

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

**Output 1.1**

**Question No. 19**

**Senator Crossin asked the following question at the hearing on 31 October 2006:**

In relation to the Family Relationship Centres (FRCs) client base:

- (a) Of the 2700 people who dropped in, and the 9100 people who contacted the first 15 pilot Family Relationship Centres by phone during their first three months, what proportion of cases involved: (i) couples about to get married, seeking information about pre-marriage education; (ii) families wanting to improve their relationships; (iii) families having relationship difficulties, seeking information and assistance to help prevent separation; (iv) separated parents seeking to resolve disputes and reach agreement on parenting arrangements outside the court system; (v) separated parents whose arrangements have broken down or whose court orders have been breached, seeking to resolve the issue outside the court system; and (vi) grandparents and other extended family members affected by a family separation, seeking information or advice.
- (b) What, if any, limitations are placed on couples in terms of their access to free joint sessions?
- (c) What proportion of joint cases are considered “resolved” during the free three hours of service provided by FRCs?
- (d) What proportion of cases are considered re-opened and what additional assistance do these couples receive?
- (e) What proportion of cases require assistance and advice beyond the three hours of service and what arrangements are made at this time?
- (f) What proportion of cases are, after the conclusion of the free three hours, (i) continued at the Centre, subject to a fees policy; and (ii) referred to an alternative service?
- (g) If cases are referred to an alternative service, does the FRC continue to monitor the outcome of that case?

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

- (a) Part of the role of the Centres is to provide information (including information about services available in the area). Apart from numbers of people who walk in or contact a Centre for information, more detailed data is not collected. Detailed data is recorded by Centres on parents who are considering separation, are separating or have separated and who proceed to an interview.

The Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) is changing over to a new data management system to collect and analyse data relating to the Family Relationship Services Program, including data relating to Family Relationship Centres. When it is fully operational, FaCSIA and AGD will be able to analyse data on the presenting needs of people who proceed to an interview. Until the new system is fully operational, Centres are collecting this data but it is not able to be analysed electronically.

(b) In accordance with the Operational Framework, joint sessions are available for separating or separated parents or those considering separation and other family members affected by parental separation where the issues relate to children (or a mixture of issues relating to children and property). They are not available where the only issues are about property (in which case the parents would be referred to another suitable service).

There is no set limit on the number of hours of joint session a Centre can provide but after the first three hours a fee may be charged, depending on the ability of the clients to pay.

Access to three free hours of joint sessions applies to all new cases and re-opened cases. A re-opened case includes instances where:

- the family uses the Centre at a later stage over a different issue or because an agreement has broken down, or
- there has been a breach of a court order made since the previous use of the Centre by the family.

Clients are only entitled to free dispute resolution a maximum of three times in any two-year period. The Centre may also decline to provide further assistance if it believes that such assistance is unlikely to be successful in resolving the dispute.

(c) Data is collected on outcomes, not on when that outcome is reached. A resolved case is not recorded as resolved at a particular point in time – it may be after more than three hours of joint sessions. Therefore, it is not possible to provide the proportion of resolved cases that were resolved during the first three hours.

(d) This data is not collected.

(e) Data is not collected on the proportion of cases that require assistance and advice beyond the three hours as the data focuses on outcomes, not what happens at a particular point in time. In many cases Centres will continue providing joint sessions beyond three hours, subject to a fee possibly being payable (depending on the clients' ability to pay).

(f) Data is not collected on the proportion of cases that continue at Centres after three hours as data focuses on outcomes, not what happens at a particular point in time. Data will be available on referral to other services once FaCSIA's data collection system is fully operational.

(g) The Operational Framework for the Centres provides that, as a best practice, where an individual interview with a client is held, the Centre should follow up the outcome of a referral.