

Brighter Futures Service Provision Guidelines

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1 Purpose

This guideline outlines the key policy and operational requirements for a non-government service provider to deliver the Brighter Futures program.

Brighter Futures aims to strengthen families so their vulnerable children can live safely at home, protected from abuse and neglect, and enjoy the best possible start to life.

Brighter Futures delivers voluntary targeted intervention services to families with at least one child under the age of nine living at home, where concerns of risk of significant harm have been raised for those families.

The program relies on a partnership between families, service providers and the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS).

2 Background

FACS is required by the [Children and Young Persons \(Care and Protection\) Act 1998](#) and the [Community Welfare Act 1987](#) and associated regulations, to work with families and the wider community to minimise the risk of significant harm (ROSH) to children and young people.

The Brighter Futures program targets families who show risk factors that put their young children at high risk of escalating within the statutory child protection system.

3 Program aims and outcomes

Brighter Futures' tailored support services help to build strong well-functioning families where children can live safe from abuse and neglect and have improved wellbeing outcomes. Through Brighter Futures services we want:

- children to:
 - ◆ grow up in a safe, nurturing family environment
 - ◆ have enhanced health and education measures of wellbeing
- parents to:
 - ◆ have the skills to reduce the risk of neglect or abuse of their children
 - ◆ understand how to foster healthy development and resilience
 - ◆ know how to access the support networks and the universal services available in the community
 - ◆ develop the skills to manage vulnerabilities that contribute to risk.

By applying targeted support, the Brighter Futures program aims to reduce:

- ◆ the overall incidence of child abuse and neglect in the community

4 Eligibility criteria

4.1 Family eligible for service

Eligibility for the program is determined according to the following:

- the family must have at least one child under nine years of age living at home, OR be expecting a child who will be at high risk of entering the statutory child protection system, AND
- the parent/primary carer's capacity to parent and/or the child's safety and wellbeing might be adversely impacted by one or more vulnerability:
 - ◆ domestic and family violence
 - ◆ drug or alcohol misuse
 - ◆ parental mental health issues
 - ◆ parent with significant learning difficulty or intellectual disability
 - ◆ lack of parenting skills or inadequate child supervision

AND:

- the family has been the subject of three or fewer risk of significant harm (ROSH) child protection reports in the last twelve months¹ with a response need of less than 10 days or less than 72 hours², **or**
- a Safety Assessment and a Risk Assessment (SARA) has been completed within the last 28 days and the Safety Decision is "safe" and the family's final risk level is "high" or "very high", but there is no current risk of a child being removed from the family, **or**
- There has been a "step down" referral from an Intensive Family Preservation (IFP) service provider, the IFP intervention was considered a success³ and there is no longer a risk of removal for the children. These referrals should be counted as ROSH referrals even when they are made directly by an IFP service through the community referral pathway. The referral criteria outlined here, including the exclusionary criteria outlined in 4.2, applies.

¹ Family history should be comprehensively reviewed to determine if any of the exclusion criteria (see 4.2) apply.

² Reports from separate sources that provide the same information or reference the same incident will count as one.

³ A successful IFP intervention should include completion of at least six months of engaged IFP service participation, sustained change within the family in relation to issues of risk, and the children and young people in the family are considered safe. IFP matters that are open at the CSC due to a current Children's Court Order are not eligible for Brighter Futures.

4.2 Family NOT eligible for service

Brighter Futures is not suitable for all families. Referrals must **not** be made where any of the following apply:

- the risk of significant harm is so high that a Brighter Futures service is unlikely to adequately ensure a child's safety
- there are indications of long-standing, deliberate physical or psychological abuse/harm in the family, or on-going risk of child sexual abuse/harm or possible exposure to sexual abuse/harm
- a household member or adult with caring responsibilities is the subject of current criminal proceedings and/or a current Joint Investigation Response Team (JIRT) investigation relating to an allegation of abuse or neglect of a child or young person
- a child or young person who is in out-of-home care (OOHC), has a current care order, or is the subject of proceedings to assign parental responsibility to a person other than the parents
- families where there are children or young people with Guardianship orders
- a parent/primary carer is the authorised carer of a child in OOHC
- The safety of workers or others when working with the family would be seriously compromised and the service provider cannot reasonably manage the risk to their staff, or
- Families that have KiDS (Key information Directory System) Case Plans with goals related to restoration.

