

Corporate Overview

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Since the death in April 1998 of the Institute's Director, Dr Harry McGurk, the Board of Management has worked closely with the Government to find a suitably qualified person to become Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies. The recruitment process is still underway to ensure that the best possible candidate to head the Institute is found. In the meantime, the Institute's Business Manager Mr John Shelton acted in the position until April 1999, and on 31 May 1999 Mr David Stanton became the new Acting Director.

With the arrival in January 1999 of Professor Peter Saunders from Sussex University in the United Kingdom as the Institute's new Research Manager, the research plan for 1999–2001 was finalised. The new plan has three programs:

- Child development, child care and responsible parenting. The basic issue to be addressed in this program is what family arrangements promote good child rearing?
- Marriage, family functioning and family law. The catalyst for this program is what family arrangements promote good marriage or de facto unions?
- Family, social change and social cohesion. The question to consider here is what family arrangements promote good citizenship?

The research plan was subject to extensive consultations with policy makers, the government and other stakeholders and was approved by the Institute's Board of Management in March 1999.

To implement the plan a new staffing structure has been developed, and recruitment action is well underway.

Research, Contracts, Activities

The early part of the year was devoted to completing the research plan 1995–98,

and the focus of the second half of the year has been on developing the new research plan. Detailed reports of research projects appear in Section 3, and a summary of Research Project Performance for the year is included at the end of Section 3 of this Annual Report.

The Institute was contracted by the Department of Family and Community Services to undertake a study to determine whether there is any evidence for the existence of a distinctive set of attitudes and beliefs held by a minority of 16–18-year-olds which set them apart from their peers and which could contribute to their more or less permanent 'social exclusion' from mainstream society. The project also considers the extent to which such attitudes may be transmitted from parents to their children, thereby helping to explain why dependency on income support seems to 'run in families'. Fieldwork has been completed and a report of the project will be finalised early in the next financial year.

Phase 1 of the Healthy Retirement Project undertaken on behalf of Lincoln Gerontology, La Trobe University, is now complete. Phase 2 will commence early in the new financial year.

The Rotary Health Research Fund project Looking After Children has been completed, with the final report being well received by stakeholders. A book entitled *What use is Looking After Children* will be released in the first part of the next financial year.

The Spousal Violence and Financial Outcomes Project, commissioned by the Office of the Status of Women, has been completed and the report submitted. The project examined the prevalence of violence among divorced men and women and its relevance to property settlement and financial outcomes.

Other contracts completed during the year include the Family and Neighbourhood Links (FANL) Project and the Enhanced Client Outcomes (ECO) Project. Both projects were sponsored by the Victorian Department of Human Services.

The National Child Protection Clearinghouse has the mission to help create an environment which helps families and communities care for and protect children. During the year the Clearinghouse collection grew to nearly 4000 items, and the network mailing list now numbers some 7000 individuals or agencies.

Work is drawing to a close on the Second Stocktake of the National Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy, due for release in September 1999. An independent evaluation of the communications project is currently underway.

The Institute's Web site was established in March 1996. This is an ongoing project which serves as a vehicle for reporting on the Institute's programs and activities, for disseminating information from its databases, publications and resource collections, and for promoting the development of networks with other organisations concerned with family research and policy.

More than 27,000 visits have been made to the Institute's home page in 1998-99; this is an average of approximately 2300 visitors per month and represents an increase of 100 per cent over last year. The success of the Web site has also been enhanced by a further 6000 visits to the National Child Protection Clearinghouse site and 16,800 visits to the Youth Suicide Prevention site since 1 July 1998.

New Minister

Following the federal election in October 1998, and the return of the Howard government, the Institute was relocated on 21 October 1998 from the Health and Family Services portfolio to the new

portfolio of Family and Community Services. The Institute reports directly to the Minister for Family and Community Services, the Hon Jocelyn Newman.

Board of Management

The Board of Management of the Institute met on four occasions during 1998-99. Four new members of the Board – Professor Donald Chalmers, Professor John Mathews, Professor Steven Schwartz and Ms Louise Staley – took up their appointments in July 1998. The term of appointment of the Board's Deputy Presiding Member, Professor Robert Gregory, who served on the Board since July 1989, ended in September 1998. Ms Susan Bastick resigned from the Board in December 1998 for personal reasons. The contributions made by both these Board members have been most appreciated.

