

FORCED ADOPTIONS

Outcome: 1.1: Families and Children

POSSIBLE QUESTION / ISSUE(S): What progress has been made on the Government response to the Senate Inquiry?

TALKING POINTS

1. At the National Apology to people affected by forced adoptions on 21 March 2013, the Australian Government announced a package of measures that totalled \$11.5 million to 2016-17 and includes:
 - \$5 million for the Department of Social Services (DSS) to improve access to specialist support services,
 - \$5 million for the Department of Health for improved access to psychological services and the development of guidelines and training materials for mental health professionals, and
 - \$1.5 million for the National Archives of Australia (NAA) to develop the Forced Adoptions History Project, including a website and exhibition.
2. The Forced Adoptions Implementation Working Group performs a key advisory role on implementation of the measures and includes representatives of mothers, fathers and adoptees and three Senators who were involved in the Senate Inquiry.
3. The NAA will launch the Forced Adoptions History Project website on 20 March 2014 at a small event with the Forced Adoptions Implementation Working Group at Parliament House that will also commemorate the first anniversary of the National Apology.

4. DSS contracted the Australia Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) to undertake a scoping study to determine service model/s for specialist support to complement and enhance existing support services.
5. AIFS' draft report was received mid-February and DSS is currently seeking stakeholder input and advice on the proposed models, with the aim to have enhanced services in place by mid-2014, or earlier if possible.
6. On 25 September, the Adoptions Issues and Directions Working Group was established to progress the recommendations which are the responsibility of state and territory governments.
7. This Working Group met by teleconference on 16 December 2013 and will meet in March 2014 to discuss the findings of the scoping study.
8. DSS administered funding for forced adoption is:

2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	TOTAL
\$300,000	\$1,350,000	\$1,376,000	\$1,377,000	\$4,403,000

BACKGROUND

On 21 March 2013, the Hon Julia Gillard, former Prime Minister of Australia, apologised on behalf of the Australian Government to people affected by forced adoption practices. The Government response to the Senate Inquiry for former forced adoption policies and practices was also announced.

Government Measures

The Australian Government is investing \$11.5 million over four years to 30 June 2017 to assist those affected by forced adoption practices. Concrete measures include:

- \$5 million for the Department of Social Services (DSS) to improve access to specialist support services, peer and professional counselling and support records tracing.
- \$5 million to the Department of Health to:
 - Develop guidelines and training materials for mental health professionals to assist in the diagnosis, treatment and care of those affected by forced adoption practices; and
 - Increase capacity under the Access to Allied Psychological services (ATAPS) program for General Practitioners to refer those affected by forced adoptions with a mild to moderate mental disorder to mental health professionals who deliver psychological strategies services.
- \$1.5 million for a website and exhibition by the National Archives of Australia (NAA) to record the experiences of those affected by forced adoption and increase understanding of these experiences in the community.

Forced Adoptions Implementation Working Group

In June 2013 DSS established the Forced Adoptions Implementation Working Group to advise the Government on the implementation of services and projects included in the Government response. Professor The Honourable Nahum Mushin was appointed independent chair of the Working Group, which also comprises representatives of mothers, fathers and adopted persons affected by forced adoptions. Senators Sue Boyce, Claire Moore and Rachel Siewert are members of the Working Group. The Working Group met on 9 July 2013 and 31 October 2013, and is scheduled to meet again on 20 March 2014.

DSS funds the travel and accommodation expenses for all members, except the Senators, for the face-to-face meetings. Professor Mushin is paid a Category 3 Sitting Fee in accordance with the Remuneration Tribunal Determination (\$698 per day), and all Working Group members provide their time voluntarily.

Progress of the Concrete Measures

DSS is the lead agency coordinating the Government response to the Senate Inquiry recommendations, and is working closely with the Department of Health, NAA and the Attorney-General's Department.

Enhanced support support services

In August 2013 DSS contracted the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) **\$179,737** (GST excl.) to map the current support available, determine how the system is meeting the needs of affected people, and suggest service model/s to complement and enhance

existing services. DSS directly approached AIFS as the scoping study work builds upon previous AIFS' research around the needs of people affected by past adoption practices.

AIFS has undertaken consultations with service providers, advocacy support groups and state and territory governments on service models options that will enhance support available for people affected by forced adoption.

AIFS' draft report was received by DSS in mid-February. DSS is currently consulting with stakeholders, including the Forced Adoptions Implementation Working Group, on the service models suggested. The scoping study and advice from stakeholders will inform the approach DSS takes to enhance specialist services for people affected by forced adoptions. It is anticipated that services will be in place by mid-2014.

