Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY)

Operational guidelines

2021–2023
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1. **HIPPY OVERVIEW**

1.1 **Background**
The Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) is a two-year, structured home-based parenting and early childhood learning program that supports parents and carers to be their child’s first teacher. The program builds the confidence and skills of parents and carers to create a positive home learning environment to prepare their child for school. It also offers some parents and carers a supported pathway to employment and fosters local community engagement and leadership.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL), through HIPPY Australia, has an exclusive licence from HIPPY International to run the program in Australia which is delivered in selected disadvantaged communities by existing not-for-profit organisations in each location.

Since 2018, HIPPY has operated in 100 communities across Australia, 50 of which focus on delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. HIPPY benefits around 4,500 children each year.

Further information about HIPPY can be found at:

www.hippyaustralia.org.au

1.2 **Objectives**
The HIPPY objectives are to:

- provide a child with a structured education-focused early learning program at home
- improve children’s preparedness for school and strengthen school participation
- build the confidence and skills of parents and carers to create a positive home learning environment
- support employment and community leadership opportunities for HIPPY coordinators, home tutors and parents
- strengthen communities.

Benefits for children include:

- encourages a love of learning
- maximises chances of enjoyment and doing well at school
- promotes language, numeracy and listening skills
- develops concentration and motor skills
- builds self-esteem and confidence in learning
- improves communication between parents and children.

Benefits for families include:

- helps create a learning environment at home
- increases parents’ knowledge of child development and the way children learn
- provides parents with opportunities to enjoy positive time with their children
- enables parents to be actively involved in their children’s education
- supports parents to meet regularly and promotes a sense of inclusion and connectedness with their community
- increases parents’ self-confidence
- has an overall positive impact on family relationships
- creates local employment and training opportunities.
1.3 Timeframe
These guidelines cover program delivery from 2021 to 2023 inclusive – including continued program delivery in the 100 selected sites.

1.4 Funding
More than $225 million has been allocated from 2014-15 to 2022-23 to support ongoing program delivery of HIPPY in 100 selected communities across Australia.

2. GOVERNANCE AND ASSURANCE

2.1 Operational Management
The department has a comprehensive management approach to ensure sound administrative, decision-making, risk management and financial monitoring processes are in place to protect the integrity of the program.

The funding arrangement manager works with BSL in relation to:

- planning, administration and conduct of funding arrangement management activities
- gathering and analysing evidence to assess funding recipient performance
- identifying risks, issues and improvement opportunities.

The following documents inform and support effective management:

- HIPPY Operational Guidelines 2021–2023
- HIPPY Funding Agreement 2015–2023
- HIPPY Activity Work Plan, including a risk management plan and stakeholder engagement plan, developed by BSL and approved by the department.

2.2 HIPPY Advisory Committee
The HIPPY Advisory Committee provides a forum for discussion on strategic direction and priorities for the HIPPY program delivery. Membership includes representatives from the Department of Social Services (the department), BSL and HIPPY Australia. The National Indigenous Australians Agency supports the HIPPY Advisory Committee by providing strategic advice and direction when required.

The committee meets as required and is chaired alternately by the department and BSL.

2.3 Roles and responsibilities
Department of Social Services
The department is responsible for policy considerations, selection of communities, administration, and managing the Grant Agreement between the department and BSL.

Brotherhood of St Laurence/HIPPY Australia
BSL (through HIPPY Australia) implements and manages the program according to the requirements set out in the grant agreement. The National Manager, HIPPY Australia, is the main point of contact with the department.

BSL has an exclusive licence with HIPPY International to run the program in Australia. BSL has the right to sub-licence in Australia and to enter into arrangements with not-for-profit organisations to deliver the program in the selected communities. The BSL Research and Policy Centre undertakes research on aspects of HIPPY with the prior written approval of the department. For further information see Section 3.5.
HIPPY Australia undertakes development, performance management, quality assurance, provision of program materials and resources, training, site support, networking and liaison with community program providers. HIPPY Australia also undertakes analysis to build the evidence base, national communication and marketing of HIPPY and participation in the International HIPPY network.

