



Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth

Working together to enhance the wellbeing and life chances of children and young people.

Feedback from consultation workshops: Common Approach to Assessment, Referral and Support (CAARS) Project

Consultation workshops have been held across Australia to engage the views of people from government and non-government, universal, targeted and statutory services providing support to children and families. Feedback from the workshops indicates a positive response to the concept of a 'common approach' for identifying and responding to the needs of children and families before problems escalate into crises, where such an approach focuses on strengths, not deficits, and can be supported by a comprehensive network of accessible support services on the ground. With this *preventive* or 'early warning, early action' approach in mind, workshop participants considered:

- what universal services (such as those in health, education, childcare and other community services) might be best positioned/most receptive to using a common needs-identification approach;
- what targeted services (such as mental health, drug and alcohol, homelessness and other support services) would be needed to support such an approach;
- what the impacts on the statutory child protection services might be; and
- the importance of working with children and families themselves to determine needs and assist with gaining confidence and skills to engage with support services as well as building informal networks of support.

Issues discussed included the benefits and challenges of a 'common approach', the form a common approach might take and its key design elements, related requirements for optimal information sharing and referral such as consent, confidentiality and case management, potential impacts on organisational culture and implementation challenges.

The next step is for the project consultant Allen Consulting Group to review and incorporate consultation input, together with the findings of an intensive literature scoping review. An interim report for consideration by the CAARS Taskforce in November 2009 will include recommendations for 'common approach' options and related information-sharing and referral mechanisms. The Taskforce will then determine the options to be further refined and tested during the first half of 2010.

See previous editions of the [ARACY Update](#) and the [CAARS page](#) of the ARACY website for more background on the CAARS project.