Forced Adoptions History Project

NAA is developing a website and exhibition to document the history of forced adoptions in Australia. The website will be launched to coincide with the first anniversary of the National Apology. NAA consulted key stakeholders and invited public contributions for the website content and contributions to the website will continue once the website is launched. The exhibition will launch on the second anniversary of the National Apology in 2015 and will tour nationally.

A Forced Adoptions History Project Facebook page was created to promote the project and collected input on a range of themes, such as stigma and consent. The Facebook page was intended to be in place until the Forced Adoptions History Project website launched in March 2014. However, the NAA closed the Forced Adoptions History Project Facebook on 20 December 2013. There were repeated violations of the protocols and rules in place for those using and commenting the Facebook page and it was closed to preserve the duty of care to both stakeholders and the NAA staff managing the page. The NAA are currently investigating whether the page can be reinstated as a static resource.

Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS)

Following the National Apology, the Department of Health provided \$3.5 million to 30 June 2014 to all 61 Medicare Locals to increase their capacity to meet the expected increase in demand for the ATAPS program. People who have been affected by forced adoption practices who have a diagnosed mild to moderate mental health disorder could already access ATAPS services. However, the one-off funding boost was to give people affected by forced adoptions priority access to ATAPS. ATAPS will continue to be available to people affected by force adoptions after 30 June 2014.

DSS has received feedback that many practitioners have poor understanding of forced adoptions, the National Apology and the additional ATAPS funding. Stakeholders have raised concerns that affected people may not have been referred to the ATAPS services. Health advised there is currently no detailed data about ATAPS referrals and usage by those affected. However, DSS and the Department of Health are currently drafting fact sheets and additional information for service providers to increase their knowledge about forced adoption.

Guidelines and training

Health is currently in the planning phase of the project to develop guidelines and training materials for mental health professionals. Health will liaise with the Implementation Working Group at key project stages.

Integrated birth certificates

The Senate Inquiry recommendations relating to integrated birth certificates, single access points for birth, death and marriage registers, and adding fathers' names to original birth certificates fall within the responsibility of the state and territory Attorneys-General. At the April 2013 meeting of the Standing Council on Law and Justice, Attorneys-General agreed to consider non-legislated changes that could provide greater harmonisation for access to information held by Births, Deaths and Marriages.

First Anniversary of the National Apology

The first anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions is on 21 March 2014. An event to commemorate the anniversary has been arranged for 20 March 2014 to help facilitate Members of Parliament and the Implementation Working Group members attending the event.

The anniversary event will consist of the following:

- A morning tea at Parliament House to acknowledge and commemorate the first anniversary of the apology.
- Ministers Andrews and Dutton, Senator Brandis will be invited to the morning tea as they have portfolio responsibility for the concrete measure to support those affected by forced adoption.
- Members of the Implementation Working Group will also be invited to attend.
- The purpose of the morning tea is to provide a small media event to help to raise awareness of the issue of forced adoptions, and:
 - Announce the installation of the national apology parchment for public display in the Members Hall of Parliament House
Note, NAA currently working with the Department of Parliamentary Services to have the parchment displayed
 - Announce and launch the National Archives Forced Adoptions History Project website.

We understand a motion will be moved in both Houses of Parliament to commemorate the first anniversary of the National Apology.

In addition, DSS has also written to service providers and advocacy groups suggesting they mark the occasion with a local event suited to the needs of their clients and members. DSS will support the events by providing National Apology remembrance items, including panel pins, apology scrolls, DVDs of the apology event and a bookmark that advertises the Forced Adoption History Project website address.

DSS is funding the anniversary activities, including production of commemorative items. The anticipated total cost is approximately \$10,000.

Working with the States and Territories

A number of the Senate Inquiry recommendations relate to the Commonwealth and the states and territories working together to improve outcomes for affected people. The recommendations relate to issues around reparation, grievance and access to personal information. This work will be progressed by the Adoptions Issues and Directions Working Group, a sub-group of the Children, Youth and Community Services Policy and Research Working Group (CYCSPRWG). The Terms of Reference for the Adoptions Issues and Directions Working Group were agreed at the CYCSPRWG meeting on 25 September

2013-14 ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARINGS – FEBRUARY 2014

2013, and the Commonwealth's update was noted at the Standing Council on Community and Disability Services Advisory Council on 10 October 2013. This Working Group held a teleconference in December 2013, and another will be scheduled in March 2014 to discuss the AIFS scoping study report.

	Action Officer:	Group Manager/FAS
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Branch/Group:	Family Support Program	Families
Work phone number:		
Mobile phone number:		
Cleared by Group Manager	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Date:
		GM/FAS Initial
Witness who will address this question at the Estimates hearing		

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