

24 August 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing to you in respect to your comments about the concerns of the systems supporting family and domestic violence, and that all levels of government and the judiciary need to reflect on this, and your promise to act.

Interrelate is a relationships services provider supporting families through early intervention prevention and family law matters. Daily, Interrelate sees clients who identify safety concerns. The Commonwealth Government currently funds Interrelate to deliver a range of programs aimed at supporting individuals and families at critical times in their lives – such as through separation – children, mothers, fathers and extended family members; as victims and perpetrators of family violence; as people experiencing mental health issues; and as people seeking assistance to overcome trauma in their lives.

However, our ability to continue to deliver these programs to the children, families and communities we live in – at current levels – is facing a significant dilemma driven by a potential funding crisis.

In context, the Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) was brought in by the Fair Work Commission in 2012 to bridge the gap in pay for many (mainly women) who deliver social services. At that time, all levels of Government agreed to pay the additional funding (SACS supplementation) required to ensure service levels would not be reduced or jobs lost due to the higher wage rates under the ERO. This support will cease in June 2021.

For Interrelate, the impact of no further SACS Supplementation funding after the 2020/2021 financial year will be catastrophic. This SACS Supplementation funding equates to \$3,328,872 and if cut, will have a detrimental impact on vulnerable individuals and families, particularly those experiencing family violence, relationship breakdown and poor mental health. Interrelate will have no alternative other than to reduce service to 2,454 clients and over 33 staff will lose their jobs.



From these figures, it is evident that Interrelate will be heavily impacted and will need to negotiate with Government to reconfigure some services. In some cases, we will not be able

to deliver existing services (such as Children's Contact Services) in their current form, reducing our hours of operation, reach and number of families that could be supported.

These are the programs that will be affected, and the client needs which won't be met:

- Family Relationship Centres
- Regional Family Dispute Resolution
- Family Dispute Resolution

Dad in Central Coast

I've learnt "That it's about my son's rights to have equal relationship with mum & dad, it's my responsibility to make this happen as best I can."

Dad in Central Coast

I've benefited "Having a much more confident understanding on how to deal with different situations with the other partner and not putting the children in the middle of our disagreement."

- Post Separation Co-operative Parenting
- Children's Contact Services

Dad in Caringbah

"Over the past year, I've come to view Interrelate, it's staff and support services as a God-send in terms of facilitating safe, reliable, warm and fun ongoing contact with my daughter."

- Family Law Counselling

Mum in Central Coast

"I in the last 12 months has helped me understand the complexity of my circumstances without rushing me. I has reached out to specialist services to support me in managing and accepting how to improve my personal situation. "

- Family and Relationship Services
- Family Mental Health Support Services
- Redress Support Services

Female, Lismore

"My counsellor being so supportive, having extensive knowledge of the issues surrounding my presenting issue and providing practical tools that allow me to deal with negative feelings related to my presenting issue."

- Specialist Family Violence

Female, Port Macquarie

"If not referred to interrelate would still be stuck in the same abusive situation. "

Case study: Interrelate's 'Respectful Man' Program

We are dedicated to our purpose and are proactively seeking ways to solve social issues. [This video](#) shows client testimonials from an Interrelate program, **Respectful Man**, which is an initiative of ours in response to domestic and family violence. This 6-week program works with men who want to learn how to change and take responsibility for behaviours in their lives. At

the small cost of \$100 per participant, it is an example of the type of service which we will not have capacity to deliver if the proposed funding cuts force us to reduce staffing levels. The following quotes are from participants in the Respectful Man program:

“I realised there was a little bit of a problem inside of me I guess, and the more I listened to the group, the more I listened to myself, the more I listened to things around me... things slowly started to change.”

“And that’s when the penny dropped, that’s when it hit me. I thought, you’re not a very nice person. I’m not a very nice person.”

“It kind of woke me up. Something triggered and I just went no, I need to start being accountable for me and my actions, and what I’ve done.”

Interrelate is not alone as this is a sector wide issue. The Peak agency of which Interrelate is a member, Family and Relationships Services Australia (FRSA) has been working with the sector on an economic modelling piece to demonstrate the impact of the cessation of the SACS Supplementation across the entire network.

Interrelate has been diligent in driving business process efficiencies, having implemented savings measures after not receiving funding indexation for a three-year period between 2015 and 2018 in the family law services program. These efficiency measures provided a combined total savings of \$1.26m and were directed to providing services to more clients in need. Having already implemented savings measures, there are no further organisational efficiencies for Interrelate to improve on. Interrelate have also continued to look for innovative ways to increase service delivery without increased costs. We are dedicated to our purpose and are proactively seeking ways to solve social issues.

This looming health and social crisis will have a devastating impact on children, families and communities across Australia. We are talking about 100,000 Australians without support, 1,000 Australians out of work and 250 sites shut down, mostly in remote and regional areas. I urge you to consider our plea and to take action on the SACS supplementation funding issue to ensure Family Relationship Services providers like Interrelate can continue delivering essential support services to families including those affected by domestic and family violence. At a time when the effects of COVID-19 are hurting families, this is a small change that must happen. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further.

Yours sincerely,



Patricia Occelli

Chief Executive Officer

Background Information

Interrelate's purpose is empowering people to thrive in their relationships. Our programs and services empower over 135,000 children and families to build and navigate strong, resilient and healthy relationships, from primary school through to adulthood. We deliver services spread across 30+ physical locations (plus online) and we're backed by qualified staff and more than 90 years of trusted expertise in sensitive relationship matters. In addition to our own centres, Interrelate operates 7 Family Relationship Centres on behalf of the Australian Government.

Interrelate have continued to look for innovative ways to increase service delivery without increased costs. We are dedicated to our purpose and are proactively seeking ways to solve social issues. This has been achieved via technology improvements to introduce webchat and skype as options for online service delivery. However, as client complexity continues to increase, the level of service delivery needed is becoming more intensive.

We believe a proactive approach to change the current paradigm is required. Ceasing SACS supplementary will eliminate our opportunity to continue delivering impactful programs and a reduction of support for very vulnerable families, leaving them in an already depleted support system.