

SPG Review

In November of 2016, The Child Safety and Permanency team sent a new edition of the Brighter Futures SPGs to a range of FACS units and service providers for comment and feedback. We were excited to receive over 75 pages of feedback from across FACS and the non-government sector. We are unable to respond individually to each piece of feedback, so what follows are some responses to a number of key themes.

What's changed?

Over time we received a large amount of feedback about the previous guidelines. In particular, many people expressed concern that the guidelines had too much content, were not organised well and needed improvements in accessibility and currency.

We have worked with the sector and a technical writer to change both the content and form of the guidelines. We have systemically reviewed all the feedback we received and made changes to enhance the user friendliness and practice applicability of the documents.

Section/Area	How much change?	What has changed?
Form/layout	Major	The document has been completely revised and re-formatted.
1. Purpose 2. Background 3. Program aims and outcomes	Minor	These sections have been re-formatted to make them more concise and accessible. However, the spirit of these sections remains unaltered.
4. Eligibility criteria	Major	We changed the eligibility criteria, including the addition of several exclusionary criteria. We are seeking to create a more streamlined program where referrals are made for families most likely to benefit from Brighter Futures services.
5. Referral	Major	90% of families in Brighter Futures should

Section/Area	How much change?	What has changed?
process		now be drawn from the FACS referral pathway.
6. Service model	Minor	This section contains mainly stylistic changes. As additional evidence based programs are introduced into Brighter Futures the section will be re-written.
7. Service timeframes	Major	Families can receive 18 months of service provision from Brighter Futures with a possible extension of 6 months.
8. Program delivery	Major	Children can now provide consent for participation at 14 years.
9. Service provider responsibilities 10. FACS responsibilities 11. Case management	Minor	These sections have been re-formatted to make them more concise and accessible. However, the spirit of these sections remains unaltered.
12. Vacancy management	Major	90% of Brighter Futures vacancies should be occupied by FACS referrals.
13. Contracts and funding deeds	Minor	This section contains largely stylistic changes. Expectations of communication between FACS Districts and Service Providers have been made more explicit.
14. Resources	Major	A number of new forms and some procedural documents have been provided. These have been provided separately to the main document so that they can be updated with the impending introduction of ChildStory, the new FACS recording system.

Referrals to Brighter Futures

From 7 August 2017 all referrals to Brighter Futures will be subject to new referral criteria relevant to both the FACS and community referral pathways. We want to streamline the service we are providing and ensure families likely to get the most from our services are those being referred. We received a substantial amount of feedback on the new criteria.

Availability of referrals

We received feedback raising concerns about whether FACS Community Service Centres (CSCs) will be able to meet the demand for referrals under the new criteria. We have been working closely with FACS Corporate Governance and Performance, who have been gathering data about the availability of appropriate referrals using the new criteria. As a result, we have widened the criteria to now also include reports with a response requirement of less than 72 hours.

We are confident, based on the data gathered, that there will continue to be more than sufficient appropriate referrals from FACS to sustain the program. We are excited about the new criteria and the potential for Brighter Futures to grow and strengthen our work with families most suited to our services.

Referral distribution

We also received feedback on the distribution of referral sources into Brighter Futures. Under the new guidelines, it is expected that 90% of referrals into the program will come from FACS, with 10% coming from the community referral pathway. We want to ensure that families with the highest levels of need are able to gain prioritised access to the program. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, who are significantly over-represented in the child protection system in NSW.

Referral criteria

Some concerns were raised about some of the elements of the new criteria. As a result of that feedback, we have made a number of changes. We also reviewed some further information and literature in response to a range of other pieces of feedback we received.

Child protection reporting history

Families referred to Brighter Futures must have a maximum of 3 child protection reports within the last 12 months. We have also stipulated that the 3 reports can be 3 separate incidents or issues. The information known about

the family should be considered as part of the referral and exclusion criteria¹ to ensure the referral is appropriate.

