

Statutory kinship care across Australia – A comparative view



An activity of the ACWA advocacy project
Kinship Care: Making It a National Issue



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What did we do?

- Starting point: templates from 2009 national kinship care forum (Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW).
- Updated to reflect some known current issues.
- Review by Steering Group & Reference Group.
- Sent to senior OHC managers 14 June, with requested return 6 July.
- Follow up process.



Results



... a selection of those of greatest relevance to advancing the wellbeing and support of children in statutory kinship care and their carers.

A couple of general comments...

- The information provided is the information provided.

The data cannot tell us:

- the outcomes in terms of children's safety and well-being
- the extent to which regional offices are able to consistently implement policy and guidelines given their workloads and other constraints.



- A general impression – The 3 smaller jurisdictions appear to be ahead in terms of responsiveness to the unique features of kinship care, standard-setting and innovation.



Kinship care – definitions



1. Family-based care within the child's extended family or with close friends of the family known to the child, whether formal or informal in nature (United Nations General Assembly, 2010).
2. Statutory relative/kinship care is where the caregiver is a relative (other than parents), considered to be family or a close friend, or is a member of the child or young person's community (in accordance with their culture) who is reimbursed by the state/territory for the care of the child (AIHW, 2018, p.78).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

All States and Territories reported that the Aboriginal Child Care Principle was enshrined in legislation.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, a kinship carer may be another Indigenous person who is a member of their community, a compatible community, or from the same language group (AIHW, 2018, p.78).



Are kinship carers always known to children prior to placement?



All jurisdictions described circumstances in which kinship care arrangements can be made with carers with no pre-existing relationship with the child, such as:

- Indigenous community members in line with the ACCP priority process.
- Relatives who have not met the child.
 - SA reported that there would be efforts to introduce child & carer prior to placement.
- Other community members not known to the child.
 - ACT the only jurisdiction that reported such a kinship placement cannot be made.
 - SA suggested they might be referred to a foster care for assessment & support.

Informal kinship care with child protection involvement

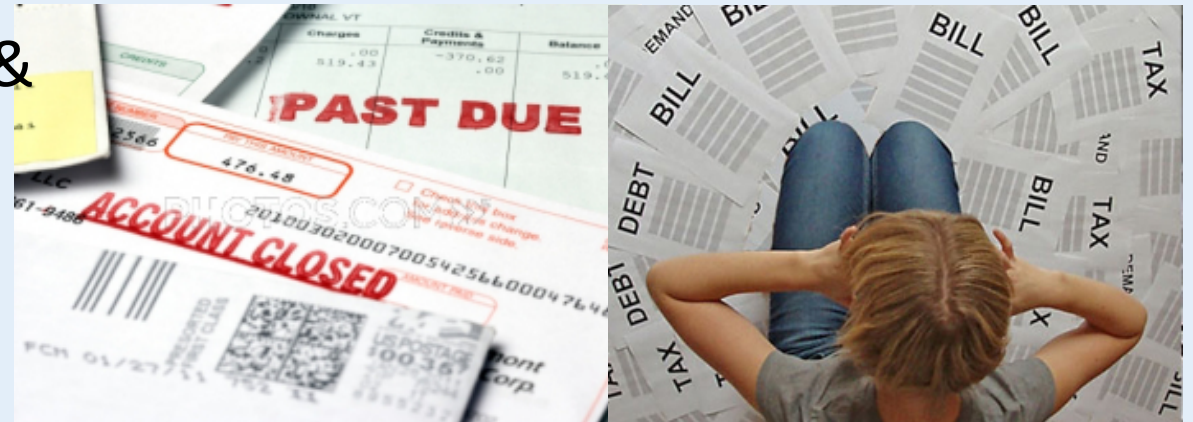
- Five of the jurisdictions reported that child protection is not involved in the establishment of informal kinship arrangements, except in some unusual, exceptional or otherwise circumscribed circumstances.
- Northern Territory was quite clear that child protection cannot be involved in the establishment of informal kinship care placements (*'Family way'* care).



