, or
- ‘slipping through the net’, the overlooked, ‘invisible’, or those unable to articulate their needs, or
- service resistant, unwilling to engage with service providers, the suspicious, over-targeted, or those disengaged from social, economic or educational opportunity.

Supporting individuals and families at risk or in crisis and the child protection system

Child protection systems in most jurisdictions throughout Australia have experienced significant increases in the number of children coming into care and to the notice of the statutory system. These trends are placing significant pressure on the systems and resources of agencies responsible for child protection. Consequently, there has been renewed focus on the importance of primary and secondary services as being integral to the prevention of child abuse and neglect, and impacting on family preservation and reunification potential.

Services that support individuals and families at risk or in crisis assist the child protection system by:

- operating from child-focused and child-centred models
- addressing those concerns that have brought children to the attention of the Department
- diverting some children and families away from the tertiary system preserving families by intervening earlier when risks are first identified
- integrating with tertiary responses to allow families and children to reunify and gradually move out of the statutory process.

Preventative work done with families is important as a significant proportion of families reported to child protection systems are likely to be re-referred with worsening circumstances if no preventative action is taken.

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6 In Australia, the number of child protection notifications increased by around 42,800 in the last year, rising from 266,745 in 2005–06 to 309,517 in 2006–07 (AIHW ‘Child Protection Australia 2006–07’)
7 Australia’s children: safe and well, A national framework for protecting Australia’s children – discussion paper (FaHCSIA 2008)
8 This allows for the child protection system to focus its resources on those children at highest risk of abuse and neglect.
Complexities and co-occurrence

Multiple challenges compound risk and disadvantage, placing significant stress on individuals and families. For example, the need to access affordable housing can require families to remain mobile and limit their opportunities to develop social networks and supports. This is further complicated when a parent or child has an issue requiring continuous care and management.

The co-occurrence of various issues has a significant impact on children, families and services. For example, community services often have to provide supports to address the effects of family and domestic violence on adult and child victims, while also providing a response to the resulting homelessness or mental health issues. The need to address a number of issues concurrently obliges a collaborative response from agencies. Many individuals and families accessing secondary services experience multiple contacts with a range of services. At worst, this can lead to duplication and contradiction. At best, the good work that one agency does with a family can enhance positive results for work undertaken by another agency. For example, the resolution of where a family will live is a major stabilising factor that facilitates other work, to the benefit and satisfaction of clients.

We need clarity in relationships and ways of working to facilitate integrated responses to families with complex problems. Clients who are in need of assistance want to feel confident that their request for help is legitimate and respected. To this end, services need to be working both with each other and with clients to ensure their views are heard, and that plans for action are recorded and carried out in an agreed way.

6. What secondary services does the Department for Child Protection provide?

While the name of the Department for Child Protection makes the child protection and children in care focus clear, the Department is also the government agency with responsibility for supporting individuals and families at risk or in crisis. The Department meets these responsibilities in a range of ways.

District response

The services and supports offered to individuals and families at risk or in crisis within each district office will depend on a number of issues. The level and type of response will depend on:
• the immediacy of the response required – the degree of crisis
• the nature of the presenting issue
• the need to prevent more serious risk to children
• the availability of other resources that can assist individuals and families.

The response provided to individuals and families at a district level may include:
• assessment for a child’s safety or wellbeing as required by legislation
• referral to internal services like ParentSupport
• referral to/information about other government agencies
• referral to/information about the community services sector
• short term services such as the provision of advice and information
• ongoing support.

At a district level, the response when individuals and families present is largely decided within the duty process.

### 7. What secondary services does the community services sector provide?

“A New Framework - a framework to redefine the relationship between the Department for Child Protection and the Not for Profit, Non-Government, Community Services Sector” was developed in 2007. The framework outlined the basis for the future working relationship between the Department and the community services sector, while acknowledging that it is multi-faceted and interdependent. That document also acknowledged the resources, expertise and perspectives of both areas and placed client needs at the forefront, while recognising that no single provider can offer the essential supports necessary in isolation. In partnership with the community services sector, the Department provides funding for a range of secondary services. These services fall under the broad categories of:

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<tr>
<td>Families and Individuals at Risk</td>
<td>Financial counselling, No Interest Loans Scheme, Practical In Home Support, youth counselling, counselling services, services for young people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 8. Challenges and opportunities

Agencies demonstrate significant clarity and innovation in their approach to secondary services, yet there are a number of challenges experienced by government agencies, the community services sector and service users in relation to secondary service delivery in Western Australia. The following challenges and opportunities are presented to prompt comment.

**Increase in demand for services**

It is clear that many agencies have experienced increased demand for their services, including the Department’s own child protection services.

