



# 'Building a Better Child Support Agency' Reforms Package

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*This media backgrounder is intended as a tool to assist journalists in understanding service delivery and legislative issues relating to child support.*

## Background

The Australian Child Support Scheme was established in 1988. It differs from most other child support schemes around the world because it is administered by government rather than being a primarily court-based system.

The primary focus of the Child Support Agency (CSA) from 1988 until 2005 was meeting the legislative requirements to collect and transfer child support for the benefit of children. This focus on efficiency led to success as a collection agency and CSA became a world leader in the public administration of child support. However, CSA's efficiency-based approach was perceived by customers, their representatives and stakeholders as insensitive, inconsistent and unaccountable.

In recent years, the nature of separated parenting has changed. Today, the primary concerns of many separating and separated parents are relationship based issues like care and shared parental decision making.

The CSA needed to make a substantial shift from a focus on higher efficiency to delivering higher quality and sensitive customer service.

## BBCSA

In 2005, the Government committed to investing \$150 million over four years through the 'Building a Better CSA' (BBCSA) reforms package. BBCSA is a comprehensive range of initiatives designed to improve service delivery to CSA customers – 1.4 million separated parents, around 1.2 million children – as well as improved engagement with stakeholders and the community.

An implementation plan was developed and was framed against three major service delivery objectives.

- 1) Develop a customer-focused approach to service delivery, characterised by more accessible, consistent, responsive, professional, accountable and empathetic interactions with customers (funding \$106 million)
- 2) Develop a customer-focused organisational culture that eliminates bias and community perceptions of the need for greater procedural fairness in customer outcomes (funding \$23 million)
- 3) Increase proactive engagement with parents and stakeholders to provide a better understanding of their rights, responsibilities and options under the child support system, and the role of CSA within the family law system (funding \$22 million)

Customer feedback indicates BBCSA is well on its way to achieving its goals. Since the introduction of BBCSA regular customer satisfaction surveys show that customer satisfaction has increased (based on a seven point



scale, with 1 being 'very dissatisfied' and 7 being 'very satisfied').

<b>Month/Year</b>	<b>Rating</b>
December 2004	5.42
December 2005	5.75
December 2006	5.74
December 2007	5.8

During 2006-2007 the CSA received only 9,151 complaints representing only 0.63 per cent of its 1.45 million customers. This compares favorably with 2004-2005, when 12,274 formal complaints were lodged, which is 0.9 per cent of the 1.36 million customers.

A nationwide survey of customers in August 2007 found that 74 per cent of parents receiving child support and 60 per cent of customers paying child support agreed that the CSA is improving its service delivery to customers. Further, 59 per cent of receiving parents and 48 per cent of paying parents also agreed that CSA is now communicating better with parents, the community and stakeholders and overall 99 per cent of parents are satisfied with CSA's new communication products like its regular newsletter, self help products and guide for new customers.

### **Implementation**

#### **Year 1, 2005-2006**

CSA focused on customer communication and stakeholder engagement, resolving individual customer problems, and developing the rest of the BBCSA program and wider Child Support Scheme reforms agenda. CSA also conducted qualitative and quantitative research to obtain customer, community and stakeholder input and to establish benchmarks for measuring future improvements to service delivery. A customer receipt was introduced to improve transparency of advice.

#### **Year 2, 2006-2007**

CSA continued the work started in Year 1 while also focusing on:

- A new Service Delivery Model was implemented to ensure customers receive service better aligned with their needs.
- Team sizes were reduced to no more than 12 and more than 100 new team leaders were hired to ensure a strong focus on people management and thereby increase service outcomes.



- Personalised Services teams were introduced to better support parents with complex issues.
- Five new Regional Service Centres (RSCs) were opened (CSA now has a total of 27 RSCs) to offer increased face-to-face services for customers in regional areas.

### *Increased online services*

- CSA's online services expanded with the award-winning CSAonline service enabling customers to perform many transactions online at a time that suits them. As at 11 February 2008 there are 59,673 parents and 3,178 employers on-line.

### *Call recording*

- Call recording was introduced further improving transparency and accountability.

### *Increased training in technical and customer service skills aligned with process improvement*

- Customer service expectations were defined using research and the new Customer Commitment was developed and communicated to customers.
- CSA procedures were reviewed to ensure customer issues relating to fairness were addressed and better customer service would result
- CSA staff received four days of Customer Focus training and CSA's new Customer Commitment and (internal) Customer Service Principles drive CSA's customer interactions to ensure better outcomes.

### *Revised customer letters and forms*

- CSA reviewed and improved all its system-generated letters and forms to meet customer expectations.
- As at 6 January 2008, 72 per cent of CSA's letters are available on-line.

### *Ongoing education and communication strategy for customers and stakeholders*

- Coordinated programs and communication tools were improved to ensure customer needs were better met, including special audiences such as Indigenous and multicultural customers, employers, and stakeholders.
- Increased education and communication programs have informed parents and the community in plain English and promoted greater voluntary compliance along with ensuring high awareness of support services and products.
- More Community Information Sessions were held and promoted along with other service options to ensure customers were aware of their choices and rights.

### *Engaging and working with stakeholders*



- The new Child Support National Stakeholder Engagement Group met for the first time in March 2007, and continues to meet at least quarterly to strengthen and develop the relationships with key stakeholders and other service providers. State engagement groups were enhanced to ensure improved local engagement.

### *Increased production and distribution of information and support products*

- A publications hotline and online ordering system was established in July 06, which with added promotion resulted in more than 1.5 million products put in the hands of parents who need them.
- Two new popular, heralded and high demand publications were produced: "Me and My Changing Family" and "A Teens Guide to separation". All support publications were translated and marketed to multicultural customers and intermediaries and put on the website as MP3 files, products for Indigenous customers were scoped and developed, a regular CSA newsletter was distributed to customers and a detailed brochure explaining customers' rights and options following CSA decisions was produced and inserted into every CSA decision letter.

### **2007-2008**

CSA continues to focus on finalising implementation of the above initiative and extending improvements made to date under the BBCSA program, and implement the Child Support Scheme Reforms program.

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