Supporting Vulnerable Families in the Early Years

NSW Kids and Families have established *Sustaining NSW Families (SNF)* to support vulnerable families with young children in five locations across NSW.

*SNF* is one of a number of NSW Government initiatives to support families to ensure that children in NSW are healthy, happy and safe and grow up in families where they have the opportunities to reach their full potential.

The program fulfils a key recommendation from the NSW *Keep Them Safe* plan to provide integrated, multi-disciplinary child and family services in locations of greatest need, and by outreach, if necessary.

The program has the potential to make a significant impact on the health, development and wellbeing of vulnerable children.

What is the *Sustaining NSW Families* Program?

**How do families benefit from *Sustaining NSW Families* programs?**

Evidence from previous local and international health home visiting programs has shown that families benefit through improved home environment; secure parent-child relationships; child development; and increased immunisation and breastfeeding maintenance rates, as well as decreased rates of child abuse and neglect.

*SNF* is an integrated, high-intensity sustained health home visiting service that strengthens relationships between children, parents, and/or carers; builds parenting capacity; and enhances child development, wellbeing, and health in vulnerable families.

The program has been designed for families experiencing social and economic disadvantage, who are vulnerable and who have associated impacts on their mental health and wellbeing.

*SNF* is led by nurses and is offered free to eligible families, ideally starting during pregnancy and continuing until the child’s second birthday.

This prevention and early intervention program assists vulnerable families to parent well, despite adversity, and involves:

- a partnership and strengths-based approach to working with families
- regular detailed assessments of children and families, and early referral when issues impacting quality parenting are identified
- a structured, positive parenting program
- anticipatory guidance to prepare parents for the transition to parenting and for each phase of their child’s development
• health promotion and brief interventions to ensure a healthy and stimulating environment for children

SNF clinicians work in partnership with other service providers, including General Practitioners. Families continue to receive maternity care from their preferred health provider.

The program also complements the range of universal services provided by child and family health services. SNF is available to families receiving care from Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Health Services (AMIHS), and Aboriginal Medical Services.

The Sustaining NSW Families Teams

Each SNF team consists of a Nurse Coordinator, six Child and Family Health nurses and a Social worker.

In addition, the core clinical team is supported by other health professionals, including Allied Health Therapists, Perinatal Psychiatrists or Psychologists, Dieticians, Drug and Alcohol Counsellors, and in some teams a Multicultural Liaison Officer and an Aboriginal Health Education Officer. This secondary-tier team works with the nurses to assist parents with addressing any issues that may be impacting their parenting, contributes to case management and review, and facilitates referrals to other secondary and tertiary services for families requiring a higher level of care.

Where is the Sustaining NSW Families program available?

SNF is currently offered in the following geographical locations:
• Wyong
• Maitland/Kurri Kurri/Cessnock
• Fairfield/Liverpool
• Arncliffe
• Kyogle/Lismore/Richmond Valley

Eligibility and Referral to the Sustaining NSW Families Program

Eligible families are those who reside in any of the SNF program’s geographical locations and who are vulnerable or at risk of poorer child health and development and maternal health and wellbeing. It is important to note that evidence supports the program being most effective for families who are experiencing particular risk factors, and is therefore only offered to families who meet specific criteria.

Families are identified through the comprehensive health assessment provided universally to all pregnant women who are booking into a public hospital. As part of this health assessment, all NSW Health providers of antenatal and community-based child and family health services are required to
offer the SAFESTART assessment in order to identify psychosocial factors that may have an impact on the mental health and wellbeing of mothers and their children.

Potential referrals are discussed within multidisciplinary case teams before being referred to the SNF Clinical Coordinator who will visit the family to further assess the family’s interest, suitability and eligibility, and to seek their consent to participate in the program.

Families who choose not to access the public health system may also be referred to the program, provided they meet the eligibility criteria and undergo an equivalent assessment through a private health care provider.

The program should, wherever possible, be commenced early in pregnancy; however, families with infants under four weeks of age can be considered under certain circumstances. The locations of the program sites were chosen because many families residing in these locations experience social and economic disadvantage, a known risk factor for poor child health and development outcomes.

Where do I find out more?

To find out more about the program, contact the Sustaining NSW Families Clinical Coordinator at the relevant site below.

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<th>Site</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Fax</th>
<th>Email</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wyong</td>
<td>(02) 4356 9411</td>
<td>(02) 4356 9425</td>
<td><a href="mailto:CCLHD-SNF@health.nsw.gov.au">CCLHD-SNF@health.nsw.gov.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Maitland/ Kurri Kurri/ Cessnock</td>
<td>(02) 4936 3282 (Admin)</td>
<td>(02) 4936 3281</td>
<td><a href="mailto:snf@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au">snf@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au</a></td>
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<td>(02) 4936 3339 (Direct line)</td>
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<td>Fairfield/ Liverpool</td>
<td>(02) 8717 1721</td>
<td>(02) 8717 1727</td>
<td><a href="mailto:SNF@sswahs.nsw.gov.au">SNF@sswahs.nsw.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arncliffe</td>
<td>(02) 9503 9600</td>
<td>(02) 9599 2832</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Sustaining_NSW_Families@sesiah.s.health.nsw.gov.au">Sustaining_NSW_Families@sesiah.s.health.nsw.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyogle/ Lismore/ Richmond Valley</td>
<td>(02) 6629 4983</td>
<td>(02) 6620 2963</td>
<td><a href="mailto:SustainingNSWFamilies@ncahs.health.nsw.gov.au">SustainingNSWFamilies@ncahs.health.nsw.gov.au</a></td>
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Contact: Child and Family Health