Many services report waiting lists or significant numbers of people they cannot assist. In the case of at-risk families and children, this limits the potential to intervene early in the life of a problem, possibly resulting in it worsening.

**Cultural and linguistic diversity**

Increasingly, culturally diverse client groups from new and emerging immigrant and refugee populations require greater access to secondary services. This necessitates continuous improvement in response to the engagement of culturally and linguistically diverse individuals and families at risk.

**Early engagement of vulnerable or at risk Aboriginal individuals and families**

Addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the tertiary protection system is a continuing quest for government. Of the children in the care of the Chief Executive Officer, 41% are Aboriginal. The purposeful development of policies and services to engage with Aboriginal
families and communities in culturally appropriate ways is imperative. It is essential to engage Aboriginal families in primary and secondary services before issues escalate to crisis point.

The engagement and involvement of community leaders and elders in the planning and development of such services is the most assured way to achieve provision of appropriate support services to Aboriginal families. The need to attract and retain Aboriginal staff requires similar expertise to develop the specific processes to improve access to employment, increase interest in seeking employment in secondary services and inclusion in the workforce.

Regional and remote areas
Regional and remote areas face a particular set of challenges, and are a priority for government. Many remote areas lack the services available in bigger centres, requiring considerable travel to see clients. Difficulties recruiting and retaining staff bring this into even sharper focus for regional and remote areas where program gaps may result in existing staff trying meet demands that are outside of their roles or training. Service planning in rural and remote areas needs to take into account the expectations and needs of the community in which the service will be based. Agencies need to engage with local communities when deciding what services are required and how they will be delivered.

Mandatory reporting
The impact of the introduction of mandatory reporting, in particular, the planned expansion of mandatory reporting to include all forms of abuse and neglect, will need to be considered in the development process. Mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse commenced on 1 January 2009, and the future expansion will need to look at a strong secondary support system to help manage those referrals and notifications that could, in the best interests of the child, be responded to through a secondary intervention. It is anticipated that most increases in reports will be in relation to allegations of neglect and emotional abuse, which may best be responded to through a family support service. This raises the need and presents an opportunity to build the expansion of secondary services, with a more collaborative and integrated approach to service access and delivery.

Child-centred and centred on the child
Many services incorporate a child-centred model in the way they work. This is always clear when the child is the direct recipient of a service. However, secondary services to families at risk or in crisis often focus on children through the provision of programs that support parents, and the goals that are worked towards are those stated by the parents. This can mean that supports become adult-centred and individualised. The needs of children are often, but not always, those of their parents and while addressing the parents' presenting issues is important, a clear awareness of the impact of those issues on the child’s wellbeing is fundamental.

Services to parents should always focus on the needs and developmental requirements of the child. An example of this is the way that many family and domestic violence interventions place increasing focus on the effects of violence on children. Men in violent behaviour change groups are often required to examine the ways their behaviours have affected their child and the child’s view of the world with the intention of creating a greater connection to the needs and vulnerabilities of children.

12 This must also include recognition of the diversity that exists within Aboriginality and the continuing intergenerational impact of previous policies.
13 Wise (2001)
Collaborative arrangements and casework

Families and individuals accessing services often have contact with a number of services at the one time. Services that aim to coordinate a range of concurrent supports provide greater opportunities for holistic responses that ‘wrap around’ families and service users.

This approach rests on strong interagency relationships and awareness, clear delineation of roles and a ‘lead’ agency that assists with developing the case management goals, and the brokering and accessing of the required services. While having excellent adult and children’s services is essential, the significant challenge is ensuring that these services are joined up and focus on all people within the family. This requires:

- clear integration and coordination of the case management process
- broad alignment of programmatic frameworks
- general agreement on outcomes sought
- appropriate information sharing.

Collaborative case work continues to be a feature of many service models. Strengthening this approach to become a standard response within secondary services would be important for improving outcomes for clients.

Communication networks and integration

One of the ways to improve the integration and collaboration between services that support individuals and families at risk or in crisis is to ensure that agencies have an awareness of each others priorities, referral pathways and other business practices. Providing a regular forum for agencies delivering secondary services to come together and discuss solutions to local issues may be of benefit.

The Department continues to develop formal linkages with a range of key agencies. Examples of this include the *Working Together Kit*, which is a partnership with the Department of Health’s Drug and Alcohol Office. An overarching protocol was developed which outlines the way in which the two Departments will work together to address the care and protection of children in the context of parental substance abuse. From this, local area memoranda of understanding between each district office and the local drug and alcohol services are being developed to guide liaison, communication and referral. Similar processes are underway with the Department of Health’s Mental Health Division, the Department of Housing and Works, and other key agencies. Similar strategies may strengthen linkages with other agencies and organisations further clarifying roles and responsibilities if not already in place.

