

## The FCAV meets with Centrelink

The FCAV met with Centrelink on March 6<sup>th</sup> 2009 with a view to getting answers to your questions. The meeting was a great opportunity to not only get some direct clarification around various questions, but also to submit ideas and recommendations to Centrelink that we feel would benefit carers. The following is a run down of what was covered on the day.

### Policy issues and recommendations:

The FCAV had submitted a paper to Centrelink some time ago detailing issues and recommendations on the following topics:

- Abolishing mean-testing of carers to determine a child in care's access to benefits.
- Blanket exemption for carers from the 'looking for work' aspect of Welfare to Work.
- Support for former young people in care.
- Improving relationships with government agencies.

The first two topics relate to policy determined by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), with some elements relating to the 'National Child Protection Framework'.

The third topic relates to policy determined by the Department for Education, Employment and Work Place Relations (DEEWR), with the last topic lying directly within Centrelink as a service centre.

All of these issues have been escalated to the relevant departments and are part of a current review being undertaken by FaHCSIA and DEEWR. We are hopeful this review will result in some good news for carers of children in home-based care. We will keep an eye out for the release/findings of this review and bring any news to you as it comes to hand.

### Questions raised by FCAV members and those all-important answers:

#### **Baby Bonus (formally also known as Maternity Payment)**

Most questions received on this topic focussed on:

- Can carer's claim the baby bonus, and if so, when should they claim?
- Instances where carers had claimed the bonus outside of the required timeframes and were subsequently refused.
- What happens if the baby is not with the carer for the full 12 week period following birth?
- Do you have to be adopting the baby to be eligible to claim the baby bonus?

Centrelink response:

- From 1 January 2009, the Baby Bonus will be paid in 13 instalments over 26 weeks.
- Claims can be made any time within 26 weeks from birth.
- Carers can claim the Baby Bonus if the placement is intended to last longer than 4 weeks. (Centrelink recognises a 4 week duration as significant in terms of benefit eligibility).
- Assessment will be made based on the 'intent' of the placement.
- Birth mothers are no longer entitled to 20% of the Baby Bonus as a standard payment – this is now reviewed on a case by case basis.
- Carers are encouraged to contact Centrelink and enquire as to whether or not they are eligible to claim the Baby Bonus. Baby Bonus eligibility is a Centrelink decision, not an agency decision.

#### **Need to present ID at Centrelink**

Question focused on the need for short term carers to constantly supply 100 pts of ID when reapplying for benefits.

Centrelink response:

- If 100 pts of ID has been provided to Centrelink within the last two years, carers only need to provide 40pts of ID for any subsequent claims. The provision of any one of the following documents would satisfy 40 pts of ID:
  - ☞ Bank/Financial Institution card, statement or passbook
  - ☞ Child's birth certificate showing your name as the parent/guardian
  - ☞ Australian Driver's Licence – Motor Vehicle
  - ☞ Australian Divorce Papers
  - ☞ Educational Certificate
  - ☞ Australian Marriage Certificate
  - ☞ Mortgage Papers
  - ☞ Name Change – legal certificate or deed poll certificate
  - ☞ Overseas Passport
  - ☞ Registration Certificate from a professional board
  - ☞ Trade Certificate
  - ☞ Veteran's Affairs Gold Card

#### **Medicare and Health Care Cards**

- Delays and difficulties encountered in trying to secure these items.
- Why can't foster children be automatically issued with a health care card?

Centrelink response:

- Centrelink recommended that carers obtain a letter from either DHS or their agency confirming the child's status and your role as their carer. This can in turn aid Centrelink in processing requests for cards where all the ID boxes can not be ticked off as normally required.
- Centrelink have escalated the suggestion for automatic issuance of health care cards for children in care for policy review and consideration.

### **Kinship Payment**

- Why is there not a 'Kinship Carer Payment' similar to the 'Carer Payment' or 'Carer Allowance' for non-statutory kinship carers? (Note: Non-statutory carers are those who have taken children in to their home without Child Protection involvement)

Centrelink response:

- The question relates to a policy issue and has been escalated as part of the review being conducted by FaHCSIA.

### **Mean-testing based on carer's income**

- Youth Allowance affected by kinship carer's receipt of an inheritance.
- No eligibility for various payments (such as recent stimulus package payments) due to means-testing based on care's income, denying children financial benefits they might otherwise have received.