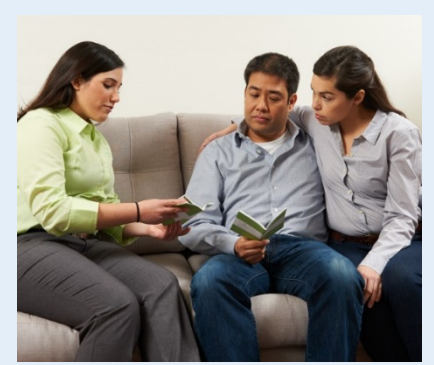
Allowances for the costs of children's care

All States and Territories stated allowances paid to kinship carers are at the same level as foster care allowances.

- Queensland - improvements have come with greater outsourcing to NGOs of support for carers, assisting carers with advocacy on the basis of need.
- Victoria and New South Wales described different decision-making pathways regarding levels of care allowances in foster care and kinship care.
- Care allowances vary across age groups & jurisdictions. Allowances highest in ACT, generally lowest in South Australia and Victoria.



Assessment



All jurisdictions reported thorough processes. Additional comments:

- NT - same process foster & kinship carers. Kin carers require re-approval after 12 months.
 - Queensland - common assessment approach foster and kinship carers; however guiding practice resources are different.
 - ACT – where more than one suitable kinship carer available, matching process occurs to determine the most suitable placement. Kinship approvals involve a *Linking Panel* (representatives of both CYPS and the ACT Together consortium of NGOs).
 - SA – using *Step by Step South Australia 2017 Kinship* for relatives, and the *Specific Child Only Carer Assessment Tool* for non-relative kinship arrangements.
- Undertaking further work on assessment policy and processes. Documented early assessment to be done by Day 2 of placement.

Timelines for full assessment



- VIC - within 6 weeks, but no information about compliance process.
- NSW, NT, QLD and SA – within 3 months; compliance reported as through normal management processes.
- ACT - no required timeframe, however the Act requires that there must not be delay in decision making that would disadvantage a child; reported that monitoring takes place to ensure this.

Assessment before or after child's placement?

Proportion of assessments that occur prior to placement?

No jurisdictions answered this question.

How are children cared for while such assessments take place?

Several jurisdictions suggested that kinship care assessments are made prior to placement, however all six reported provision for assessments to take place following placement with brief safety screening at the outset. Varied estimations about whether emergency placement with brief safety screening is exception or rule.

- Only NT commented that children are sometimes placed in alternative approved placements while assessment takes place.
- NT also reported the most stringent requirements for temporary carer approval, with such approval lasting only 3 days.



Difficulty in securing alternative placements when kinship care placements are not approved?

Five of six jurisdictions said this was the case, and the sixth made no comment.

- ACT – experience difficulty in placing older children and sibling groups.
- NT – purchased home based care providers are contracted to provide care where kinship or foster placements cannot be identified.
- SA –when foster care is not available or where the children have highly complex needs, children are placed in residential care.
- NSW and SA – engaged in active foster care recruitment drives.



Support for children and their carers



- All jurisdictions described a range of casework and carer supports.
- All but one jurisdiction stated that every child in kinship care has an active case worker, however the degree of activity varied.
 - Minimum visits were monthly in 2 jurisdictions, quarterly in 1 and yearly in 3; all but one stated visits would be more frequent where needed.
- All jurisdictions reported they had Quality of Care processes in place. 4 suggested these were adequate, 1 reported significant work being done on their process and 1 made no comment.
- All jurisdictions reported active work on developing carer training programs.
 - ACT and NT reported well-developed training programs although NT acknowledged challenges of remoteness and demand exceeding supply.

Development of policy and practice

All jurisdictions reported significant development in kinship care policy and practice since 2010, generally focusing on carer recruitment, support and training initiatives.

Two jurisdictions responded to a question about areas where they would like to see further development in kinship care policy and/or practice.



Areas where you would like to see further development in kinship care policy and/or practice?

South Australia - developmental work in train related to:

- Scoping kinship carers and the application of placement principles in practice.
- Improving support and monitoring of kinship carers.
- Documentation for care plans and carer support plans.
- Capacity building and training.
- Responses to care concerns.
- Responses to placements at risk of breakdown.



Areas where you would like to see further development in kinship care policy and/or practice?

NT – noted need for continued improvements to the delivery of kinship care training especially:

- for carers in remote communities.
- expanding the availability and utilisation of interpreters for contact and case planning.
- partnering with Aboriginal organisations to increase the numbers and proportion of children placed with kinship carers.