Providers

Not-for-profit organisations are selected by BSL, in consultation with the department, through a competitive application process. Selected organisations deliver the program in each HIPPY community in collaboration with the community and in accordance with their sub-licensing and funding agreement with BSL.

3. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

3.1 Delivery model

The HIPPY model has five essential features:

- two-year home-based program
- role play as a learning tool
- parents/carers as home tutors
- home visits and parent groups
- everywhere learning – looking for learning opportunities in everyday settings.

Parents and their children enrol in the program in the year before the child commences formal schooling and participate for two years. Program activities are designed to be integrated into the daily life of the family. Each family participates in a curriculum of structured learning experiences that are aligned to the Early Years Learning Framework under the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care. The first year of HIPPY provides children with 30 activity packs delivered weekly that support literacy, numeracy and motor skills. The second year provides 15 packs delivered fortnightly plus information for parents about children’s learning and development.

In each HIPPY site the contracted not-for-profit organisation delivers the program in collaboration with the local community. It is essential that the provider has an established presence in the community with linkages to other services and connections within the community. Each community program is staffed with a tertiary qualified (or equivalent) coordinator and a team of home tutors.

The coordinator has overall responsibility for the program and is key to the success of program delivery. Coordinators recruit families into HIPPY; supervise home tutors; conduct weekly training sessions with tutors; conduct fortnightly HIPPY parent groups and enrichment opportunities; complete all reports and assessments, and attend all HIPPY training and conferences.

Home tutors live in the community (ideally drawn from the HIPPY parent group but any willing community member can be considered), are paid employees and receive training and support from the coordinator. They work with HIPPY families and deliver the program through home visits and parent groups as well as assisting with parent enrichment activities and maintaining records for each family.

Referral of families

HIPPY is a free, voluntary program, and families may hear about HIPPY from a variety of sources. This may be through referral by other support programs, by word of mouth, friends and family, advertisements in the local paper or through promotional posters around the community. Families may contact the local HIPPY coordinator if they wish to enrol or to find out if they are eligible to participate.

To be eligible to join the program, the family must have a child who will start school in the following year and live in a catchment area where HIPPY is delivered. In addition, from 2019, BSL has been recruiting new families in accordance with its Priority of Access Guidelines to ensure targeted recruitment of disadvantaged families most in need of the program.
Priority access criteria include:

- the household holds a Health Care Card
- the HIPPY child is Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- the HIPPY child resides in out-of-home care
- the household has no income or receives a form of government support payment as their primary source of income
- single-parent families
- the child resides with a carer (i.e. not a parent)
- the main language spoken at home is not English.

3.2 Funding arrangements

The department has a Grant Agreement (2015-2023) with BSL to support the ongoing delivery of HIPPY in 100 communities across Australia.

BSL enters into ‘sub-contracting-type’ arrangements with not-for-profit organisations to deliver the program to the selected HIPPY communities.

There is no cost to families participating in HIPPY. Materials and resources are provided to families free of charge.

The Grant Agreement specifies arrangements and requirements including:

- enrolment and retention targets
- employing HIPPY coordinators and tutors
- new location selection
- provider selection
- performance reporting
- assessment, evaluation and innovative project development.

3.3 Community selection

HIPPY communities were selected by the Australian Government, in consultation with BSL/HIPPY Australia and other key stakeholders.

Phase 1 (first 50 communities) selected between 2009 and 2011

Phase 1 locations (which target disadvantaged areas) were identified using analysis of the Socio-Economic Index for Areas 2006 Scale, Census information, the Australian Standard Geographical Classification, 2009 Australian Early Development Index results, where available. In addition, state and territory departments were consulted to ensure the establishment of the program in a particular area would not clash with current jurisdictional programs that may be similarly targeted.

