



ATTORNEY-GENERAL  
THE HON DARYL WILLIAMS AM QC MP

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **FAMILY LAW PATHWAYS RESPONSE**

The Howard Government's strong commitment to families is reflected in our response to the report of the Family Law Pathways Advisory Group "Out of the Maze – Pathways to the Future for Families Experiencing Separation".

The all-of-Government response to the report has been released today.

As part of the Government's response, \$27.8 million has been allocated to the Attorney-General's portfolio in the 2003-04 Budget to enhance services for families around Australia.

I am pleased to note that Commonwealth agencies, legal and community services have already begun improvements to the family law system based on the Pathways recommendations.

The former Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Jocelyn Newman, and I established the Family Law Pathways Advisory Group on 17 May 2000.

We asked the Advisory Group to consider how to build a family law system that provides more effective early assistance, helps families to minimise conflict, provides better information and ongoing support and better coordination of service delivery.

The resulting Pathways report contained 28 wide-ranging recommendations to improve the operation of the family law system.

The Government supports the Advisory Group's recommendations, which address three broad themes:

- Early help – connecting people to information and services;
- Better outcomes for children and young people; and
- An integrated system that meets families' needs.

The recommendations were directed not only to government but also to the courts, private professionals and community organisations.

I am pleased to see the enthusiasm with which the recommendations have been received. Work has already begun to implement the directions outlined in the Pathways report.

A number of very positive initiatives are being implemented by Commonwealth Government agencies, while others are being pursued by the legal and community sectors.

Since the launch of the report in August, 2001, Government and non-government agencies, the courts and the legal profession have worked together to develop ways to implement the recommendations.

Funding provided in the 2003-04 Budget will support directions in the Pathways Report by providing continued resources for Family Law Online ([www.familylaw.gov.au](http://www.familylaw.gov.au)) and the Family Law Hotline (1800 050 321) (both part of Australian Law Online).

The Government is also providing ongoing funding in the 2003-04 Budget for Children's Contact Services and for the support services provided by the Victorian Court Network for family court clients.

And we are expanding the innovative and successful Contact Orders Program, which helps separated parents who are experiencing high levels of conflict to establish better relationships and ongoing contact with their children.

Another measure which supports the implementation of the Pathways Report is the provision of ongoing resources for the Men and Family Relationships and Family Relationships Education programs, both part of the Family and Community Services portfolio.

To further support Pathways initiatives, the Minister for Family and Community Services and I will be convening a national forum of service providers this year.

The forum will bring together stakeholders in the family law system, including lawyers, Federal and State agencies, non-government service providers, the courts, health professionals, educators, counsellors and mediators.

The Government is committed to the vision of an integrated family law system that achieves the best possible outcomes for Australian families.

But it would be unrealistic to expect that this can be achieved quickly or by Government alone.

The Government's Pathways Taskforce will continue to work with service providers and other stakeholders to develop a coordinated and consistent policy framework for the future delivery of services for separating families and families in conflict.

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