

TOWARDS A NATIONAL FAMILY POLICY

CONFERENCE REPORT SYDNEY, MAY 1980

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This unique conference held in Sydney in May 1980 achieved three vital steps. It drew attention to the whole question of family policy and initiated the beginning of a process which will explore the nature of legislation affecting family life.

It brought together on a real work sharing basis politicians, administrators, service personnel, and consumers, in a way which has rarely, if ever, happened in Australia before.

Finally it produced a consensus over a number of key issues which the conference believed to be basic (or fundamental) to the development of any family policy. This issues voted to be of most concern were the following:

- (1) That income maintenance provisions be restructured to take account of family size and age of family members.
- (2) That all functional departments prepare family impact statements in consultation with community groups.
- (3) That the process of developing a national family policy be based on consultation with the widest possible cross-section of the community, using media, existing community structures, institutions and family support

groups.

- (4) That information be provided by all media and other channels to families and communities by Government and other organisations regarding their family policies, benefits and services.
- (5) That all social service benefits be indexed.

Certainly there was some feeling among participants that insufficient time was given to debate over matters of the definition of "family", and "family policy", and whether it was feasible and desirable. The general indication was that a family was to be defined as any unit which was responsible for nurturing children. There were differences expressed about this, particularly in relation to the place of adolescents and older people in the family.

It should be remembered, however, that this was the beginning of a process, and undoubtedly the community together with the policy makers will continue to develop their ideas. The fact that it is happening is salutary.