Family histories should be reviewed comprehensively before a decision is made about eligibility for Brighter Futures. Information about children or young people with historical relationships to adults in the home should also be considered in the application of the above criteria. This may be completed by the Community Service Centre (CSC) or the FACS Brighter Futures Unit (BFU) pending the referral pathway.

4.3 Priority access

The priority of access for new families, in hierarchical order, entering the Brighter Futures program is:

1. FACS risk of significant harm (ROSH) referrals, including 'step down' referrals from Intensive Family Preservation (IFP) services that may be directly referred through the community referral pathway
2. Families with children under three years of age
3. Aboriginal families
4. Young pregnant women including young pregnant women in OOHC, young parents in OOHC or leaving OOHC

5. Existing Brighter Futures clients from the FACS referral pathway transferring to a new area.
6. Families that have been on an eligibility list the longest (relates only to community referrals).

5 Referral process

The program has two referral pathways:

- FACS referral – FACS may refer a family to Brighter Futures either pre-assessment, following the receipt of a child protection report by the CSC, or post-assessment in certain circumstances.
- Community referral – an agency or individual may refer a family directly to a Brighter Futures service provider.

5.1 FACS referrals

The majority (90%) of referrals into the Brighter Futures program will be via FACS referral where ROSH has been identified via a Helpline report. FACS may:

- make the referral directly to a Brighter Futures service provider, or
- conduct a SARA , and if the safety decision is “safe” and the risk is “high” or “very high”, refer the family to the Brighter Futures program, or
- As part of a ‘step down’ referral following IFP service engagement. When these IFP referrals come through the community referral pathway, they are still counted as FACS referrals.

5.2 Community referrals

Where a child protection report is **not** required, (i.e. the reported issues are below the ROSH threshold) referrals may be made directly to a Brighter Futures service provider. The online [NSW Mandatory Reporter Guide](#) (MRG) should be used to determine if a child protection report is required.

Brighter Futures service providers are required to liaise with the Brighter Futures unit to determine if the family have a current open case plan with FACS prior to the submission of a referral. If there is a current open plan for the family, the case will be considered ineligible as a community referral. Communication with the CSC may occur to determine current or future suitability.

These referrals may be made by a community agency or program such as Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Health Strategy (AMIHS), or a Child Wellbeing Unit (CWU) or an individual, including self-referrals.

Even though referrals may be made directly by an IFP service through the community referral pathway, these referrals will be counted as ROSH referrals.

6 Service model

Brighter Futures is designed to enhance child safety, parenting capacity and family functioning. It has four integrated service components:

- structured home visiting programs
- parenting programs
- quality children's services
- brokerage funded support.

Brighter Futures service providers refer and assess families and then undertake ongoing case management and coordination of service delivery to those families.

6.1 Structured home visiting programs

These one-to-one visits provide information, practical support and advice, and are opportunities to model good parenting practices. Structured home visiting programs (including parenting programs delivered one-to-one) can also provide support and skill development to parents in their home or another agreed, family-friendly environment.

Initially, a caseworker will typically meet at least once a week with the family members, preferably in their home, with phone contact occurring between meetings. The family's needs will determine the frequency of the home visits.

In general, it is anticipated that that frequency will reduce over the course of the intervention. Timing of visits should be flexible to optimise attendance by children and parents who make have work or other commitments.

6.2 Parenting programs

Parenting programs are short-term interventions that seek to help parents:

- develop flexible and adaptable approaches to parenting and improve their relationship with their child and responsiveness to their child's needs
- understand how to prevent or respond to a range of problems including behavioural and emotional adjustment issues.
- Develop expanded networks of support

In the Brighter Futures context, parenting programs are:

- delivered by a facilitator, usually in a group and outside the home
- Aimed at providing support to address a specific issue, such as child behaviour.

