

Department of Social Services Approach to Policy Advice

This document represents a statement to ministers, other agencies and external stakeholders on the department's approach to developing its policy advice. It is designed in the context of Australia's existing social support system and is intended to set a high benchmark for the quality of the department's policy advice. The document provides a consistent, rigorous and systematic basis for policy development; and articulates the department's role, focus and approach to advising government action.

12 December 2013

	Domain	Our approach
Our role	Supporting ministers	<p>We support the role of our ministers as decision-makers.</p> <p>We understand the economic, social and fiscal environment in which the government operates.</p> <p>We understand the government's objectives, and respond diligently and in a timely manner to requests for policy advice.</p> <p>We work hard to implement the government's decisions efficiently and effectively. Subsequent policy advice reflects decisions already taken.</p>
	Policy development	<p>We develop evidence-based innovative policy advice that is practical, timely and apolitical.</p> <p>We recognise our role in ensuring the long-term integrity of policy development within our areas of responsibility.</p>
	Evidence-based and whole of department	<p>Our advice reflects a thorough understanding of the issues and evidence, and carefully considers the views of experts, stakeholders and other agencies.</p> <p>We are forward-looking and provide considered advice on future issues, opportunities and challenges.</p> <p>We explain and test assumptions that underpin our policy advice and carefully explain our reasoning where a view is not backed by robust evidence.</p> <p>We consult internally and work hard to develop and promulgate a robust departmental view.</p>
Our focus	Improving lifetime wellbeing	<p>Our policy advice is focussed on improving the lifetime wellbeing of people and families, within a frame of encouraging independence and economic and social participation.</p> <p>We understand that people's needs and circumstances change across their lives and are influenced by the broader social and economic context.</p> <p>We give policy priority to those people and families who are most likely to have poor lifetime outcomes.</p> <p>We understand the role that education, employment and well-functioning families play in promoting lifetime wellbeing, and that acting early can prevent poor lifetime outcomes.</p> <p>We recognise the role that community behaviours, civil society and economic opportunity play in promoting wellbeing.</p> <p>Our focus on lifetime wellbeing occurs in the context of promoting Australia's diverse multicultural society.</p> <p>Our focus on lifetime wellbeing recognises the importance of ensuring sustainability and equity.</p>
	National significance	<p>Our advice focuses on issues of national significance. These are issues that affect people across the country or, where localised, are of such intensity and significance as to be of national concern.</p> <p>Our advice recognises the roles of the states, territories, local government, civil society and the private sector and considers the contribution they do or could make.</p>
	Role of government	<p>Our advice recognises that governments have a role to play in creating the environment in which people have access to the resources and opportunities needed to live a reasonable life.</p> <p>We recognise that governments play a role in encouraging norms and behaviours that maximise wellbeing across the community.</p> <p>Our advice recognises that governments cannot address all harm or risk, and that individuals and families are primarily responsible for their own lifetime wellbeing .</p> <p>Our advice recognises that not intervening can be a valid government response.</p>
Proposing action	Action will help and is cost-effective	<p>Our advice carefully considers the likely impact of government action or inaction, including the potential for unintended negative consequences.</p> <p>We advise government action where it has a good chance of improving lifetime outcomes for those affected and where the likely benefits to society justify costs.</p> <p>We carefully consider the equity of access, sustainability and precedent set by our proposed government action.</p>
	Action is connected and practical	<p>Our advice considers all relevant mechanisms to address an issue, not just those administered by our department.</p> <p>We recognise that sometimes the best solution will be the responsibility of others.</p> <p>We design solutions that connect to, and utilise, the policies and services of other agencies, levels of government, civil society and the private sector.</p> <p>Our advice carefully considers cost, implementation and timing issues, recommends a course of action and includes practical, achievable plans.</p>
	Success and failure	<p>We define success in terms of achieving expected improvements in lifetime wellbeing and encouraging greater independence for individuals and families.</p> <p>Our advice recognises that social policy outcomes can take time to deliver and can be difficult to measure. We propose well-considered strategies for evaluation, including interim and proxy measures of progress.</p> <p>We provide honest advice on when and why a policy should be changed or terminated. Such advice might be needed, for example, when policy is: not achieving its intended effect; not cost-effective; or no longer appropriate for the prevailing social or economic circumstances.</p>