

SENATE LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL LEGISLATION COMMITTEE
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Output 1.1

Question No. 24

Senator Siewert asked the following question at the hearing on 31 October 2005:

- a) Who developed the criteria for the establishment of the Family Relationship Centre?
- b) Who determines the successful tenders?
- c) How were the locations of the family relationship centres determined?
- d) Will services be required to be provided by professional qualified counsellors?
- e) What level of competence are counsellors expected to meet?
- f) If not, under what circumstances will unqualified counsellors be considered?
- g) Will full disclosure be required if a faith based provider is chosen?

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

a) The selection criteria for the open competitive selection process for Family Relationship Centres were developed by the Attorney-General's Department and the Department of Family and Community Services, in consultation with the Attorney-General's Office.

b) The Attorney-General will determine the successful applicants for Family Relationship Centres, after receiving recommendations from the Department. The recommendations from the Department will be based on an assessment process outlined in the Request for Application for Funding Selection Document.

c) The locations of the 65 Family Relationship Centres were determined by the Attorney-General. To assist the Attorney-General to determine the locations, the Attorney-General's Department analysed demographic information obtained through the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) along with information on needs provided by the Department of Family and Community Services, which showed, by ABS Statistical Sub-division:

- population
- proportion of divorced or separated people with children
- proportion with oldest child under 5 yrs old
- the number of blended families
- separations in the last 6 months and the last 3 years
- Child Support Agency clients
- people receiving parenting payment, and
- Domestic Violence Hotline referrals.

Other factors taken into account in the Department's analysis were:

- the accessibility of the proposed Family Relationship Centre to people elsewhere in the region, and
- the location of the courts and Government funded services such as those under the Family Relationship Service Program, Indigenous services and community legal services and the distribution of other Government agencies such as Centrelink and the Job Network.

d), e) and f) Competency standards for family dispute resolution practitioners and counsellors across the sector are currently being developed. The Family Relationships Services Program (FRSP) Approval Requirements and the legislation, including regulations, will be amended to reflect this new competency system, once in place. The Government is considering how the new competency standards will be implemented in the Family Relationship Centres.

In the meantime, centres would be required to comply with the current Standard 5 of the FRSP Approval Requirements, which specifies the qualifications of family relationship practitioners, and would also need to ensure that mediators at the centres comply with the qualifications requirements outlined in the current Family Law Regulations (Regulations 60 and 61).

g) An organisation which applies for funding to operate a Family Relationship Centre must provide details of its aims, objectives, service charter and governance arrangements. While an organisation chosen to operate a Family Relationship Centre will not be required to disclose its affiliation or faith orientation, it will be required to comply with Standard 1 (Values and Ethical Framework) and Standard 10 (Accessibility of Services) of the FRSP Approval Requirements. Standard 1 requires organisations to have a clear ethical framework that includes a non-discriminatory and equitable approach to service provision. Standard 10 requires organisations to work to ensure sensitivity and accessibility to any people who face a real or perceived barrier to receiving assistance, whether on the basis of race, religious background, language, ethnic background, gender, disability, age, locality, socio-economic disadvantage or any other unjustifiable basis.