

Logan Together Submission to the Senate Inquiry for ParentsNext

Logan Together is a ten year whole-of-community effort to ensure that Logan children, 0-8 years of age, grow up as healthy and full of potential as any other group of Australian children. It is one of Australia's largest place-based initiatives, with support from all tiers of government, philanthropic and community organisations. Logan Together involves the efforts of over 100 partner organisations and collaborators including government, community organisations, businesses, academics and community members.

Logan/Browns Plains was the first and largest trial site for the ParentsNext program which commenced in April 2016. Logan Together has worked collaboratively with all providers across the site, during both the trial and mature phases of the program - convening providers to forge a collaborative approach to engaging the parent population and the service system.

ParentsNext engages with all parents receiving the Parenting Payment, which is approximately 6,000 parents in the local community. Logan Together has worked with providers to leverage the universal engagement opportunity the program offers, and connect participants into a range of child and family wellbeing opportunities. According to the Department of Employment, this collaborative model was unique in Australia.

In preparing this submission, Logan Together sought feedback from:

- ParentsNext providers
- Program participants, and
- Community Partners offering services and support to program participants as part of their holistic case planning and to meet compulsory participation requirements.

Parents Next Providers

A key theme raised by providers during consultation, was the impact of the new compliance framework and provider roles on relationships with program participants. Specifically, providers reported that the shifting of responsibility for re-instating benefits from Centrelink to providers, had contributed to a breakdown in the provider participant relationship and loss of trust.

The onerous nature of the new mandatory reporting requirements was another key concern cited by providers – namely the requirement for participants to complete two reports on separate systems on different dates. This requirement making it especially difficult for vulnerable participants to meet their reporting obligations because of the barriers and additional challenges they experience.

Program Participants

Fear of receiving a breach and/or payment suspension for missing an appointment with a provider was common across program participants, weighing heavily on their minds. This was the case even where grounds for exemption appear to be evident.

Some participants also reported they were confused and had received inconsistent information about grounds for exemption and proof requirements.

Community Partners

Community Partners made the following observations during the consultation process:

- Parents attending activities for the first time as part of their compulsory attendance requirements are presenting with very high levels of stress, due to concerns their payments will be cut off

- The compulsory nature of their attendance, meant that they were often unwilling to engage with others in the space, and felt staff were there to report on their attendance, making it difficult for staff to build rapport.
- Some participants did not know how to log their activity into the online system and reported their payments had been cut off as a result. This is a greater issue with ParentsNext participants arriving with very little or no English.

Recommendations

Logan Together recommends:

- That the new compliance framework (provider roles) is re-visited, and safeguards put in place to preserve a trusted provider- participant relationship.
- That the mandatory reporting process/requirements are simplified and streamlined, so as to reduce the burden of reporting on participants.
- That there is clear and consistent messaging for participants in relation to non-compliance, participation exemptions for compulsory participants and proof requirements.
- That reporting mechanisms include provisions and safeguards for participants with genuine barriers/challenges in accessing and using on-line technologies.

Contact Information

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