

## ***Surviving and Thriving in ParentsNext.***

This information and tips are to help you navigate ParentsNext when you've been told to participate, or you are in the program.

### **Tips**

- Do not make an appointment close to a payment
- Take the 10 'thinking days' before signing your plan and do not overcommit. There is no minimum obligation. The obligation is based around the activity. For example, if your activity is studying, the obligation would be to attend the course. If the activity is focused on the child, such as Storytime, the obligation is based around attending that activity.
- Ask to access the Participation Fund (intensive location)
- Providers in the Targeted location may also provide some financial assistance as part of the services they offer in delivering the program. You should speak to your provider about what assistance they can offer you.
- If you do you feel upset, aggrieved or unhappy the first step is to speak with your provider. If this makes you uncomfortable the second option is to call the National Customer Service Line (1800 805 260). It's important that concerns are registered through the correct channels. If you cannot pursue the first two options or have not received an inadequate response, please contact NCSMC. Currently, we have been granted access to the Department and we will forward your complaint / concerns. It must be detailed. Email [ncsmc@ncsmc.org.au](mailto:ncsmc@ncsmc.org.au). This option can only occur whilst NCSMC has direct contact with the Department.
- Check out the provider's mechanism to accept an out-of-hours message. This is important when you can't attend an early scheduled activity or appointment as there is a requirement to give notice of non-attendance before the scheduled appointment. Ask the provider the best way on how to manage this circumstance, as its foreseeable that this will occur.

### **Determining your eligibility**

- DHS determines your eligibility for ParentsNext based on the information on your record. In some cases, DHS will need to complete a Job Seeker Classification Instrument assessment with you to determine if you are eligible.
- If you are eligible, DHS will provide you with information about the program and refer you to a ParentsNext provider.
- You can choose your ParentsNext provider (if there is more than one available in your area), and when you're in the program you can change providers if you're not happy with your treatment.
- There are around 73,000 ParentsNext participants across Australia.

### **Selecting a Provider**

- You can find a list of Providers in your area [here](#). We recommend talking to other people in the program and asking for their experiences before you choose.

- Providers are required to give information about their services and what participants can expect. Further information to assist you in selection a provider can be located on the [website](#).
- It is our aim that the government roll out some form of 'rate the provider' to help with choosing a provider and to collect feedback, however, there has been no commitment to this from the government to date.
- There are two categories known as *Intensive Stream* and or the *Targeted stream*. The difference is geographical. Your provider can confirm which stream you are in.
- There are 30 Intensive Stream locations, click [here](#) to locate them.
- The Intensive Stream has a participation fund which can assist with the costs of your activities, including study.
- If you live in an Intensive Stream location, you may also be able to join voluntarily. If you're a voluntary participant and do not attend two meetings you will be exited from the program. Your payments cannot be suspended if you are a voluntary participant.
- Providers must provide a safe space for children.
- If your provider determines that you are 'capable' of self-reporting your participation against mutual obligation requirements, you can do this via the dashboard. Otherwise reporting could be face- to-face, phone calls and or SMS, again it varies depending upon the provider.
- All participants need to report to Centrelink on a fortnightly basis.

**Privacy Waiver: ParentsNext providers are contractually and legally obliged to comply with the Privacy Act 1988 and Australian Privacy Principles (APPs) when dealing with parents' personal information.**

If a parent chooses not to sign the Privacy Notification and Consent form, the types of services the Provider can offer the parent is limited to those not requiring the collection and disclosure of sensitive information, unless otherwise authorised or required under Australian law. Parents are still required to participate in the program.

If by signing the Privacy Notification and Consent form, a parent is agreeing to the collection of their sensitive information, which is afforded a greater level of protection under the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs). Sensitive information includes certain characteristics of an individual such as details of their cultural or linguistic background, any criminal record, medical information and membership of a professional or trade association. As protected information under the social security legislation, a parent's personal information may only be collected, used and disclosed to carry out the functions of delivering work-related services as provided under social security law, or for other purposes if the parent consents.

