



Children's Contact Services – Selection Process for Locations for Grant Opportunity

Children's Contact Services (CCSs) play a critical role in the family law system, providing a child-focused and safe environment for supervised contact and facilitated changeovers for families who are unable to safely manage contact arrangements for their children. In the 2021-22 Federal Budget, the Australian Government provided additional funding of \$101.4 million for CCSs, including:

- ongoing funding of \$68.8 million over four years from 2021-22 to enhance the 64 existing CCSs, and
- ongoing funding of \$27.5 million over three years from 2022-23 to establish 20 new CCSs.

This funding aims to increase capacity of services, reduce waiting times and fill geographical gaps in delivery – particularly for regional, rural and remote areas, where access to services can be limited.

On 11 March 2022, the Attorney-General, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, invited applications for funding through a grant opportunity to establish the new CCSs in 20 locations, which are listed at **Appendix A**. Applications are due by 12 April 2022. To identify the 20 locations, the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department (AGD) used a methodology that considered locations according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4) framework,¹ and weighted relevant factors to assess demand. This was informed by analysis of relevant data and research, and public consultations through an online survey on a draft methodology² that ran from 26 October to 16 November 2021. AGD received 81 responses to the survey.

The exact location of each service (town or suburb within the selected SA4s) will ultimately be determined based on applications received for the grant opportunity. These will be assessed through an Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) Community Grants Hub selection process which includes representatives from DSS and AGD.

Summary of methodology

To identify the locations with the greatest demand for additional services, AGD assessed the following factors to estimate demand, weighted at 50:30:20 percent respectively:

- proximity to the nearest Australian Government funded CCS
- estimated disadvantage based on the Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA), and
- target cohort population per CCS.

AGD then conducted a manual review of the SA4s ranked highest in estimated demand, to rule out the possibility of disadvantaging some areas through the over-saturation of new services in other areas. These factors and relevant considerations are outlined in further detail below.

¹ The ABS Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) framework for 2011, has been used in the application of this methodology. SA4s are the largest sub-State geographical areas as defined by the ABS. While in regional areas, SA4s tend to have populations somewhere between (100,000 - 300,000), metropolitan areas tend to have larger populations (300,000 - 500,000). Grant agreements for all Family Law Services funded under the Family Relationship Services Program, including CCSs, define service delivery area by SA4.

² The draft methodology is available at: <https://consultations.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/childrens-contact-services/>

Factor 1: Proximity to the nearest CCS – weighted at 50%

This factor considers the locations of the 64 CCS providers currently funded by the Australian Government (in their known main service location) and estimates the distance and time travelled by families in order to access their nearest government funded CCS. This factor was calculated as follows:

- The initial calculation was undertaken at the SA3 level (one step below SA4 – [see ABS for more](#)) rather than by SA4. This increases accuracy by allowing for more precise calculations. Post calculation, aggregation to an SA4 level was then undertaken to ensure the alignment of this factor to the broader methodology.
- In measuring distance to the nearest CCS, the point measured was a population centre³ rather than the geographic centre. Measuring from the geographic centre of a location is problematic, as it does not appropriately account for communities on the border of the region.
- Instead of using kilometres as the unit of measure, this factor used time travelled in minutes.⁴ This is a more accurate representation as it accounts for actual time travelled as opposed to distance, which does not account for differing speed limits, high-volume streets or travel along highways.
- Time in minutes between the chosen location and the closest CCS was multiplied by the population.
 - Population was considered recognising that there are some very large SA4s with a small population. A distance measure which didn't consider population would inappropriately preference these SA4s, and would not accurately indicate higher demand.
- SA4s with the highest total of time by population were ranked the highest.

Consultation with stakeholders indicated that proximity to the nearest CCS was the key factor influencing relative demand for a new service. As a result, this factor was assigned 50 percent of the total weighting.

Factor 2: Estimated disadvantage based on SEIFA – weighted at 30%

This factor takes account of overall levels of disadvantage for a statistical area, which recognises that clients of the family law system commonly face higher levels of disadvantage, such as lower incomes and levels of educational attainment, as well as being more dependent on government benefits.

The ABS Index of Relative Socio Economic (IRSD) measure of SEIFA uses 16 variables to determine an overall level of disadvantage for a statistical area. For example, the percentage of people with low income households (between \$1 and \$25,999 per year), the percentage of people aged over 15 with no educational attainment, and the percentage of people with children under 15 years old who live with jobless parents. A lower SEIFA score indicates a greater level of disadvantage.

Consultation with stakeholders indicated that SEIFA was the most appropriate method of assessing disadvantage, and that this factor was important, though less influential, than proximity to the nearest service. As a result, estimated disadvantage based on the IRSD index of SEIFA was assigned 30 percent of the total weighting. Each SA4 was ranked according to their SEIFA value to assess relative disadvantage.

³ AGD examined each of the 339 SA3 regions individually to choose a location in each of these SA3s that accounted for both geographic and population centres of each SA3.

⁴ Time traveled was calculated using Google Maps, at a consistent time of 2-4 pm in the afternoon.

Factor 3: Target cohort population per CCS – weighted at 20%

This factor prioritises providing services for a target cohort of children aged 0–14 years, reflecting that children are the primary clients of CCSs. While the key target cohort of other family law services is 25-49-year-olds, this approach assumes that the percentage of adults likely to need CCSs will fluctuate based on numbers of families without children and the number of separating families, and the fact that CCSs also provide services to other members of the family not captured by this age range (such as grandparents).

