## The Common Elements Approach for Child and Family Services

### What are common elements?

Evidence-informed common practice elements (common elements) are discrete techniques or sets of strategies used to engage clients (e.g. seeking feedback, being culturally responsive) and to facilitate changes in attitudes or behaviours (e.g. goal-setting, motivational interviewing).

They are:

* Discrete techniques or sets of strategies
  + Engage clients (e.g. seeking feedback)
  + Facilitate changes in client attitudes or behaviours (e.g. motivation interviewing)
* Evidence-informed
  + Found across programs or interventions that have been shown to be effective (thus “common”)
  + Based on evidence from multiple sources (e.g. theory, practice handbooks, multidisciplinary research)
* Used flexibly in response to client needs and desired outcomes

**For more information on evidence-informed practice see the EIP factsheet.**

## How are the common elements used in practice?

Evidence-informed practice is the integration of best research evidence with practice expertise and client values. Practitioner decision-making is at the core of evidence-informed practice and is central to using common elements. Developing a service response is not simply a matter of selecting a common element from a list of evidence-supported options. Instead, a practitioner uses their professional judgement and knowledge to consider a range of contributing factors including the client’s needs, circumstances, preferences and values and the desired outcome.

Given this, the decision-making process inherent to effective use of common elements in practice is no simple matter. Practice guides, an implementation framework and individually tailored plans, and ongoing implementation support are all useful in supporting practitioners to engage in evidence-informed decision-making when using common elements.

## What is the Common Elements Approach?

The Common Elements Approach is a trial in five sites across a range of Victorian settings for implementing the common elements in child and family services. It is complementary to evidence-based programs and will build on and support good practice across the sector. The purpose of this approach is to:

* promote a shared understanding of good practice
* provide the right implementation supports
* focus on how services are delivered to support the effectiveness of what is currently delivered.

The trial comprises developing a number of common elements and a supporting implementation framework.

### The common elements

Based on a review of the evidence, and informed by sector consultations, a range of common elements have been identified for testing and refinement. The common elements have been chosen to capture practices that are widely accepted as universally relevant across the child and family service system. For the trial, the common elements fall into two categories; common elements for engagement and common elements for behaviour change.

#### Common elements practice guides

Tailored practice guides for each of the common elements will be developed for the trial. They will provide practitioners with information on how to effectively delivery each common element. Each practice guide, underpinned by strong theory and best practice evidence, is designed as a foundational ‘how to’ guide for practitioners to apply the practice with clients.

**For more detailed information on the common elements in the trial, please refer to the Common Elements Approach Information Sheet.**

### Implementation framework

Putting common elements into practice across the Victorian service setting will require careful support and guidance that is tailored to the needs of individual organisations. An implementation framework will be used to guide the approach and will form the basis of site-specific implementation plans. The illustration below illustrates the stages of implementation for the trial.

**Stages of implementation of the Common Elements Approach**

For more detailed information on the Common Elements Approach, please see the Common Elements Approach Information Sheet.

### Development of the Common Elements Approach

The Department of Health and Human Services, the Centre for Evidence and Implementation and the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare are partnering to trial the implementation of the Common Elements Approach across a number of child and family service delivery settings (e.g. family, care, leaving and care services) during 2019.

This trial is part of a redesign of the child and family service system, which aims to provide a more integrated and person-centred service system that is informed by principles of self-determination, client voice and experience, the best available research evidence and builds on the skills and expertise of the workforce.

The trial will build on existing practice knowledge, experience and expertise, with a view to increasing the consistent use of common elements across the child and family service system. The Common Elements Approach is designed to:

* value and incorporate client experience, and perspectives
* enhance consistency of practice within and across child and family services
* embed evidence-informed approaches into ‘business as usual’.

The purpose of the trial is to:

* understand what is required to effectively implement the Common Elements Approach, including the facilitators and barriers
* build implementation support such as leadership, training, coaching and feedback loops
* understand the extent to which the Common Elements Approach is acceptable and feasible for families, practitioners, leadership teams and other stakeholders
* better understand the potential benefits of the Common Elements Approach for clients.