

MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES

OVERVIEW

<i>Agency</i>	<i>2007-08 Budget \$m</i>	<i>2008-09 Budget \$m</i>	<i>Variation %</i>
Department of Community Services			
Total Expenses	1,260.2	1,348.6	7.0
Capital Expenditure	16.3	29.8	82.5
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DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

The Department of Community Services promotes and enhances the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and their families and provides services that support and strengthen the community.

To achieve these outcomes, the Department works closely with other Government and non-government agencies, and within the legal framework set by the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*, the *Community Welfare Act 1987* and the *Adoptions Act 2000*.

RESULTS AND SERVICES

The Department has lead agency responsibility for working with partner agencies to deliver the following State Plan priorities:

- ◆ F6: Increased proportion of children with skills for life and learning at school entry.
- ◆ F7: Reduced rates of child abuse and neglect.

The Department seeks to achieve the following results:

- ◆ People who experience natural or other disasters are supported to recover and to resume self-sufficient living.

- ◆ Where a child or young person is at risk and the Department determines that it must intervene, the child or young person and any relevant siblings are safe following that intervention.
- ◆ At-risk children, young people and their families are supported so children reach development milestones without ongoing involvement in the child protection system.
- ◆ Children or young people who are removed from their family are cared for in a safe, well-functioning and stable placement and are successfully restored to their families where appropriate.

Key services provided by the Department that contribute to these results include:

- ◆ community services including community development and capacity building, crisis support and disaster recovery services
- ◆ prevention and early intervention services that give early support to vulnerable families, with particular focus on those with very young children
- ◆ statutory child protection services in accordance with the requirements of the child protection legislation and
- ◆ out-of-home care services for children and young people whose ongoing protection means that they are unable to live at home.

The key services provided by the Department, and the ways in which they are expected to contribute to results are set out in the following table:

Service Groups	2008-09 Budget Expenses \$m	Results			
		People who experience disasters are supported to recover and resume self-sufficient living	Children and young people reach development milestones	Children and young people are safe following DoCS' intervention	Children/young people removed from their family are cared for in a safe and well-functioning placement
Community Services	194.9	✓	✓		
Prevention and Early Intervention	263.2	✓	✓	✓	
Statutory Child Protection	395.2		✓	✓	
Out-of-Home Care	495.2		✓	✓	✓
Total Expenses Excluding Losses	1,348.6				

RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS

In December 2002, the Government provided the Department of Community Services with a \$1.2 billion funding package over five years to 30 June 2008. This major funding boost increased the Department's budget from around \$600 million in 2001-02 to over \$1.3 billion in 2008-09. These increased resources have been directed towards expanding services in early intervention and out-of-home care, dealing with an increase in child protection reports and improving processes and systems.

Since the reform package, there have been significant increases in demand. In 2001-02, the Department received 159,600 reports concerning 85,000 children. In 2007-08, 305,500 reports concerning 132,100 children are expected, an increase of around 7 per cent in reports from the previous year. The rate of children reported and referred has risen by around 5 per cent per year since 2001-02.

In 2007-08 the Department worked to improve the safety and wellbeing of children and young people through a range of initiatives:

- ◆ By the end of 2007-08, the Department will have established the full allotment of 1,025 additional caseworker positions under the reform package. As at end March 2008, there was a net increase of 841 caseworkers compared with June 2004 when recruitment under the package commenced.
- ◆ About 60 per cent of the Department's budget in 2007-08 was used to purchase contracted services for clients, mainly from non-government organisations (NGOs). All contracted services in the Brighter Futures early intervention and High Needs Kids out-of-home care programs are now performance-based and monitored.
- ◆ The range of out-of-home care placement and service options was expanded when the Department started another call for expressions of interest for out-of-home care services in April 2007. More than \$617 million will be invested over five years to improve out-of-home care services, mainly in the NGO sector. The funding will establish all placement and support services under a performance-based contracting framework which requires agencies to report on outcomes for children.
- ◆ A revised out-of-home care allowances and contingencies system was introduced in October 2006. The system ensures annual indexation of allowance payments to maintain a level consistent with increases in the cost of living and equity and consistency in administration of payments. This will support the recruitment and retention of authorised carers.

- ◆ The Department implemented the Brighter Futures early intervention program. This program provides services for young children who have had low-level reports to the Department, or who have been referred by NGOs and assessed as eligible. The program works intensively with the family to improve child safety and development and to keep children from entering (or escalating within) the child protection system.
- ◆ In 2006-07 and 2007-08, \$17.6 million was provided to 539 community-based preschools under the Preschool Investment and Reform Plan to support the existing service system, expand service provision, and improve access and affordability, especially for disadvantaged families.
- ◆ From 2006-07, the Department started regulating out-of-school-hours care services. By March 2008 more than 2,300 services were registered as part of the staged introduction of the regulatory framework.
- ◆ The Department also began the process of licensing New South Wales' 250 school-based preschools, which will take effect from 1 July 2008.
- ◆ An evaluation of the Intensive Family Based Service (IFBS) for Indigenous clients was undertaken. This service is a time-limited, intensive home-based program for families who are at risk of having their children removed, or who need intensive intervention to facilitate the safe return of children. The evaluation has shown that it has contributed significantly to a reduction in the number of child protection reports of its clientele. It also showed a reduction following IFBS intervention in the likelihood of placements for children and young people who had a placement in the out-of-home care system 12 months prior to the intervention.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The Department's objectives are:

- ◆ improved delivery of child protection and out-of-home care services appropriate to the needs of diverse groups
- ◆ greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention
- ◆ delivery of a strategic community-building agenda
- ◆ better processes and systems to support frontline service delivery
- ◆ stronger partnerships with other agencies, service providers and peak bodies and
- ◆ policy-making and service delivery based on sound research and analysis, including economic analysis and feedback from evaluations.

