



Australian Government
Australian Institute of
Family Studies



Foster, kinship and permanent carers payment review: Written submissions

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) are inviting organisations and individuals with expertise in foster, kinship and permanent carers to submit a written response to discussion questions about payments and financial supports for home-based carers (e.g. foster, kinship and permanent carers/guardians).

These responses will inform recommendations that AIFS makes to the Australian Government Department of Social Services and to the Safe and Supported governance bodies about carer payments and financial supports.

This call for submissions closes on **Monday 14 April**.

About the project

AIFS have been commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Social Services to undertake a review of foster, kinship and permanent carer payments. This project is an activity under Action 6 in the *Safe and Supported: First Action Plan 2023–2026*. Safe and Supported and the Action Plans were designed (and are being implemented) through a shared decision making approach that includes Australian, state and territory governments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and leaders and non-government organisations.

The aim of this project is to

provide information to Australian Governments that can be used to improve carer supports, in particular the adequacy, consistency and accessibility of payments for foster, kinship (including grandparent)¹ and permanent carers.

Research and consultation activities

This project includes a range of research and consultation activities. The first step in the project was conducting a review of research and policy literature, including reviewing publicly available information for carers on payments and financial supports. Some of the findings of this review are summarised in this document.

This call for written submissions is the first stage in our national consultations. Consultation activities will also be conducted with:

- foster, kinship and permanent/guardian carers²
- state and territory governments
- representatives from relevant peak bodies
- out-of-home care service providers.

¹ The term 'kinship carer' includes grandparent carers and other relatives, close family friends, or a member of the child's community.

² Permanent/guardian carers care for children under a long-term guardianship or third-party parental order



The Australian Institute of Family Studies acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands and waters. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

About the written submission process

We are seeking the views of organisations and experts who work with carers or have expertise in out-of-home care. This includes:

- carer peak bodies
- out-of-home care service providers
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations
- Key expert stakeholders (e.g., academics working in this field).

You do not need to answer all the discussion questions. We ask that no personal or identifying information is shared through this process.

You don't have to submit your written submission in one sitting – you can save your progress and return to it later to complete your response. To save your response, click the 'Resume later' button at the top right-hand corner of the screen and follow the prompts.

If you are a carer, you are welcome to make a submission but you may prefer to share your views in an online workshop with other carers. Please contact OOHC-Carersreview@aifs.gov.au for more information on workshops. If you choose to make a submission, we ask that you don't include any personal information about you or the children in your care.

All information you provide will be securely stored, in accordance with the Privacy Act 1998 and [AIFS Privacy Policy](#). We will retain your response for 7 years, in accordance with AIFS Records Authority, and if you agree, we may reuse it in other projects to do with out-of-home care and carers.

At the end of the form, there are questions about your organisation, privacy and option to leave contact details. Some of these questions are required. They help us better understand your responses to the discussion questions and ensure we maintain your privacy in a way that you choose.

Discussion questions

This section summarises some information from a review of research and policy literature and asks you to answer discussion questions. There are 12 questions. You do not need to answer every question.

If you would prefer to submit your responses in a different format or are having difficulty submitting your response, please contact the project team via email: OOHC-Carersreview@aifs.gov.au.

Overview of payments

Foster, kinship and permanent/guardian carers are eligible for a range of payments and financial supports. All carers may be eligible for other Australian Government payments including the Family Tax Benefit. Formal carers – that is, carers that have been approved through an assessment process – are eligible for payments that are set by the state or territory the carer lives in. In our review, we identified 2 types of payments commonly available to carers. Rates of the base payment/carer allowance, and what is covered under each payment, vary depending on the state or territory. The 2 types of payments are:

a base payment or care allowance based on the age of the child. This is most commonly paid fortnightly. In most states and territories there are different payment levels based on the needs of the child. The carer allowance is intended to cover the day-to-day costs of raising a child.

discretionary or supplementary payments. These payments need to be approved in advance and are often used to cover medical expenses, childcare gap payments and expenses associated with family contact. These are most commonly paid via reimbursement.

Our review found that foster and kinship carers were eligible for the same base and discretionary payments, but permanent carers appear to have less access to base payments, and less (or no) access to discretionary payments. Informal carers are not eligible for these state and territory-based payments.