There were two meetings of the Research Sub-Committee and one meeting of the Administration, Finance and Audit Sub-Committee during the year.

Institute Conferences

The Sixth Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, *Changing Families, Challenging Futures*, was held in Melbourne on 25-29 November 1998. The conference attracted more than 450 delegates and over 130 papers were presented across the three days. As with past conferences, a diverse audience and an equally broad range of presentations were represented. There were delegates from universities, state, federal and local government, independent research organisations, human relations consultants, and service providers from the health and community services sectors.

The Institute held a Social Capital and Social Policy Conference in Canberra on 17 February. The conference brought together the authors of the Institute's forthcoming book *Social Capital and Social Policy in Australia* to discuss problems of conceptual definition, empirical measurement and policy

applications of the concept of social capital. This conference was well attended, attracting some 200 delegates.

Also in February, the Institute hosted a two-day workshop on the Measurement of Quality of Life. About 20 experts in the field from around Australia attended this workshop which aimed to advance understanding of issues surrounding the concept and measurement of quality of life. The workshop led to the establishment of an organisation known as OzQol, which will be affiliated with the International Society for Quality of Life Studies, based in the United States. The Institute is represented on the Committee of OzQol, which is now planning a national conference on research into quality of life.

Staffing/Human Resources

The year saw several staff leave the Institute – Trevor Batrouney (Acting Research Manager) with the completion of his contract, and the resignations of Eva Mills (CATI Manager), Anna Buratti, Belinda Murray and Mary O’Dowd (research staff), Margaret Jenkins, Kathleen McHugh and Angela Mackie (administrative staff).

During the year two appointments were made: Professor Peter Saunders as Research Manager and Ms Christine Stojanovski as receptionist.

Workplace Diversity

As a Commonwealth-funded agency, the Australian Institute of Family Studies is committed to the active pursuit of the principles of Workplace Diversity. The Institute is adopting the Workplace Diversity Strategy, the intent of which is to ensure that its research reflects the diversity of families in Australia, and that the Institute’s information and related services are accessible and relevant to all members of the Australian community.

Within the Institute, diversity issues are addressed in the context of an Institute Consultative Committee (ICC) comprising representatives of management and staff.

Workforce Planning

As indicated earlier in this report, planning for the new triennial research plan has been completed together with a new staffing structure to complement the plan. Resources continue to be invested in ensuring that staff are exposed to new developments in family policy and implementation. For instance, several senior officers from the new Department of Family and Community Services have visited the Institute to brief staff on relevant issues.

During the year, resources have also been invested in competency-based training and career enhancement.

Financial and staffing resources summary (all programs) \$'000s			
	Actual 1997–98	Actual 1998–99	Budget 1999–2000
Budgetary basis			
Revenue from Government:			
Departmental Outputs	3240	3236	3444
Total Revenue from Government	3240	3236	3444
Less adjustments	-	-	-
Total outlays	3240	3236	3444
Staffing			
Staff years (actual)	37.67	35.92	38.42

Agency Bargaining

The Australian Institute of Family Studies Certified Agreement 1998–2000 was certified by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in October 1998. Currently Institute management is developing the Australian Workplace Agreements for Executive Grade 1 and 2 members of staff.

Business Management

Financial arrangements for the introduction of accrual budgeting and accounting, including revised portfolio budget statements, have now been finalised.

The Institute remains in a strong financial position. Financial Reports for 1998–99 are contained in Section 8 of this Annual Report.

Internal and External Scrutiny

There has been no significant comment on issues relating to the Institute in 1998–99. The External Audit Report relating to the 1998–99 financial statements contains no qualifications. Suggestions made by the Australian National Audit Office to improve some processes associated with the financial statements will be addressed immediately.

Summary table of resources

Reconciliation of Programs and Appropriation Elements for 1998–99 \$('000)

	A +	B +	C +	D	= E	– F	= G
Program Number	Approp.Bills Nos 1 & 3	Approp.Bills Nos 2 & 4	Special Approps	Annotated Approps	Program Approps	Adjustments	Program Outlays
1	3236	–	–	–	–	–	3236
Total	3236	–	–	–	–	–	3236