Throughout 2008-09, the Department will also continue to lead, monitor and review the strategic directions for State Plan Priorities F6 and F7. It will also develop a new Corporate Plan setting the organisation's directions for the five years 2009-10 to 2013-14, which will align with its responsibilities under the State Plan and reflect the Government's response to the 2008 Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services.

Key strategies for 2008-09 include:

- ◆ implementing the Government's response to recommendations of the Special Commission of Inquiry to further improve the child protection system
- ◆ further increasing the Department's focus on improving the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children by implementing its Aboriginal Strategic Commitment 2006-11. Key initiatives include recruitment of more Aboriginal staff, rollout of cultural capability training for non-Aboriginal staff and introduction of cultural care plans
- ◆ continued expansion of Intensive Family Based Services
- ◆ assisting in the Government's response to the Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce report
- ◆ expanding the availability of e-reporting for mandatory reporters to improve the efficiency of reporting to the Helpline
- ◆ strengthening Joint Investigation Response Teams
- ◆ improving placement stability for children in long-term out-of-home care by implementing the Permanency Planning Demonstration Project State-wide for children aged 0-2 years by the end of 2008, and then extending this project to Aboriginal children and older children
- ◆ rollout of the Brighter Futures early intervention program to all community services centres by the end of 2008
- ◆ linking Brighter Futures with the Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Health Strategy and prenatal reporting

- ◆ ongoing implementation of the Government's Preschool Investment and Reform Plan (PIRP), which is providing an additional \$85.5 million from 2005-06 to 2009-10 to improve access to preschool for children in the year before school. From July 2008, an additional \$21 million per year will be allocated bringing the annual investment in PIRP to \$29.8 million. This will provide preschool opportunities for an additional 10,500 children for two days per week in their year prior to school
- ◆ continued work to improve the evidence base for reforms to the child protection system, including a five year longitudinal study of children in out-of-home care, a major evaluation of the Brighter Futures program and an evaluation of the operation and economics of the out-of-home care system
- ◆ implementing the Department's funding policy, including performance-based contracting, for services under the Community Services Grants and Supported Accommodation Assistance Programs
- ◆ rollout of the Triple P: Positive Parenting Program for parents with children aged three to eight and
- ◆ family and domestic violence programs including: the Staying Home, Leaving Violence program which ensures victims can stay safely at home while the perpetrator moves to alternative accommodation; and the Integrated Case Management program which seeks to provide coordinated multi-agency responses to families experiencing violence.

2008-09 BUDGET INITIATIVES

Total Expenses

Total expenses for 2008-09 for the Department are estimated at \$1.3 billion, an increase of \$88.4 million or 7 per cent on the 2007-08 budget. Major initiatives include:

- ◆ \$33 million to meet the increase in the number of children entering the Out-of-Home-Care Program and
- ◆ \$21 million to provide preschool opportunities for an additional 10,500 children for two days in their year prior to school, bringing the Government's commitment in the Preschool Investment and Reform Plan to \$29.8 million per year.

Capital Expenditure

The Department's \$29.8 million capital program will provide:

- ◆ \$26.8 million for the continued relocation and/or expansion of Community Services Centres to accommodate additional caseworkers and associated staff and
- ◆ \$2.9 million for refurbishment, essential maintenance and minor works.

AGENCY RESULT INDICATORS

People who experience disasters are supported to recover and to resume self-sufficient living

Result Indicator	Units	2005-06 Actual	2006-07 Actual	2007-08 Budget	2008-09 Forecast
i) Supported Accommodation Assistance Program clients with only one support period per year	%	79.1	79.1	79.1	79.1
Note:					
i) This indicator shows the effectiveness of Supported Accommodation services in helping clients to become independent, and the availability of ongoing accommodation and support services for these clients in the community.					
The SAAP measure is based on National Data Collection Agency data. 2005-06 data is repeated in 2006-07 and 2007-08 because later data will not be available until June 2008.					

Children/young people are safe following DoCS' intervention

Result Indicator	Units	2005-06 Actual	2006-07 Actual	2007-08 Budget	2008-09 Forecast
i) Average number of reports per child reported in a year	no.	2.20:1	2.31:1	2.31:1	2.31:1
Note:					
i) "Average number of reports per child reported" is a proxy for a measure being developed "percentage of re-reports after DoCS' (appropriate) action which raise the same or similar concerns".					

Children/young people removed from their family are cared for in a safe and well-functioning placement

Result Indicator	Units	2005-06 Actual	2006-07 Actual	2007-08 Budget	2008-09 Forecast
i) Children on a final care and protection order who have had 5 or more placements in their lives, for:					
- All children in out-of-home care (OOHC)	%	21.2	21.2	18.9	16.7
- Children under age 5 in OOHC	%	3.2	4.3	3.8	3.4
Note: Children generally experience better outcomes if they have fewer placements as they can bond with their carers. Initially, changes may be needed while a final placement is sought.					