Adequacy and equity

Research we reviewed about carers suggests that current carer payments and financial supports do not fully cover the costs of raising a child in out-of-home care. This can place a significant financial burden on carers, particularly as many carers have low household incomes or experience financial hardship. The research literature – including research and consultation undertaken with carers – also suggests that payments and financial supports are particularly inadequate for carers of children with complex and/or additional needs, even when they are paid a higher rate of their state or territory's carer allowance.

However, there is no general agreement about what an adequate payment would be. Some state and territory government carer payments are intended to 'cover' the costs of raising a child in out-of-home care, and other state and territory government payments are intended to 'contribute to' the costs of raising a child.

We know from existing research that many kinship carers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers (noting that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers are also kinship carers) can have less money and experience greater financial hardship than non-Indigenous carers (especially foster carers). Some literature has recommended that kinship and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers should receive a higher allowance or greater financial supports because they often have less money to start with.

Discussion questions

1. **Should payments and financial supports for carers be expected to cover all the costs of raising a child in out of home care or just to contribute to these costs?**
2. **Should carers receive payments that go beyond the costs of raising a child?**
For example, payments that recognise the time required to care for children and/or that cover the costs of reducing hours spent on paid work and subsequent reductions in superannuation?
 - a. How should this be done in practice? (e.g. should all carers receive additional payments or should this only happen in certain circumstances?)
3. **How could payments and financial supports for carers be made more equitable?**
 - a. Should payments and financial supports take into consideration a carers' financial position or other factors? (e.g. by means testing).
4. **What is the impact of inadequate payments and financial supports on carers and the children in their care?**

Accessibility of payments and financial supports

In our review, we found that many people have written about the accessibility of payments and financial supports. They have often described how payments can be difficult or slow to access. Some of the issues experienced by carers included:

- a lack of accurate and reliable information
- delays in payments and reimbursements
- inconsistent and unclear decision-making about financial supports and child and carer assessments of need/complexity
- burdensome and complex administrative processes
- the complexity of navigating the child protection system.

Kinship carers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers can experience these barriers more acutely as a result of their circumstances (e.g. having low household incomes); as well as their unplanned and rapid entry into a caring role, how much contact they have (or want to have) with case managers and the child protection system; and their subsequent access (or lack of) to supports.

Discussion questions

5. **What factors influence carers' ability to access payments and financial supports?** Are there unique factors specific to:
 - states and territories
 - geographic areas
 - types of carers (e.g. formal and informal carers, foster, kinship or permanent/guardian carers)
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers
 - carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
 - culturally and linguistically diverse carers
 - carers of children with disability or complex needs?
6. In many states and territories, payments to carers are made by non-government organisations. **What factors make it easy or difficult for out of home care service providers to provide payments to carers?** (e.g. are there funding arrangements, policies or processes that make it difficult to pay carers?)

Recruitment and retention of carers

Research suggests that the cost of caring can discourage people from becoming carers and that inadequate financial supports can lead some people to stop being a carer. Previous research has indicated that improving financial supports to carers could be expected to improve carer recruitment and retention, particularly for foster and permanent carers.

Discussion questions

7. **How do the financial costs associated with caring influence people's decision to become a carer or to stop caring?**
 - a. Do you think the current payments and financial supports for carers make a difference?
8. **What changes to payments and financial supports would improve carer recruitment and retention?**
 - a. Are there changes to financial supports beyond increasing payments that would improve carer recruitment and retention?

Suggested solutions

A key focus of our review of payments is to identify strategies, actions and practices that could improve carer payments and financial supports. We are particularly interested in hearing about examples of good practice. This could be in your organisation, in Australia or overseas.

These next questions ask about what improvements could be made to carer payments and financial supports by:

- governments
- carer support services (including ACCOs, mainstream OOHC service providers and carer peak bodies).

Where relevant, please include in your response any considerations for improvements to payments that might meet the unique needs of:

- different types of carers (e.g. formal and informal carers, foster, kinship or permanent/guardian carers)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers
- carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- culturally and linguistically diverse carers
- carers in different states and territories
- carers of children with disability and/or complex needs
- carers living in different geographic areas (e.g. urban, regional, remote).