6.3 Quality children's services

Access to quality children's services is evidenced to deliver positive outcomes for vulnerable children. Quality children's services, includes any of the following licensed, children's services:

- centre-based childcare, such as long day care or occasional care services
- preschools
- mobile services in rural and remote areas
- family day-care or home based services.

6.4 Brokerage funded support

Is used to support a family's case plan, a Brighter Futures service provider may purchase material aid, specialist services, and other essential services to meet a family's or child's immediate and/or short term needs.

Brokerage funds may be spent on any person in the family after the Brighter Futures service provider has considered whether:

- the required service is available through another Brighter Futures service option
- the family has the capacity to pay for the goods/service
- Other services, benefits or subsidies can be accessed for the family within a reasonable timeframe.

Examples of where brokerage funding may be used:

- material aid – one off purchase of goods or equipment to assist families deal with an immediate need; including items such as a washing machine, nappies or bedding
- financial aid - provision of one-off low cost financial assistance; used only in exceptional circumstances to purchase goods or services
- fee for service - purchase of immediate and/or short term (up to three months) access to private, government or non-government services not otherwise available, such as:
 - ◆ specialist counselling/support, family counselling, mediation - may include purchase of specialist services to support children experiencing trauma as a result of parental vulnerabilities and, where a domestic violence perpetrator is participating in Brighter Futures, services that work intensively with domestic violence perpetrators
 - ◆ short term access to quality children's services - may include purchase of a short term child care centre place to assist a family for up to three months, but **not** an ongoing place

- ♦ respite care - may be used to provide care of children to achieve a case plan, including parent participation in a short term treatment or rehabilitation program, or care during an unplanned event or issue (e.g. parental/carer accident or illness).

When respite is provided, the Brighter Futures service provider makes sure:

- the family will remain on the worker's active caseload
- where appropriate and possible, all services and support provided to the parents and/or children remain in place, particularly child care
- if the respite arrangement means children are placed outside the local area, the Brighter Futures service provider liaises to make sure services to the children are maintained.

7 Brighter Futures service timeframes

A family may receive up to 18 months of sustained case management from a Brighter Futures caseworker. Caseworkers plan and coordinate services to make sure families access the most appropriate services and support at the right time.

In circumstances where extension will benefit the family's young children, a Brighter Futures service provider may extend a family's participation by six months.

Brighter Futures service providers should undertake exit planning:

- as a family builds resilience and family functioning improves, or
- when the end of the planned service provision approaches.

Exit planning should begin long before a family exits the program, and include, where required, completed referrals and handovers to 'step-down' options within the community. Thoughtful and considered exit planning is critical to a family's successful transition from the program.

8 Program delivery

8.1 Parent/primary carer commitment

At least one parent/primary carer needs to agree to participate in the program. The success of ongoing engagement requires FACS and agencies to work collaboratively with families to maintain their commitment to and active engagement in the program. Families should be engaged in agreeing to participate in the Brighter Futures Program within 28 days of the commencement of engagement.

Brighter Futures service providers must engage families in planning, actions, reviews and decision making throughout all stages of the program.

8.2 Information sharing

In circumstances where risks may be escalating to children, service providers have an obligation to share information with other relevant agencies under [Chapter 16A of the Children and Young Persons \(Care and Protection\) Act 1998](#) to effectively manage the safety, welfare and wellbeing to children and young people. In these circumstances, it may not be appropriate to request parental consent to exchange information. However, it is critical that transparency and sensitivity to the views and feelings of the family is imbedded in practice.

In circumstances where there are no concerns about escalating risks to children or young people, consent to exchange information should be obtained. The form at [Appendix 5: Brighter Futures Exchange of Information Consent Form](#) should be used.

If families seek to disengage from services and there are ongoing concerns regarding children's safety and wellbeing, or in situations of elevated risk or potential risk to a child/young person, Brighter Futures service providers must:

- gather and exchange information, where necessary using the provisions of the [Children and Young Persons \(Care and Protection\) Act 1998 Chapter 16A](#), to reinforce the children's safety and wellbeing, and
- Use the online [NSW Mandatory Reporter Guide](#) (MRG) to guide decisions about making a report to the Child Protection Helpline (Refer to section 9.1).

