



An Australian Government Initiative



A New Family Law System

**A message from the Attorney-General,
the Hon Philip Ruddock MP**

The Australian Government is making the most significant reforms in 30 years to the family law system, to protect the best interests of Australia's children. The Government wants to bring about a cultural change in the way family breakdowns are handled. Separating parents should be able to sit down across the table and agree on what is best for their children, rather than fighting in the courtroom.

Currently, more than one million children in Australia have a parent living elsewhere. One in four children from separated families sees their non-resident parent only once a year, or not at all.

The Government believes children have a right to know both their parents and both parents have a responsibility to raise their children, even after a relationship has ended, where this does not put children in a harmful situation.

We are providing \$397 million over four years—the biggest ever investment in the family law system—to give parents the support they need to do the best for their children, whether through providing resources to help parents work out their difficulties and stay together, or supporting them through the process of separation and divorce.

A major part of our investment is a network of Family Relationship Centres throughout Australia. These centres will provide support and assistance to people in all stages of relationships, whether you are thinking about getting married, seeking parenting advice or need help in the difficult time after separation.

The first 15 centres will be established in Lismore, Sutherland, Wollongong, Penrith, Mildura, Sunshine, Frankston, Ringwood, Townsville, Strathpine, Joondalup, Salisbury, Hobart, Darwin and Canberra.

We are working to have the first centre ready to open its doors to families by the middle of next year.



Fifty more centres will then be set up around Australia in the following two years.

I hope some of your questions about the reforms and the Government's new Family Relationship Centres are answered in the following pages.

If you would like more information, or to let us know how you think the centres should be developed, please E-mail: familylawreforms@ag.gov.au or call (02) 6234 4876—your input is vitally important in making these centres become an everyday part of the lives of Australian families.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Philip Ruddock', with a large, stylized initial 'P'.

PHILIP RUDDOCK
ATTORNEY-GENERAL