Discussion questions

9. What could governments (state, territory or the Australian Government) do to improve carer payments and financial supports?

You might wish to consider improvements in the following areas:

- ensuring carers are not unfairly disadvantaged by caring (e.g. carers with lower household incomes).
 - improving the consistency of payments:
 - » between different types of carers
 - » between carers in different jurisdictions or regions
 - » between carers who are supported by different service providers
 - how governments fund carer support services to provide payments and financial supports to carers
 - other actions you would like to see governments (state, territory or Commonwealth) take to improve carer payments and financial supports
- a. Reflecting on your answers above, what do you see as the highest priority actions for governments?

10. What could governments and/or carer support organisations do to improve carer payments and financial supports?

You might wish to consider improvements in the following areas:

- carers' eligibility for payments
- the availability and accessibility of payments for carers
- ensuring carers receive information about payments

Please feel free to include suggestions for improvements in other areas not listed above.

- a. reflecting on your answers above, what do you see as the highest priority actions for governments and/or carer support organisations to take?

11. What could carer support organisations do to improve carer payments and financial supports?

Please consider including examples of good practice from your organisation, where relevant.

You might wish to consider improvements in the following areas:

- how payments are provided to carers
- the transparency of decision making around payments and financial supports (particularly discretionary payments and additional loadings based on child need)
- the information that carers receive about payments (and how they receive information)

Please feel free to include suggestions for improvements in other areas not listed above.

- a. Reflecting on your answers above, what do you see as the highest priority actions for carer support organisations?

Final thoughts

Discussion question:

12. Is there anything else relevant to the adequacy, consistency or accessibility of payments and financial supports for foster, kinship and permanent carers that you want to note?

About your organisation

These questions ask some information about your organisation and where you work. This will help us to better understand your responses to the discussion questions.

- Your name/your organisation's name*
Please note: We will not include your organisation/agency name in any reporting unless you select this option below.
- My organisation/I can be identified in reports and presentations about this topic
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 If yes, how would you/ your organisation like to be identified?
- What state or territory do you mostly work in? [check all that apply]*
 - ☐ National
 - ☐ Australian Capital Territory
 - ☐ New South Wales
 - ☐ Northern Territory
 - ☐ Queensland
 - ☐ South Australia
 - ☐ Tasmania
 - ☐ Victoria
 - ☐ Western Australia
- What does your organisation do? [choose one of the following answers]*
 - ☐ Carer peak body
 - ☐ Other peak body
 - ☐ Out-of-home care service provider
 - ☐ Government agency
 - ☐ Commissioner or guardian
 - ☐ University
 - ☐ Other, please describe

- Are you submitting on behalf of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisation?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Unsure
- If you are submitting on behalf of an ACCO or out-of-home care service provider, which areas do you deliver services in? [check all that apply]
 - ☐ Urban
 - ☐ Regional
 - ☐ Rural
 - ☐ Remote
- If you are submitting on behalf of an ACCO, out-of-home care service provider or peak body, who does your organisation support? [check all that apply]
 - ☐ Informal carers
 - ☐ Formal kinship carers
 - ☐ Foster carers
 - ☐ Permanent or guardian carers
 - ☐ Children in out-of-home care
 - ☐ Other, please describe

*questions are compulsory

Before final submission

[all questions are compulsory]

- This submission does not include any personal or identifying information in responses to the discussion questions*

Please ensure that you have removed any personal or identifying information from this submission

You must click "Yes" to complete this submission

☐ Yes

☐ No – We are unable to accept submissions that contain any personal information or any information that could identify an individual. Please remove this information prior to completing the submission.

- AIFS can use the information in this submission in other projects to do with out of home care and carer supports within the next 7 years

☐ Yes

☐ No

- My organisation/I can be contacted for follow up questions about this submission

☐ Yes, please provide your contact information:

☐ No

- I would like to receive a summary of the report findings. Please note this will be after the conclusion of the project.

☐ Yes, please provide your email address:

☐ No

- If you are submitting on behalf of an ACCO, out-of-home care service provider or peak body. Is your organisation interested in participating in the consultation workshops, and/or can connect AIFS with carers. Express interest in the consultations via [this form](#)

☐ Yes, please click the link above for more information

☐ No