Evidence-based planning

The Department for Child Protection has developed a demand forecasting model to guide an integrated planning, resource acquisition and resource allocation approach to secondary services. The further development of this formula will allow for more accurate forecasting of service growth and community need. Using data to identify trends or emerging patterns will facilitate a more responsive approach towards the planning of new services or programs.

Responsive to the changing research and social context

There is a growing body of research that focuses on program efficacy and good practice. American researcher Professor Marianne Berry has undertaken significant work with at risk families and the key themes relating to good practice in providing services to vulnerable families.
These themes include:
- a strong focus on the engagement of the family
- sharing decision making and choices, where possible
- providing choices
- assisting with achieving small successes early
- solving concrete problems first
- being specific
- providing case workers with flexibility
- being honest with clients and families.

It is important that Western Australia’s approach to supporting individuals and families at risk or in crisis is informed by current research and evidence. All agencies have a responsibility to be aware of the evidence that exists in their areas of specialisation, and to ensure that this informs the development of their services and interventions. Equally, it is important that services operate from a strong theoretical foundation.

9. Conclusion
In concluding, attention is again drawn to the questions provided as a means to organise feedback into particular themes. However, the questions are not exclusive and any other perspectives that stakeholders may wish to express are welcome.

Questions

1. What should be the vision and outcomes for the Strategic Framework and State Plan?

2. What principles should underpin the Strategic Framework?

3. What tangible priorities and developments are required over the next four years in order to successfully deliver secondary services?

4. What should be the future directions for secondary services?

5. Other comments?

Current practice frameworks in the Department for Child Protection

The Signs of Safety child protection practice framework

The Department is adopting and implementing Signs of Safety as its child protection practice framework. It is anticipated that over time, Signs of Safety will form the basis of a consistent, evidence-based approach to child protection practice across the Department and partner agencies.

Constructive working relationships between professionals and family members, and between the professionals themselves, is a critical factor in practice in situations where children suffer abuse. A significant body of thinking and research suggests that best outcomes for vulnerable children arise when constructive relationships exist in both these arenas. Research with parents and children who have been through the child protection system assert the same finding.

The Signs of Safety framework supports an approach to practice that is inclusive of all people significant to the safety and wellbeing of the child/young person. Signs of Safety is designed to create a shared focus among all stakeholders in child protection cases, both professional and family. It is designed to help everyone ‘think their way into and through’ the case, and is simply a process of creating a map of the circumstances surrounding a vulnerable child. Central to this approach is the use of specific practice tools and processes where professionals and family members are encouraged to engage with each other in partnership to address situations of child abuse and neglect. As such, the framework helps create a shared focus among all stakeholders in child protection cases.

Best Beginnings practice framework

Program description

The Best Beginnings Program is an evidence-based, early-intervention home-visiting service provided to families and their new-born children. The service aims to improve outcomes for families and children for whom there is a risk of poor life outcomes. The service is holistic, building on strengths within individuals and families to enhance infant health and wellbeing and parenting skills, and facilitate linkages with community support systems. The service promotes parental competence, knowledge, skills and positive behaviour.

Framework

The service employs an evidence-based clinical framework which is outlined in the Best Beginnings Manual. The program is modelled on Queensland’s Department of Health’s Family CARE program, incorporating the Oldsi model of home visiting. The Best Beginnings Program has adapted the model to suit the local service context and clients’ needs. Clinical practice occurs under the supervision of Child Protection (District Office or ParentSupport) Team Leaders and WA Health Clinical Nurse or Community Health Managers, and is supported by a Child Protection Senior Practice Development Officer, ongoing training, regular team case conferencing and clinical supervision.

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ParentSupport framework

Program description

*ParentSupport* is an evidence-based, multi-intervention through casework, specialist service. The program contains relational, educational, therapeutic and tailored components including home visiting for up to six months. The service aims to enhance parenting capacity and confidence. *ParentSupport* teams are typically situated within each Department of Child Protection district office in the metropolitan area and across the Kimberley.

Framework

*ParentSupport* has developed its own clinical framework which is targeted and tailored to context, operationalised using the "Family Functioning Profile", flexible and responsive to local needs and conditions. Operational principles are in keeping with the latest formal and practice evidence, and are in keeping with other principal articulations such as the 'C' Frame. It is supported by background papers, training, accreditation, supervision and a database. Continued pursuit of best practice is achieved through a Clinical Governance System with ongoing research and review of current literature, and application of key learning from the program into improved structures, systems and processes.