

**Senate Select Committee on Mental Health**  
**Senate Inquiry into the Provision of Mental Health Services in Australia**  
**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**  
**Public Hearing – Canberra**  
**7 October 2005**

**Topic:** CSA telephone counselling pilot.

**Hansard Page:** Written question on notice

**The Committee asked:** Please provide more written information about the CSA telephone counselling pilot.

**Response:**

- From May 2003 to June 2005 the Child Support Agency, with Crisis Support Services, successfully piloted an approach to providing specialised support to newly separated parents in Queensland.
- From May 2003 to May 2004 the pilot project was funded by the Department of Health and Ageing under the National Suicide Prevention Strategy. The pilot project continued in Queensland with CSA funding until June 2005.
- An evaluation of the pilot project highlighted positive feedback from parents who accessed the service. The success of the pilot project led to the development of an ongoing national priority referral service, the CSA Parent Support Service.

CSA is currently working with Crisis Support Services to implement the Parent Support Service across Australia.

- The priority service is being offered by CSA staff to new or existing customers who display emotional and psychological distress and who are assessed as being at risk of harm either to themselves or others.
- CSA staff ‘warm link’ customers by telephone to a Crisis Support Services counsellor for:
  - crisis intervention;
  - an assessment of customer needs and further case management;
  - short term counselling with two follow-up calls; and
  - information about appropriate services and possible referral.
- Customers receive:
  - an immediate response to their emotional distress;
  - early intervention (if at risk); and
  - short term support and the option of linkage to longer term support.
- CSA and Crisis Support Services have developed a comprehensive training package to support staff with telephone referral, risk assessment and in engaging effectively with men. This training has increased staff awareness and empathy in dealing with separated parents who face mental health issues.

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- Part of the appeal of the service is that separated parents do not have to seek the service – the service comes to them as a result of their interaction with CSA. The nature of the service increases the likelihood of men accepting the offer of help. It also provides an avenue for increasing separated parents' awareness of broader community support and potential take-up of support services.
- On the basis of pilot project figures it is anticipated that the Parent Support Service will manage approximately 5,500 calls per annum.
- The service has also been described in Attachment 16 of the Australian Government Submission to the inquiry: The Contribution of the Australian Government to Mental Health in Australia.