**Changing Providers**

- Participants can contact the National Customer Service Line (1800 805 260) to arrange a transfer to a different provider. It can be agreed by both a participant and the provider (Transfer by Agreement) or it can be made by the participant on the grounds of a 'relationship breakdown'.

### **Your Participation Plan**

- Your participation plan sets out your required activities (see below) – you determine these *together with* your consultant
- After agreeing to the plan, you have 10 ‘thinking days’ before it needs to be signed.
- The provider cannot change activities on the plan without your knowledge, all changes need to be agreed and signed by the provider and the participant.

### **Participation Plan Activities**

- Education and training, both accredited and non-accredited, are acceptable activities. Such activities do not make you exempt from the program and you will be required to attend a meeting (quarterly). The appointment can be a phone call if you were studying at the time you were referred to ParentsNext.
- Providers can assist participants to access childcare and help to access financial assistance for childcare, including voluntary participants.
- The activities need to work for you and your family and help you progress towards your education and employment goals. They can be around parenting, connecting with your community and or studying/training. There is no necessity to do an activity for the sake of it. E.g. if you’re are studying with no attendance during semester breaks or end of year, before you commence the next year, it would be expected that there are no extra activities scheduled during this time
- You will be expected to meet with provider at least once every three months.
- Activities should not crowd out or take precedence over commitments and plans that the family have already have.
- It would be unusual practice for the provider to contact a local service to ‘check’ to see if you have attended an activity after self-reporting. This contact would only be made if there are some reasonable grounds and is not generally, part of a provider’s regular practice.

### **Parenting takes precedent: Reasonable non-attendance**

There are a range of health-related reasons why you may not be able to attend an agreed ‘activity’ that do not require a medical certificate. Typical examples include teething, nappy rash, managing asthma, ear infections etc. It is expected to inform the provider before the scheduled activity or appointment prior the commitment by phone or face-to-face.

You are generally required to undertake your scheduled activities during school holidays, however the provider is required to consider whether you have access to suitable care and supervision for your children when negotiating and scheduling activities during these periods. If you do not have appropriate arrangements, you will have a Valid Reason not to undertake the activity during these periods.

### **Suspension of payment**

If a participant does not meet a requirement, this will generally result in a payment suspension. Participants are informed, via SMS or email, immediately upon their payment being suspended.

Mostly participants can have a suspension lifted by (1) re-engaging with their provider by phone but check if this is enough as a meeting maybe required. Once confirmed by the provider the suspension should be lifted immediately with full back payment no later than the next working day, so there are no delays or deductions in your next fortnightly DHS payment.

## **Exemptions**

Exemptions, under which ParentsNext participants are not required to meet their participation requirements for a particular period, only apply to compulsory participants. ParentsNext providers are responsible for applying automatic exemptions (when provided with the required evidence) and determining when and for how long case-by-case exemptions apply.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is able to grant exemptions for temporary reprieve due to pregnancy/birth of a child for Intensive Stream participants. Under this exemption, participants are exempt from participation requirements from six weeks prior to and six months after the expected birth date.

Other basis for exemptions:

- Domestic violence, temporary incapacity
- Temporary reprieve due to pregnancy/birth of a child
- Major personal crisis
- Major personal disruption to the Parenting Payment (PP) recipient's home
- If the PP recipient is an active and registered foster carer
- If the PP recipient is providing home schooling for one or more of the children or secondary pupil children for whom they are the principal carer or main supporter
- If the PP recipient is providing or suitably assisting and supervising distance education for one or more of the children for whom they are the principal carer, or secondary pupil children for whom they are the main supporter
- If the PP recipient is caring for a large family (i.e. is the principal carer of at least one child between six and 15 years inclusive and a total of four or more children all aged between six and 18 inclusive)
- If the PP recipient is a relative but not a parent of a child and the child is living with the PP recipient in accordance with a Family Law Order
- If the PP recipient is a relative but not a parent of a child and the child is living with the PP recipient in accordance with a document prepared or accepted by a state or territory authority that has responsibility for the wellbeing of children, or

For more information: <https://docs.jobs.gov.au/documents/exemptions-and-suspensions->