Role of the Commonwealth – DSS return

To what extent does the Commonwealth see its responsibilities as the support grandparent carers in particular, and to what extent the support of other kinship carers such as aunts/uncles, sibling carers & non familial kinship carers such as ‘family friends’?

The Commonwealth considers its responsibilities as the support of individuals and families, whatever their form, caring for children. The relationship of the individual to the child in their care is not relevant to the form or level of support provided.



To what extent are the services of the Grandparent Advisors available to other kinship carers (e.g. aunts/uncles, sibling carers, non familial kinship carers such as 'family friends')? How is any wider eligibility advertised?



<https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/grandparent-advisers> The Grandparent Advisors page on the Department of Human Services website is subtitled:

Extra support for grandparents and non-parent carers with ongoing care for children

This advertises that these services are available to all non-parent carers.

*To what extent is the Grandparent Advisor program meeting current demand?
Are there any current plans for augmentation to address demand?*

The Grandparent Adviser program is currently meeting demand, and as such there are no current plans to augment the program above the current staffing level of eight Grandparent Advisers.

Kinship and foster carers as well as grandparent carers can also access the Grandparent Advisers phone service. The DHS Grandparent Advisers webpage also includes information tailored to non-parent carers.



Has there been consideration of renaming the Grandparent Advisors as Kinship Carer Advisors? What pros and cons might need to be considered in such a change? Please comment.

The Department of Human Services has not given consideration to renaming the program, and is concerned that doing so will diminish the focus of the program, which was established primarily to provide support to grandparent carers



Please provide details of any benefits, allowances and programs available to grandparent carers but not to other kinship carers (e.g. aunts/uncles, sibling carers and non familial kinship carers such as 'family friends').

Family Tax Benefit Part B, youngest child aged 13-18 years
For any grandparent and great-grandparent carers and single parent families (including single non-parent carers) with a youngest child aged 13 to 18 years, Family Tax Benefit Part B may continue to be available. Eligibility for Family Tax Benefit Part B ceases once the youngest child turns 13 for couple families who are not grandparent or great-grandparent carers.

www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/enablers/changes-family-tax-benefit-1-july-2016



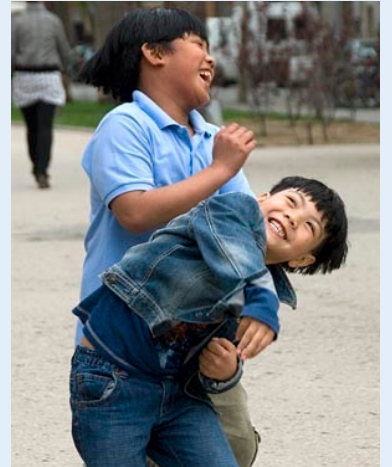
Please provide details of any benefits, allowances and programs available to grandparent carers but not to other kinship carers (e.g. aunts/uncles, sibling carers and non familial kinship carers such as 'family friends').

Additional Child Care Subsidy (Grandparent).

You need to meet certain criteria to be eligible for the

Additional Child Care Subsidy Grandparent. You or your partner must:

- be eligible for Child Care Subsidy
- get an income support payment
- be the grandparent of the child
- have 65% or more care of the child, and
- make the day to day decisions about the child's care, welfare & development.