9 Service provider responsibilities

As each family situation is different, Brighter Futures service providers have the flexibility to determine the services needed to meet the individual and specific needs of children and their family. The responsibilities of the agencies FACS funds to deliver the Brighter Futures program are outlined in their Program Level Agreement (Contract) and this Guideline.

For services to be effective, Brighter Futures service providers need to:

- be child centred and family focussed
- keep children as the program priority
- deliver culturally appropriate services
- promote the rights of children and their family
- monitor and review the services delivered
- tell FACS about family changes
- meet reporting and record keeping requirements
- have appropriate financial management and reporting systems
- have systems in place to manage complaints and disputes

- use competent and suitably trained staff and support them.

9.1 Children are our priority

FACS must be confident that children will be safe if a parent declines the Brighter Futures program or does not keep to the negotiated and agreed plan.

If the parents do not engage with the Brighter Futures service provider and/or withdraw from the Brighter Futures program, the Brighter Futures service provider may contact their local CSC to exchange information under [Chapter 16A of the Children and Young Persons \(Care and Protection\) Act 1998](#) to:

- determine any additional options for engaging the family
- discuss safety and risk issues and determine if any further reports to the child protection helpline are required.

The advice given should be recorded by the CSC in a contact record.

If there are concerns that the safety and/or risk of a child has escalated, the Brighter Futures service provider must:

- use the online [NSW Mandatory Reporter Guide](#) (MRG) to guide decisions about reporting a new concern or escalation of a current concern
- if the MRG outcome is 'immediate report to the Child Protection Helpline' or Report to the Child Protection Helpline, action the outcome
- contact the local CSC to exchange information, gain advice and feedback
- If FACS receives a ROSH report about a child or young person while the family is receiving a Brighter Futures service, FACS reviews the case and consults with the Brighter Futures service provider to decide if the Brighter Futures program remains a viable option
- FACS may also conduct home visits and Risk Assessments of families in the Brighter Futures program to determine the level of ongoing risks to a child. This work may involve joint home visits where appropriate and agreed by both agencies.

Elevated or ongoing risk of significant harm to children may require intensive monitoring, safety planning and management.

Wherever possible, Brighter Futures service providers and CSCs should work together to mitigate risks to children. In instances where the CSC cannot allocate the new report/s for response, the Brighter Futures service provider should consult with the CSC to gain their expertise regarding how the risks could potentially be managed in Brighter Futures.

In some instances, remaining involved with the family may be considered as of no benefit to children and young people and as sending a message to a family of collusion with severe abuse or neglect. In these instances, consultation should occur with the CSC about options for the best way forward.

9.2 Culturally capable services

FACS funded organisations must provide 'culturally capable' services.

This means where the family or child is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, service providers:

- Need to make every effort to ensure the services provided take account of the context and support system, and the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander concept of family or community.

Where the family or child is of a culturally or linguistically diverse background, Brighter Futures service providers:

- need to make every effort to ensure the services provided take account of the family's cultural, linguistic and religious needs
- must organise and use interpreters where required
- must be prepared to provide FACS with information about their use of interpreter services.

9.3 Children's and family's rights

Brighter Futures service providers have a legal responsibility to protect the confidentiality of privileged information they receive. Service providers should:

- maintain the privacy of the children, young people and the family
- keep information confidential, and only exchange information in accordance with the [Children and Young Persons \(Care and Protection\) Act 1998 Chapter 16A](#) and [s.149b-k](#)
- have policies and procedures in place to receive, record and resolve issues or complaints a family or child may raise.

9.4 Monitoring and review

Brighter Futures service providers must develop and maintain a comprehensive and current understanding of the broad family context to inform case planning, with a focus on the child's safety in the home.

In addition to formal reviews, Brighter Futures service providers are responsible for monitoring the family's circumstances to identify when a significant change in circumstance and/or required service occurs.

