



Parents Advisory Group – Meeting 9

Communique

The Parents Advisory Group (the Group) held its ninth meeting in-person in Adelaide on 21 October 2025. The Group consists of parent representatives, community organisations and an academic expert. The community organisations attending the meeting included:

- Antipoverty Centre
- Australian Council of Social Service
- Brave Foundation
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- Council of Single Mothers and their Children
- Single Mother Families Australia
- Settlement Council of Australia

The Group welcomed the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, and the Hon Patrick Gorman MP, Assistant Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. The Ministers thanked members for their insights and ongoing contributions to Parent Pathways, noting the upcoming first anniversary of the service and reaffirming the government’s commitment to continuous improvement. The Ministers highlighted:

- The value of bringing parents’ voices directly into policy design.
- The need to strengthen referral pathways and broaden awareness of the service.
- Ongoing work required to ensure the service remains voluntary, person-centred, flexible and supportive.

Members provided thoughtful reflections on their experiences, community feedback and opportunities for strengthening Parent Pathways. In discussion with the Ministers, members:

- Acknowledged the importance of having parents’ voices and lived experience centred within Parent Pathways
- Expressed support for the voluntary nature of Parent Pathways, its holistic support model, and improved rapport between mentors and participants.
- Emphasised the importance of trust building and the substantial time this takes, particularly for parents who have had adverse experiences with compulsory employment programs.
- Reiterated their concerns about the eligibility ending once parents’ youngest child turned 6 years of age, noting ongoing barriers faced by parents beyond this age.
- Suggested the department trial and explore options to continue support for parents who still require assistance after their youngest child turns 6.
- Noted strong interest in the potential for online or hybrid delivery options to better meet the diverse needs and circumstances of parents and carers.
- Expressed disappointment in the tender process and suggested improvement for future processes.

The Department provided an update on the Parent Pathways service as it approached 12 months of operation. Updates covered the intention to release new mandatory training modules in 2026 for provider staff (mental health first aid, cultural responsiveness, and parent practices); release of both the [Parent Pathways Evaluation Strategy 2024-2027](#) and the Department's first [Complaints Service Report](#); and enhancements to IT features to improve staff and user experience. The Department provided an overview of the Parent Pathways service data as at 30 September 2025 (<https://www.dewr.gov.au/employment-services-data/parent-pathways-data>).

The Department also provided a holistic overview of the participant journey; from the time they connect with Parent Pathways to the time they transfer or exit the service. The Department highlighted that across all points of the journey, Parent Pathways aims to deliver high-quality, personalised, flexible and meaningful support and parents are reminded of the voluntary nature of the service.

Across the participant journey, members shared feedback on practical ways to improve the service for participants, such as focusing on strengthening communication, accessibility and trust, including through community networks, improved service navigation, and culturally appropriate outreach. Members raised that:

- Trust is a major barrier due to past negative experiences and fear of payment impacts. Members stressed the need for strong, transparent messaging about the voluntary, supportive nature of Parent Pathways.
- Human connection is essential, and more human touchpoints are needed. Members emphasised that real conversations and trusted community organisations are often the most effective referral pathways.
- There are opportunities to increase visibility through:
 - accessible digital information,
 - community based information sessions,
 - improved searchability and clarity of service information online,
 - posters and materials in familiar child-friendly settings,
 - success stories to illustrate benefits and real-life experiences, and
 - appropriate engagement with culturally and linguistically diverse parents.
- Online servicing options would likely reduce drop-out rates for time-poor parents and increase accessibility for all parents.
- Need for providers to build trust through transparency, consistency, and better community engagement.
- Providers and community groups are sometimes uncertain about the service offer, leading to missed referrals or reluctance to recommend the service.
- There are ongoing concerns about the contrast between the supportive Parent Pathways model and mainstream employment services and how this may undermine parents' trust and progress.

Parent Pathways mentors and one participant joined the meeting and shared their practical experiences of delivering and receiving services, highlighting:

- The importance of smaller caseloads in enabling meaningful support.
- Key challenges for participants related to financial stress, mental health, housing and caring responsibilities.
- The value of flexible goal setting, confidence building and personalised support.
- Improved experiences and morale for both staff and participants throughout Parent Pathways, compared with previous programs.

The Department advised that the Terms of Reference and membership of the Parents Advisory Group were due to be reviewed, and that this process would commence in November 2025. The Department provided information regarding an opportunity for members to participate in discussions with the Department's evaluation research partner, to provide their insights on how Parent Pathways is working and potential areas for improvement.

The next meeting will be virtual and take place in December 2025.