

Foster Care

2014 Log of Claims



Victoria's foster care system is under threat. Carer numbers are in decline, leaving children in state care at risk of not receiving the care they desperately need.

Foster carers dedicate their lives to supporting some of Victoria's most vulnerable children, but are disrespected and exploited by a system that fails to recognise their knowledge and expertise.

This frustration is being compounded by the unreasonable financial stress places on foster families which continues to grow. These fiscal strains are cited as a core reason for carers leaving the care system, which is reducing the options available for children requiring protection.

These issues have reached a critical point and require urgent political intervention. Ahead of the state election this November, we ask you to clarify your party's position on the following issues. The results will be published on our website and distributed to our thousands of members and supporters.

1. Foster care reimbursements

The Department of Human Services offer a weekly contribution towards the costs incurred in the delivery of care. The University of New South Wales Social Policy Research Centre has calculated that Victoria's reimbursement rates lag dramatically behind the actual costs associated with delivering care, which is requiring carers to directly subsidise the support of young people in state protection by as much as \$5,356 per child, per year. This equates to more than \$8,500,000 in underpayments to foster carers every year.

While other states recognise that meeting core expenses for children in foster care is vital in order to maintain a sustainable system, Victoria's inadequate financial support continues to drive carers away and discourage potential carers from volunteering.

AGE	VIC	NSW	ACT	QLD	NT	TAS	SA	WA	FCE*
1	159	218	231	224	211	190	155	172	218
3	159	218	231	224	211	190	155	172	218
6	159	245	259	241	226	217	179	225	234
10	171	245	259	241	266	217	179	225	274
14	252	329	348	262	329	251	256	277	345/337

*Foster Care Estimates - calculated true cost of care (UNSW Social Policy and Research Centre)

Will you commit to increasing foster care reimbursements to meet the day-to-day costs of caring for children over the next term of government?

2. Expenses for young people in care

The Department of Human Services is currently failing to meet its responsibility to cover essential medical, educational, health and recreational expenses for young people in its care. These services are not included as part of the regular foster care reimbursement.

In recent months it has become clear that, increasingly often, carers are being refused access to brokerage funds to pay for dental work, psychological support, speech therapy, educational assistance, medical services and more. This places an additional financial burden onto carers already at breaking point, often resulting in children in care missing out on essential services.

This is unacceptable.

Will you commit to ensuring that all educational, medical, allied health and recreational expenses for children in foster care are met by the state?

3. Recruitment and retention of foster carers

The capacity of Victoria's foster care system is being consistently limited by a state-wide shortage of foster households. To ensure there are appropriate options available when placing children in foster care, it is vital that there are adequate numbers of carers within the system.

Against the advice of the FCAV, the Foster Care Communication and Recruitment Strategy was discontinued in 2012, dramatically reducing the numbers of prospective carers enquiring about volunteering.

Will you commit to working with the FCAV and the broader foster care sector to implement a state-wide recruitment and retention strategy in by the end of 2015?

4. Learning and development

Foster carers are responsible for supporting traumatised children through a wide range of challenges, often without significant support. The current minimal pre-service training fails to equip carers with the skills required to manage particularly difficult behaviours and assist children in surviving traumatic events, contributing to the emotional fatigue and burn-out which is driving carers from the system.

Delivering a comprehensive program of learning and development opportunities to carers will ensure they are able to most effectively meet the needs of young people in care.

Will you commit to working with the FCAV to develop and implement a comprehensive learning and development strategy for foster carers in the next term of government?

5. Income testing

Access to Commonwealth family tax and childcare benefits is currently subject to income testing based on the household income of foster families. This system fails to take into account the extraordinary needs of children in care, and discourages higher income earners from becoming foster carers.

Removing income testing from foster families' access to benefits, or basing the test on the income of children's birth parents, will help the system attract working carers and retain those that are being financially exploited by an inadequately resourced system.

Will you join us in advocating to the Commonwealth for the removal of income testing for foster carers?