



## AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES NEED GREATER CERTAINTY

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Catholic Social Services Australia is calling on the Australian Government to ensure the needs of children and vulnerable families are priorities in the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

CSSA comprises 60 member organisations providing social services in more than 650 communities across Australia. The network supports some of the country's most vulnerable people.

It is concerned that the Government's failure to provide certainty to providers of its Families and Communities Programme (FCP) is damaging the long-term planning required to ensure success in supporting the wellbeing of families and children. The FCP seeks to improve financial wellbeing and capability, to strengthen communities and to support migrants in their transition to life in Australia.

"The previous FCP service agreements expired in June 2020, but were thankfully extended until the end of June 2021," CSSA chief executive officer Ursula Stephens said.

"But this is the second 12-month funding extension to an important suite of programs that provide early intervention and prevention support to families, children, young people, volunteers, refugees, migrants and other individuals with special circumstances."

Dr Stephens said COVID-19 has compounded disadvantage for many children across Australia, including the fact one in five children fall behind on their development milestones before they start school.

"The success of early intervention programs is contingent on having continuity and stability around staffing and funding to address these critical issues," she said.

CSSA chair Maria Harries said the pandemic highlighted the importance of financial and emotional resilience. Additional emergency relief funding has helped, but a scheduled review of FCP is overdue.

"Furthermore, many recommendations of the 2015 report *A New System for Better Employment and Social Outcomes*, which highlighted the fragmented nature of the social security system, have not been implemented," she said.

Dr Harries said the Government's plan for COVID-19 recovery must include measures to address the complex and compounding impacts of entrenched disadvantage.

"The work of our members in supporting children and families in need is central to our mission of Catholic service," she said.

"As such, CSSA is calling on the Government to recognise the importance of investing more in the wellbeing of children. For those working in the social services sector this means a commitment to strategic reforms to the sector, providing certainty to our workforce and guaranteeing funding to meet the costs of program delivery.

"To build back a strong and robust Australia, there is no better investment than the wellbeing of children and young people," Dr Harries concluded.

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The national network of Catholic social services