Phase 2 (additional 50 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focussed communities)—25 selected in 2013

In 2013, the first 25 new HIPPY communities were selected via an expression of interest process, with the following selection criteria considered:

- a focus on communities with a minimum population of 100 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 0-4 year olds
- communities that have a strong need for an early childhood program
- communities that have a strong desire for an early childhood learning program
- communities that have, or have the ability to source, a not-for-profit program provider that has the ability to form strong linkages and relationships within the community and deliver the program at the local level
- geographic spread.
Phase 2 (additional 50 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focussed communities)—25 selected in 2014

The selection of the remaining 25 communities in 2014 was undertaken in a two-staged process. During stage one, communities nominated to have HIPPY delivered in their community from early 2015. In parallel, the department identified communities that met the selection criteria to target locations with high levels of demonstrated vulnerabilities, to ensure geographic coverage and to support other government policy initiatives. For stage two, shortlisted communities participated in information sessions facilitated by HIPPY Australia.

Community selection was determined by the assessment of potential communities against a number of selection criteria and other considerations.

Stage one criteria specified that communities must have:

- a minimum population of 100 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander 0-4 year olds
- a strong need for an early childhood program
- a not-for-profit program provider to deliver the program or the ability to source a suitable provider.

Stage two criteria included (but was not limited to):

- the ability of the community to participate in the program in line with the HIPPY model
- strong community support for HIPPY
- factors that may influence the success and sustainability of HIPPY delivery in the community.

The department used a range of data and information to assess a community’s ability to meet the above criteria and considerations including 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics 0-4 Indigenous population counts; 2012 Australian Early Development Index results (now known as the Australian Early Education Census); 2011 Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas data; Australian Standard Geographical Classification data; other early childhood, education and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs currently operating in the community, and information collected by HIPPY Australia during the sessions conducted in the shortlisted communities.

The department and BSL monitor recruitment rates in each site and Australian Early Development Census scores to ensure the program continues to be delivered in locations most in need.

3.4 Performance and monitoring

Program implementation and delivery will be monitored by the department to ensure HIPPY is delivered according to Australian Government policy priorities as well as according to specific requirements outlined in the Grant Agreement.

Key aspects of program implementation and delivery by BSL (2019-2022) include:

- ongoing program management across all 100 HIPPY sites, including providing advice, mentoring and support to program providers to ensure enrolment numbers are reached and numbers are retained
- ongoing provision of additional support to complex sites, including engaging local strategies in collaboration with providers and communities in line with Practice Agreements
- implementation of recommendations from 2018 ACIL Allen Consulting HIPPY evaluation report
- reviewing and redeveloping the HIPPY curriculum, material and resources to ensure HIPPY continues to reflect evidence informed early learning, parenting and employment approaches and practice
- engaging and collaborating with other services and networks
- establishment of outcomes reporting in the Data Exchange for the HIPPY 2020 cohort onwards.
3.5 Research and evaluation activities

As part of the delivery of HIPPY, BSL is able to conduct in-house research projects to inform program delivery and build the evidence base for HIPPY, for example, by examining effective recruitment and retention strategies and factors affecting participation by HIPPY families. Research will not be commissioned with grant funding unless prior agreement has been received from the department.

Each research proposal is presented, reviewed and assessed by the department with assistance from the department’s Evaluation Unit. The selection criteria used to assess each proposal includes; demonstrated need for the research, appropriateness of the proposed methodology, suitability and ethics process in regards to research involving children, and value for money, plan for implementation of the outcomes.

Independent evaluation activities may be commissioned by the department or BSL and will provide an opportunity to add to the evidence base and measure how effectively HIPPY contributes to key Government policy objectives (such as enhanced parental engagement and improving readiness for school), particularly as compared to other similar programs.

