



Jenny Mikakos MP

Minister for Families and Children
Minister for Early Childhood Education
Minister for Youth Affairs

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Katie Hooper
CEO
Foster Care Association of Victoria
Level 1, 398 Smith St
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Dear Ms Hooper

Katie

I write to let you know about recent advocacy that Victoria has undertaken to the Commonwealth on behalf of foster and kinship carers. Early intervention, prevention and reunification with families (where appropriate) is a priority for all jurisdictions responding to growing demand for out-of-home care services. Home-based care is the preferred care type where a child is unable to live in their own home with their families, and the Victorian Government recognises the critical role that home-based carers play.

As you will be aware, I have been a strong advocate to the Commonwealth on a range of important issues facing families and children in our communities. Victoria has led work at the national level to advocate to the Commonwealth for a dedicated Medicare item for children in out-of-home-care, and has consistently sought Commonwealth improvements to supports for carers such as access to passports for children in out-of-home-care by carers.

At the 1 June 2018 meeting of Community Services Ministers, I called again on the Commonwealth Government to take action in a number of areas to better support our carers through improved delivery of Commonwealth services. The proposals led by Victoria were strongly supported by other jurisdictions and the Commonwealth committed to working with states and territories to consider options to reduce red tape for carers accessing entitlements and Centrelink services, and to consider options for the delivery of professionalised models of foster care.

Improved delivery of Commonwealth services

Victoria proposed a number of actions that would improve carers' experience of interacting with Commonwealth systems. These included:

- broadening the scope and reach of the Grandparent Advisory Line beyond just grandparents to include practical assistance navigating Centrelink, including more specific information for carers online and providing greater resources and training to advisors;
- redeveloping generic forms to respond to carers' unique circumstances and improve the usability and accuracy of the forms;
- reviewing the income eligibility criteria for carers accessing the Family Tax Benefit payment with a view to making all carers exempt from means-testing, which would

- reflect the real costs of caring for children and the extraordinary volunteer work undertaken by all carers regardless of their personal financial situation; and
- allowing a grace period for payments to continue between placements to better reflect the fluidity of care arrangements and the burden on carers of frequently amending their applications.

Professionalised models of foster care

Victoria also proposed that further investigation be undertaken into ways to deliver professionalised foster care models in light of current or anticipated trials in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. With the benefit of evidence emerging from these trials, there are significant opportunities to further investigate professionalised models and explore how we can best share and use new knowledge to better support vulnerable children and carers and provide options for more children to be cared for in home-based environments. Commonwealth support for jurisdictions running these trials for longer periods and to multiple target groups would assist in establishing a better evidence base and inform the future direction of the foster care system.

I am optimistic that the renewed focus from Community Services Ministers on enhancing supports for carers will generate positive changes and result in tangible improvements for carers as they navigate Commonwealth systems. I am very pleased to be able to advocate strongly for carers in interjurisdictional forums with my colleagues and will continue to pursue further work to better support carers in the vital work they do in caring for vulnerable children who cannot live at home.

I would also like to thank you for the assistance given by the Foster Care Association of Victoria to my Department in providing case studies from carers to support this piece of work. The case studies were noted by Ministers and illustrated the lived experience of carers, clearly demonstrating the important rationale for this work.

Please do not hesitate to contact Nicola Young, Assistant Director, Out of Home Care, Children and Families Policy, on (03) 9096 0564 should you have any queries or wish to discuss any matter further.

Yours sincerely



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