Ongoing monitoring may occur during general day to day contact with the family, and gathering information from other relevant sources, such as services.

A formal review of the family's strengths, needs and goals, and revision of the case plan with the family should be undertaken:

- at least every three months, and

- at other significant times to ensure it accurately reflects the family's current situation.

Case closure should be considered if plan goals have been achieved, if Brighter Futures is no longer an appropriate program response, including where families are no longer willing to participate in case management and/or services.

9.5 Changes to families

Brighter Futures service providers must maintain an accurate, up-to-date record of family membership and inform FACS via [DoCS Connect](#) when:

- an adult or child joins or leaves a family that is in the program
- a family withdraws/exits from the program.

9.6 Reporting and records

FACS needs accurate information about families participating in the Brighter Futures program, so it can:

- monitor program capacity and uptake, and program effectiveness
- Meet reporting requirements.

FACS needs Brighter Futures service providers to record data in a consistent manner, and:

- provide FACS information for performance monitoring and program improvement purposes by submitting the mandatory Brighter Futures data through [DoCS Connect](#)
- maintain accurate information about the family, records of their agreement to participate in the program and consent to gather and exchange information
- detail reasons for a family's exit/withdrawal from the Brighter Futures program
- Maintain accurate records of service use and quarterly program reports.

9.7 Financial accountability

Service providers managing Brighter Futures brokerage funds must:

- provide families equitable access to the funds
- have appropriate administrative and financial accountability policies and processes (including processes for approving expenditure)
- Keep detailed records to meet the financial accountability and reporting requirements consistent with the Funding Deed, Program Level Agreement (Contract), Service Delivery Schedule, and this guideline.

9.8 Complaint and dispute management

Brighter Futures service providers must make sure that families know how to make a complaint to their service provider and other services referred to, and understand how each service provider will deal with any complaint.

Brighter Futures service providers must provide the family at their first meeting with plain English, culturally appropriate information on how they or their children can make a complaint, and the provider's policy on dealing with complaints.

9.9 Staffing and training

Brighter Futures service providers need to make sure their staff delivering services:

- are suitable to provide services to children
- hold a Working With Children Check (WWCC) clearance or have a current application⁴
- hold a current National Police Criminal Record Check clearance
- have the appropriate qualifications, skills and knowledge to perform their role
- respect the privacy of children and their family
- have access to and undertake supervision.

It is critical that all staff working with at risk families and children in the human services sector receive some form of professional (i.e. not administrative) supervision that is focused on worker experience, skill and emotional wellbeing. This may be provided externally, by a line manager, or in group form, depending on the industry standards and supervision model used by the agency.

10 FACS responsibilities

FACS works with Brighter Futures service providers to deliver the Brighter Futures program by:

- providing effective and responsive referral support
- providing any new information received about families involved in the Brighter Futures Program to service providers in a timely fashion
- working collaboratively to resolve issues and disputes

10.1 Referral support

The FACS Brighter Futures Unit:

⁴ The [Child Protection \(Working with Children\) Act 2012](#) allows staff to work in child-related employment with a current WWCC application number while the application is being finalised.

- provides Brighter Futures service providers relevant information to help determine a family's eligibility for the program
- confirms if any family member has an open FACS case prior to the submission of community referrals
- responds to FACS ROSH referrals within 24 hours
- responds to community non-ROSH referrals within three working days
- provides new non-ROSH information to Brighter Futures Service Providers about existing clients
- Provides KiDS history information to Brighter Futures Service Providers when a new family member joins a household or the program
- assists in the transfer of cases between Brighter Futures agencies across areas
- Oversees currency of data FACS holds on the family.

10.2 Child Safety

If FACS receives a ROSH report about a child while the family is receiving a Brighter Futures service, FACS reviews the case, and consults with the Brighter Futures Service Provider, to decide if the Brighter Futures service remains a viable option or if another intervention is required. Consideration should be given to whether the family continue to meet the eligibility criteria for Brighter Futures, including the exclusionary criteria.