Previous evaluation activities for HIPPY include:

- the evaluation of the national rollout of HIPPY in 2011, undertaken by Monash University in conjunction with BSL
- the evaluation of the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of HIPPY in 2017, undertaken by ACIL Allen Consulting.

3.6 Working with children

The department is committed to ensuring that our work and activities do not expose children to abuse and harm. As part of this commitment, the department has implemented measures to promote the safety of children in all services and activities that the department funds.

In delivering HIPPY program to children, BSL is required to:

- comply with Commonwealth, state and/or territory requirements relating to working with children in the jurisdiction in which the activities are delivered. This includes mandated police checks, working with children checks and working with vulnerable people checks.
- comply with all relevant legislation in jurisdictions relating to mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect as required or otherwise defined by state or territory legislation.
- implement and meet the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.
- submit and annual statement of compliance, specific to the child safety clause in the grant agreement or contract.
- impose the same child safety obligations in subcontract and secondary subcontracts.
- notify the department of any failure to comply with the child safety clauses.
4. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

4.1 Privacy

The department, including its employees, contractors and agents, are subject to the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) (the Privacy Act) and the requirements of the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs) contained in the Privacy Act. The Privacy Act and the APPs regulate the handling of ‘personal information’ of individuals by Australian Government agencies and certain private sector organisations, including the collection, storage, use and disclosure of that information.

The department will, when administering the program, abide by the Privacy Act when handling personal information collected for the purposes of the program.

The department has also imposed on BSL, through the Grant Agreement, an obligation to comply with the Privacy Act and in particular the APPs when providing activities under the Grant Agreement.

For further information about the department’s Privacy Policy, including how to access or correct personal information held by the department or how to make a privacy complaint:

Write to: Privacy Officer
Legal Services Branch
Department of Social Services
GPO Box 9820
CANBERRA ACT 2601
or email: DSSfeedback@dss.gov.au

Privacy complaints may be made directly to the Office of the Australian Privacy Commissioner (OAIC), but will only be actioned where a complaint was made in the first instance to the department but was not dealt with to the complainant’s satisfaction.

4.2 Freedom of information (FOI)

All documents created or held by the department in relation to the program are subject to the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (FOI Act). If a request is made under the FOI Act for access to a document subject to the FOI Act, then that document will be made publicly available, unless it can be demonstrated that the document falls under an exemption provision, or a conditional exemption provision and disclosure would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest, as specified in the FOI Act.

All FOI requests are to be referred to:

Freedom of Information Team
Government and Executive Services Branch
Department of Social Services
GPO Box 9820
CANBERRA ACT 2601
or email: foi@dss.gov.au

Decisions regarding requests for access to documents will be made by an authorised FOI decision-maker in accordance with the FOI Act.

4.3 False and misleading information

Giving false or misleading information to the Commonwealth is a serious offence.
4.4 **Grant publication**
The department is also obliged to publish details of all grants on its website. Published information includes the name of the funding recipient, the contract amount, a description of the project, and relevant dates.

4.5 **Complaints**
A complaint is defined as “any expression of dissatisfaction with a product or service offered or provided”, (Australian Standard, AS4269–1995).

The department has a formal complaints service and an unsuccessful community organisation or service provider can lodge a complaint by:

**Telephone:** 1800 634 035  
**Email:** complaints@dss.gov.au  
**Post:** DSS Internal Audit and Complaints Section  
GPO Box 9820  
Canberra ACT 2601

The department has a ‘complaints recording system’ to capture complaints to the department about any of its services or those delivered by funded service providers.

For the purposes of the department’s complaints recording system, a ‘complaint’ does not include:

- ministerial correspondence  
- Freedom of Information requests  
- complaints made to service providers, as these will be covered by their own complaints mechanisms required under sub-licensing arrangements.

If a service provider or community organisation is dissatisfied at any time with our handling of their complaint, they can also contact the Commonwealth Ombudsman at www.ombudsman.gov.au.