Intensive Family Presentation (IFP) 'step down' referrals

We have enhanced the criteria for IFP referrals into the program. In particular, we have outlined specifically what constitutes a 'successful intervention' with IFP which must take place before a Brighter Futures referral can be made.

Criteria definitions

There was concern about whether some of the wording in the criteria, such as 'long-standing' and 'deliberate', would be further defined. The complex nature of abuse and neglect makes it difficult to provide definitions in this context that would be helpful. For example, defining a word like 'long-standing' might unintentionally lead to information about serious abuse being minimised. We trust that FACS staff have the experience and expertise to apply professional judgement when making decisions about individual cases and the criteria. The whole context of the information available needs to be considered, and the spirit of the referral criteria needs to be applied.

SARA outcomes

Some issues were raised about the nature of cases that might be referred to Brighter Futures after a SARA has been completed. All cases where a SARA has been completed prior to a referral to Brighter Futures must have a safety assessment outcome of 'safe'. This means that the children and young people in the family must be safe before the case can be referred to Brighter Futures. We have also added to the guidelines that there must be a SARA completed within at least 28 days of the referral.

Guardianship Orders

Brighter Futures is unable to meet the needs of children and young people with Guardianship orders. Evidence suggests that children who have historical experiences of abuse and neglect are the most vulnerable to subsequent experiences of abuse and neglect by secondary perpetrators. Reports about children and young people with Guardianship arrangements need to be assessed and managed in the context of continuous review of the continued suitability of those arrangements. Brighter Futures services do not have the capacity to make that assessment or undertake the necessary Children's Court work that may be required. Referring these families to Brighter Futures may result in the real needs of highly vulnerable children becoming obscured within the service system.

¹ Please see section 4.2 of the Brighter Futures Service Provision Guidelines.

Service model

We also received some helpful feedback about the Brighter Futures service model and its components.

Service timeframe

We have taken into consideration feedback we received on the time frame for services to families offered by Brighter Futures. Recent research by FACS has analysed data about the length of time successful families in Brighter Futures tend to spend in the program. We have changed the time frame in the guidelines to a service period of up to 18 months with a possibility of extension for a further six months.

Service components

We were excited to receive some great feedback on the desire to see more evidence based service components. As many people stated, SafeCare is the first new evidence based program to be introduced into Brighter Futures with an upcoming trial expansion. We are hopeful that in the future, we will be able to expand the number of evidence based programs we are using. Once we have a clearer picture of our direction in this area this element of the guidelines will be re-written.

Voluntary service provision

A number of people commented on the exclusion of the word 'voluntary' from the guidelines. Brighter Futures is a voluntary service. During drafting of the new guidelines, we were supported by a technical writer who helped us reduce the amount of superfluous material that existed within the document. As a result of this process, the word voluntary was removed inadvertently from much of the document. We have now added it to the purpose section.

What's next?

Implementing the new guidelines

The new guidelines will come into affect on 7 August 2017. From this date all FACS districts and Brighter Futures Service providers will be using the new guidelines.

We appreciate that there will be a transition period before service providers will be able to fully adopt all of the guidelines. Service relationships with existing clients should be maintained until those clients are exited from the program as per usual practices. However, all new referrals should be in accordance with the guidelines from 7 August 2017. In some areas, there may also be a transition period for service providers to reach the 90% FACS

referral requirements. We suggest that service providers work with FACS districts to plan for this change.

There are a number of new forms that accompany the guidelines. We have tried to make them as user friendly as possible. We are also hopeful their contents can be easily transferred into DoCS Connect, although their structure may be different. We received a lot of feedback that the old forms were not useful.

Continued review

Brighter Futures is undergoing a time of change, particularly in regard to its service components. The introduction of 'ChildStory' into FACS will also create additional changes. As these changes occur, there will be additional reviews and updates to the guidelines.

Who can I contact with questions?

For policy advice on the guidelines, you can contact us at Brighter.Futures@FACS.nsw.gov.au. We will endeavour to respond to your query as quickly as possible.