10.3 Dispute resolution

Where families or children receiving a service raise issues with FACS the [FACS Client Complaints Policy](#) will apply. This may include circumstances related to:

- A referral made by FACS
- FACS intervention in relation to a subsequent ROSH report
- Complaints to Brighter Futures Service Providers that clients feel have not been sufficiently resolved by the service provider.

Where FACS and the Brighter Futures service provider disagree, FACS will use the dispute resolution process described in the Funding Deed.

Brighter Futures service providers should use the local FACS CSC as the first point of contact for raising an issue or dispute.

11 Case management

Case management is central to providing integrated and coordinated services tailored to addressing parental vulnerabilities and keeping children safe in their

home. While each Brighter Futures service provider's case management practice is informed by the agency's case management policy and guidelines, Brighter Futures workers must:

- apply a child-focussed and strengths-based approach to practice
- build relationships and work collaboratively with families, other services and professionals
- Make sure services and supports provided to families are tailored and do not duplicate other universal and/or specialist services the family may access.

11.1 Casework focused on parental vulnerability

Casework focused on parental vulnerability has a specific focus on the impact of program vulnerabilities including domestic violence, mental health issues and drug or alcohol misuse, on parental capacity and on children.

Parents are supported to implement strategies and develop the necessary skills, capacity and resources to increase the safety of their children at home.

11.2 Transfers

If a family in the Brighter Futures program plans to move to a different district or CSC area, where possible, the Brighter Futures service provider must identify if the case originated from a FACS referral or a community referral. Cases that originated as FACS referrals should continue to be counted as such.

Where transfer is occurring, both sites should consider effective approaches to ensure the smoothest transition possible for the family (i.e. joint home visits, case planning meetings, etc).

If the case was a FACS referral, the Brighter Futures service provider:

- enters the case in [DoCS Connect](#), and
- The FACS Brighter Futures Assessment Unit identifies a new Brighter Futures service provider.

If the case was a community referral, the Brighter Futures service provider:

- identifies a Brighter Futures service provider in the family's proposed new location, and confirms their capacity to deliver the required service
- assesses the level of risk to the child and family and provides adequate information to the new service. Vulnerable families where the risk to the children is high should be prioritised and not be placed on eligibility lists
- negotiates a transfer of the family's information to the new Brighter Futures service provider, with the parent/primary carer's consent

- updates the family's address if known, and emails the FACS Brighter Futures Assessment Unit advising of the transfer so a new referral can be processed as a priority
- refers the family to universal and specialist services in the new district, where appropriate

If the new Brighter Future service provider does not have capacity to provide the program at the time the family transfers, the transferring service provider must facilitate that family being placed on the Brighter Futures eligibility list.

12 Vacancy management

Brighter Futures service providers need to manage the provision of Brighter Futures services so that 90% of funded services are allocated to families referred by FACS.

Brighter Futures service providers may maintain eligibility or waiting lists for community referrals that cannot be allocated, governed by local procedures. Cases that cannot be allocated within 28 days should be closed, with notification to the referrer.

FACS referrals are not appropriate for eligibility lists and should not be referred to Brighter Futures where there is no agency capacity.

13 Contracts and Funding Deeds

FACS will negotiate contracts with Brighter Futures service providers. Service providers will deliver services to families on the basis of:

- 90% of funded capacity is used to deliver services to families referred by FACS
- Maximum of 10% provided to families via community referrals.

Brighter Futures service providers must meet with FACS District Commissioning staff on a quarterly basis (at a minimum) to:

- identify barriers to service provision
- report on the requirements defined in their Funding Deed and contract
- Maximise service provision.

14 Resources

14.1 Templates and tools

Appendix 1: [Brighter Futures Referral Procedures](#)

Appendix 2: [Brighter Futures Referral Form for FACS Community Services Centres](#)

Appendix 3: [Brighter Futures Community Referral Form](#)

Appendix 4: [Brighter Futures Community Referral Consent Form](#)

Appendix 5: [Brighter Futures Consent for Exchange of Information Form](#)

Appendix 6: [Data Management in Brighter Futures](#)