Centrelink response:

- The question relates to a policy issue and has been escalated as part of the review being conducted by FaHCSIA.

### **Family Tax Benefit**

- When should short term carer's claim Family Tax Benefit?

Centrelink response:

- Carer's should claim for Family Tax Benefit in instances where the placement is intended to last longer than 4 weeks.

### **Grandparent Benefits**

- Not all grandparents who are raising their grandchildren are retired and/or in receipt of a pension and they are therefore not eligible for benefits such as 50 hours free Child Care Benefit, etc.

Centrelink response:

- The question relates to a policy issue and has been escalated as part of the review being conducted by FaHCSIA.

### **Centrelink Staff**

- There needs to be a 'carer expert' in each Centrelink office to avoid misinformation being given.

Centrelink response:

- Each Centrelink office is required to operate the same way to ensure consistency across all service outlets. Centrelink thought our suggestion of 'Carer Liaison Officers' was a great one and they have escalated this feedback to Centrelink management for review and consideration.

### **Clarification of 'carers' for DHS and Centrelink**

- What are the Centrelink definitions of 'carer'?

Centrelink response:

- Centrelink will forward a list of relevant definitions and terms to the FCAV – these will be published in the newsletter upon receipt.

### **Service in Centrelink offices**

- Why can you not have a system like Medicare where you get a ticket and wait in a seated area to be served?

Centrelink response:

- Currently not set up for a Medicare style of service. All Centrelink officers should have customer liaison officers who 'work the queue' to ensure people are in the right section and have the right paperwork, etc to avoid not being able to receive assistance on the day.
- Centrelink advised there are many services now for which customers can obtain/organise details 'online'. Online services include:

Reporting:

- ☞ Report – if a customer is eligible to report online, they can report employment income for a specified reporting period, and see the effect on their payment.
- ☞ View reporting dates
- ☞ View employment income
- ☞ View Income Bank balance
- ☞ View Working Credit balance

Applying for a payment:

- ☞ Make an Online Claim for a student
- ☞ Make an Online Claim for an Australian Apprentice (apprenticeship or traineeship)
- ☞ Make an Online Claim for a child
- ☞ Make an Online Claim for retirement
- ☞ View/update your online claims

Family Assistance:

- ☞ Update family income estimate
- ☞ Advise of return to work
- ☞ View family income history
- ☞ Family Tax Benefit child reviews
- ☞ Advise non-lodgement of tax return

Child Care Benefit:

- ↳ View child care details
- ↳ Claim approved Child Care Benefit
- ↳ Add/remove child care centres
- ↳ Update work/study/training
- ↳ Update child schooling details

Payment enquiries:

- ↳ View payment history
- ↳ View or update where Centrelink/Family Assistance Office payments are sent
- ↳ Centrelink/Family Assistance Office rate estimator

Deductions:

- ↳ Update your deductions

Advance Payments:

- ↳ Check eligibility for Advance Payment
- ↳ Apply for an Advance Payment
- ↳ Advance Payment details

Money you owe:

- ↳ Make a repayment
- ↳ View the money you owe

Study details:

- ↳ Report future study intentions
- ↳ View study details

Cards and statements:

- ↳ Request a document
- ↳ View and print your income statement

Income and assets:

- ↳ View income and assets summary
- ↳ View other government payments
- ↳ View shares
- ↳ View savings accounts
- ↳ Advise parental income

Personal details:

- ↳ View appointments
- ↳ View contact details
- ↳ View address details
- ↳ View accommodation details
- ↳ Update your address, contact or accommodation details

Self service access:

- ↳ Change password
- ↳ Set secret questions and answers
- ↳ Cancel registration
- ↳ Upgrade you registration

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those carers who submitted questions – you raised thoughtful and relevant questions the answers of which have now benefited all carers across Victoria. We would also like to acknowledge and thank Anne and Deb from Centrelink for the considerable effort and time they put in to ensuring you were heard and your concerns addressed.

If you have any more questions around Centrelink issues, please contact Beth Parker in the office on 9489 9770 or via email at [b.parker@fcav.org](mailto:b.parker@fcav.org) and we will do what we can to find the answers for you.