



National Action Plan for Grandparent and other Kinship Carers

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Tens of thousands of grandparents and other kinship carers provide full-time care of a child or children due to family break-up or problems such as mental ill-health, substance abuse, gambling or domestic violence. The majority of kinship carers are grandparents whose special needs must be met if they are adequately to fulfil their role.

In the absence of a reduction in national rates of substance abuse, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence and other problems affecting families, it is highly likely that grandparents and relatives will increasingly find themselves taking on primary caring roles for children affected by these circumstances. The costs to the nation are substantial and include lost productivity of mature-age and older Australians.

Issues for grandparents, in particular, include: physical capabilities associated with ageing that affect their ability to care for children; emotional and social pressures such as isolation and stress; inconsistent advice from some Government services; generational differences in relation to cultural issues and parenting styles; and financial and legal issues.

Grandparents and relatives who are not formally recognised as foster carers by State/Territory child protection agencies do not receive the same level of financial and other support as foster carers. There are few services in Australia directed to assisting grandparent and kinship carers and relatively little community recognition of the important role they play. We know that grandparent/kinship carers would benefit from targeted, additional financial, emotional and social support.

Families Australia and Grandparents Australia call for the establishment of a National Action Plan for Grandparent and other Kinship Carers which would include:

- Urgent joint effort by Federal and State/Territory Governments to ensure that a *uniform nationally-consistent carer allowance* is paid to grandparent and other kinship carers who are providing primary care for children.
- Placement of grandparent/kinship *care liaison officers* within all major Centrelink offices to act as a contact point for carers.
- *Emergency or discretionary payments* by Centrelink to assist particularly needy grandparent and other kinship carers in cases where children are placed in care at short notice.
- A *national information service* (such as a 24-hour telephone line and/or a website) to make information about financial assistance, social support, family law and other legal matters more accessible.
- Additional and sustained, multi-year funding for grandparent/kinship carer *support groups and access to respite services and local information*.
- A review of *Legal Aid income assessment processes* for grandparent and other kinship carers providing primary care of children.
- Access to a *health care card* for each child being raised by a grandparent/kinship carer – to be issued irrespective of the carer's level of assets or income.
- A *counselling/support program* within the national Family Relationship Services Program which specifically address the needs of grandparent/kinship carers.
- National *research into the effectiveness of whole-of-family conferencing* as a strategy of support for grandparents raising grandchildren.

Contact

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