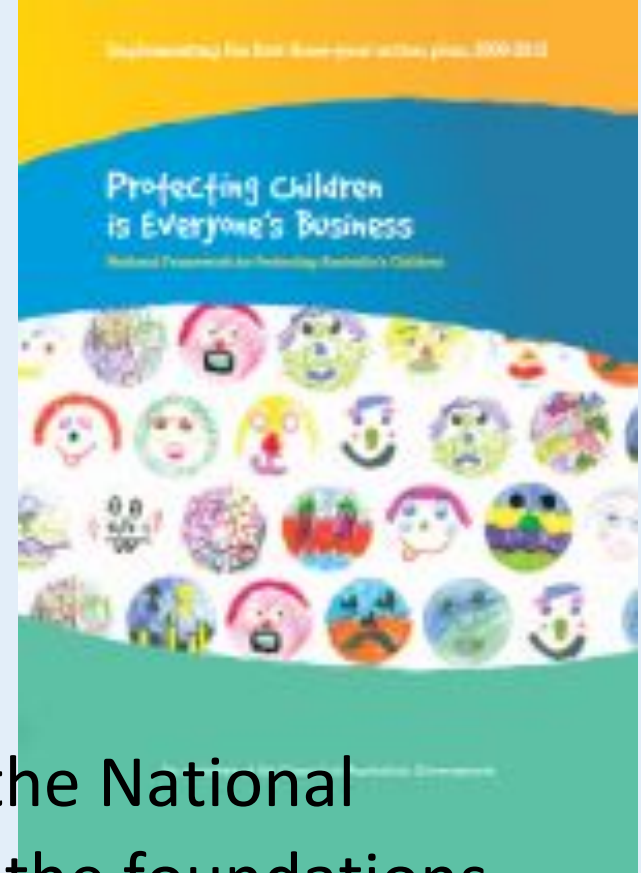


What is the relationship between the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009 2020 and current Commonwealth policy and practice regarding the support of children in kinship care & their carers?

- The Commonwealth Government has a partnership with State & Territory Governments & community sector under the Framework to generate a coordinated national approach.
- Commonwealth, State & Territory Ministers for portfolios such as family, community, disability, children & young people, child protection and social welfare responsible for agreeing to national strategies & actions, overseeing progress & overall direction of the Framework, e.g. 1 June 2018 agreement to a national Permanency Work Plan, including actions to recruit and retain more permanent carers.
- The Children & Families Secretaries group - an informal group of senior officials from relevant government departments with oversight of identified national priorities, providing jurisdictions with a platform to collaborate on innovative policy approaches to child & family issues.



What planning (if any) is taking place to develop a policy document to succeed the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020 when it expires in 2020?



While the Fourth Action Plan is the last instalment under the National Framework, the work to be delivered through this will set the foundations and evidence base for the work that is to come post-2020. The department is currently considering what policy or mechanism may succeed the National Framework in the context of related strategies, reforms and key priorities agreed by government and the non-government sector.



Role of the Commonwealth – as seen by States and Territories

Four out of the six jurisdictions expressed views about the wish to see some augmentation to Commonwealth support for children in kinship care via Centrelink.

Suggestions from States and Territories

- Special consideration in child care placement/ financial support/ documentation and work activity tests.
- Greater access to a 'grandparent support line' like service.
- Easy access to allowances for informal care.
- Improved access to payments for non-parent carers.
- Better recognition of the caring role kinship carers provide in assessments for government benefits (e.g. waiving work requirements for some payments).
- Future exploration of Commonwealth support for children in kinship care.



Victoria reported a proposal made to the Commonwealth to improve carers' experience

- Broadening scope and reach of the Grandparent Advisory Line beyond just grandparents to include practical assistance navigating Centrelink and providing greater resources and training to advisors.
- More specific information for carers online.
- Redeveloping generic forms to respond to carers' unique circumstances and improve usability.
- Reviewing income eligibility criteria for carers accessing Family Tax Benefit, view to making carers exempt from means-testing.
- Grace period for payments to continue between placements to reflect the fluidity of care arrangements & burden of frequently amending applications.





The Victorian proposal was actually put to the Federal Government by the Victorian Minister for Community Services in conjunction with Ministers from the ACT & WA.

Issue of improving carers' access to support payments and advice was raised at the meeting of State, Territory & Commonwealth Community Services Ministers 1 June 2018.

Commonwealth response same day – a joint Communique



The Hon Dan Tehan MP, Minister for Social Services

The Hon Jane Prentice MP

Assistant Minister for Social Services and Disability Services

The Hon Dr David Gillespie MP, Asst Minister for Children & Families

...acknowledged the voluntary nature of caring for children in out-of-home care and agreed to undertake further work to better support carers. In particular they agreed to drive reform efforts through the *Fourth Action Plan* of the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*.

Conclusions

- Much has been done, much remains to be done to ensure safety and wellbeing of all children in kinship care.
- There is strong interest across jurisdictions in the development of policy and programs to support children in kinship care both in informal arrangements and under statutory orders.
- Advocacy opportunities exist with State, Territory and Federal governments to draw greater attention to the need for continuous improvement in policy and support programs.
- A key opportunity – provide input into consultations regarding action to follow up the National Framework post 2020.