



Australian Government  
Department of Social Services

# Families and Communities Program

Families and Children Access Strategy Guidelines



## Aims and objectives

The Access Strategy aims to support and encourage service providers to ensure their services are inclusive and appropriate to assist the most vulnerable members of the community through:

- understanding their communities better and identifying vulnerable groups within them;
- reflecting on how they do business and what they could do better (including developing staff to work with new client groups); and
- working more collaboratively with other agencies in their community.

Services should identify and target those in the community who are most in need of support including hard to reach families. The targeting of services should be underpinned by effective [needs assessments](#) and [culturally competent practice](#). A needs assessment is a systematic process that provides information about social needs or issues in a place or population group and determines which issues should be prioritised for action. Cultural competence is the ability to participate ethically and effectively in personal and professional intercultural settings. See the [Australian Institute of Family Studies](#) website for additional information.

The Access Strategy is intended to be a living document, owned at all levels of an organisation, to support cultural change in the way an organisation operates, both in its attitude to access and its responsiveness to any need for change. Its broader purpose is to encourage innovation and creativity in reaching out to 'new' client groups.

## Accessibility Guidelines

DSS requires services to be accessible to all families and children. The following departmental-wide requirements, policies and guidelines should be applied (unless otherwise exempted by legislation or program-specific requirements):

- [Families and Children Activity Administrative Approval Requirements](#)
- [Access and Equity Policy](#)
- Service providers should develop strategies to ensure all families and children, including those experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage, have access to their services. The department expects services to be responsive to the needs of families and children and deliver equitable outcomes.
- Service providers must ensure that cultural and linguistic diversity is not a barrier for participants by providing access to language services where appropriate.
- Service providers are required to deliver services to clients from outside service areas when they present to services.

Please refer to your program-specific operational guidelines for a complete list of guidelines.

## Priority Target Groups

Priority should be given to specific groups of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families who are at risk of poor outcomes. This may include (but is not limited to):

- Children and families with multiple and complex needs
- People identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, particularly children and young people experiencing disadvantage or who are vulnerable
- People from a cultural and linguistically diverse background
- People identifying as having a condition, impairment or disability

- Children and young people and/or parents/carers with disability, experiencing disadvantage or who are vulnerable
- Families experiencing mental illness, alcohol and other drug or domestic violence issues; and
- Families who lack social supports.

## Reporting Requirements

Documentation should be brief and concise (approximately two pages). Funding Arrangement Managers (FAMs) will discuss the organisation's Access Strategy during regular site visits.

This discussion will cover issues such as any changing needs in the community, actions the organisation intends to take to improve organisational capacity or service delivery, and progress against goals identified in the access strategy. Agencies will only need to provide the documentation if requested by their FAM.

For more information, refer to the [DSS website](#).