Consultation with stakeholders indicated that this factor was important, but less important than the above two factors, and it was allocated the remaining 20 percent of weighting. The target cohort population per SA4 was divided by the number of existing CCSs in the SA4 (plus one additional CCS⁵) and SA4s were then ranked according to the highest proportion of the target cohort population per CCS.

Factors that were excluded

In developing the methodology, the department undertook an analysis of each of the factors listed below and assessed whether the factor was relevant and/or measurable. This helped to inform whether the factor was included in the methodology as it was developed. The analysis for each factor has been summarised below.

Factor	Relevant?	Measurable?
Family Violence Statistics	Yes. Australian and International research has highlighted domestic and family violence as a shared experience of some families using CCS.	No. Consistent national dataset not available. Several statistical data sets (including ABS recorded crime statistics) were considered but were not found to be appropriate, as data is collected and recorded differently across jurisdictions.
Current CCS Waiting Times	Yes. Longer waiting times in an existing CCS could indicate demand for additional services.	No. The dataset could be accessible through grant program reporting, however it would not be available in sufficient time to inform the methodology.
Additional funding to current services	Yes. The increase to funding for existing services will impact the demand for new services in the areas currently serviced by the existing CCSs.	No. Consistent, point in time information from all providers not available.
Court filings/location of courts as a factor	Yes. The number of court filings in a particular registry might indicate areas of higher demand for court ordered CCSs.	No. AGD does not hold consolidated data on court registry filings, and this data is not available at an SA4 level. AGD could request this data from the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia, however it would not be available in sufficient time to inform the methodology.
Alcohol consumption as a factor	Not adequately demonstrated. A Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs report lists alcohol consumption as a high-risk contributor to marriage breakdown, ⁶ which could indicate a greater demand for CCSs. However, AGD did not identify any direct evidence to conclude a correlation between alcohol consumption and use of a CCS.	Yes. Data on alcohol consumption is available from the HILDA Survey 2019, using variable 'days per week a person drinks alcohol'.

⁵ The addition of one CCS to every SA4 ensures that the calculation accurately compares SA4s without any existing centres to SA4s with existing centres. This is a common statistical method.

⁶ Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, 1998, To have and to hold: Strategies to strengthen marriage and relationships.

Factor	Relevant?	Measurable?
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) population	Not adequately demonstrated. AGD does not hold any data which would indicate that indicate that ATSI populations use CCSs at a higher rate.	Yes. ATSI population compared to total population can be measured at the required statistical area level, using data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) population	Not adequately demonstrated. AGD does not hold any data which would indicate that Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) populations use CCSs at a higher rate.	Yes. CALD population compared to total population can be measured at the required statistical area level, using data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Final calculation

To determine estimated demand by SA4, the corresponding rank for the three key factors outlined above was multiplied by the weighting for each factor, and figures were then totalled for each SA4 to provide a final rank. The SA4 with the lowest value according to this ranking was considered to have the highest demand.

AGD then manually examined each of the highest ranking SA4s, in conjunction with the neighbouring SA4s which also appeared in the list, to assess whether it would be appropriate to exclude an SA4 for any reason. For example, two high ranked SA4s border each other and, despite the two SA4s neighbouring each other, their geographic size and spread of population across the total area provided no reason for exclusion, as clients in either SA4 were not likely to be serviced by the establishment of a new CCS in the other, due to the size and location of the areas. In contrast, comparing the next two SA4s, it could be seen that establishing a new CCS in either SA4 would service clients across both SA4s with relative convenience. Further, the establishment of one new CCS in either SA4 would reduce pressure on the existing services in the area. For this reason, one was excluded, with the furthest SA4 from an existing service remaining in the list for the grant opportunity.

This process was completed for all SA4s on the list, including where an SA4 was drawn into the top 20 based on the exclusion of an SA4 through the above process.

Acknowledgment and Questions

AGD extends its thanks to stakeholders for the substantial contribution their input made to the final methodology through public consultations. Questions about policy in relation to CCSs in general can be directed to: FamilyLawServices@ag.gov.au

Any questions in relation to the current grant opportunity, including the methodology for selecting locations, should be directed to support@communitygrants.gov.au

Selected Locations

Statistical Area 4	Classification of area	State
1. Wide Bay	Regional	QLD
2. Queensland – Outback	Remote	QLD
3. Sydney - South West	Metro	NSW
4. Hunter Valley exc Newcastle	Metro	NSW
5. Northern Territory - Outback	Remote	NT
6. Western Australia - Outback (North)	Remote	WA
7. New England and North West	Regional	NSW
8. Melbourne - North West	Metro	VIC
9. Melbourne - Outer East	Metro	VIC
10. Adelaide – North	Metro	SA
11. North West	Regional	VIC
12. Gold Coast	Metro	QLD
13. Far West and Orana	Remote	NSW
14. Perth - North East	Metro	WA
15. Hume	Regional	VIC
16. Barossa - Yorke - Mid North	Regional	SA
17. Latrobe - Gippsland	Regional	VIC
18. Cairns	Regional	QLD
19. Sydney - North Sydney and Hornsby	Metro	NSW
20. Riverina	Regional	NSW