

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs
Attention: PO Box 6021 Canberra ACT 2601, Australia

Subject: Recognition and Support for Australia's Unpaid Carers

Dear Committee Members,

Kin Raising Kids Tasmania Inc. would like to thank the parliament for the opportunity to make a submission to this committee.

Kin Raising Kids Tasmania Inc. was founded by a group of grandparent carers in the Northwest of Tasmania. Our focus has been advocating with our allies around Australia for improved services and support for kinship carers. We have had some success in Tasmania with our recent Carer Recognition Act 2023 being passed by the Tasmanian government. Our organisation is a committee of kinship carers who volunteer their time and their resources to advocate for others. Our experience of our advocacy in Tasmania has led to increased funding to services that are not sustainable as they do not include the voices of people they are funded to support. Many of our achievements to increase funding has gone to others, who have delivered programs or services they think we need. Community sector theory is based on consumer, client, and participant focus, our experience on the ground has been **“This is what we offer/fund, take it or leave it.”** As elected representatives, people walk through your doors to let you know how services are not flexible enough to meet the community's needs this makes this legislation important to all of us to ensure the Carers Charter is at the forefront when decisions are made about us and the people we care for.

As kinship carers we would like to you to consider the cost to Australian Governments if we do not put our hands up to care for our kin. This is an excerpt from the 2017 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report, for your consideration.

“Box 2.5.1: Estimating the cost of abuse and neglect • In Australia, the national recurrent expenditure on out-of-home care services alone was \$2.7 billion in 2015–16—a real increase of \$240.2 million (9.7%) from 2014–15 (SCRGSP 2017). The total cost of child protection, including out-of-home care services, was almost \$4 billion. • The longer-term cost to government of negative family functioning was estimated to be \$5.4 billion per year in 2010 (Access Economics 2010). • The cost of unresolved trauma from physical, sexual and emotional abuse has been estimated at \$6.8 billion per year (Kezelman et al. 2015).”

Kin Raising Kids Tasmania recommends a change be made to the Act to recognise all kinship carers that provide 24/7 care to children not being their own.

The effectiveness of the Act and the associated Statement of Australia's Carers in raising recognition and awareness of the unpaid caring role, including its obligations on public service agencies

The effectiveness of the current act in recognising and raising awareness specifically excludes approximately 57 000 informal kinship carers (Kiralý et al, 2021) in this nation kinship carers provide unpaid care to approximately 90 000 Australian children. These numbers are approximate as informal kinship care has not been extensively researched with in Australia. It has been suggested 50% of kinship carers are grandparents looking after their grandchildren, 25% are older siblings of the child and the other 25% are uncles, aunties or a friend of the family who have stepped in to provide care. Many kinship carers would meet the requirements under the act to be identified as a carer by providing support to the parents of the children, many parents live with a disability, have a medical condition, or mental ill health.

In the current Carer Recognition Act, Part 1 section 5 (3) (a) and (b), excludes all kinship carers being recognised under the act.

- (3) To avoid doubt, an individual is not a *carer* merely because he or she:
 - (a) is the spouse, de facto partner, parent, child or other relative of an individual, or is the guardian of an individual; or
 - (b) lives with an individual who requires care

Our experience of the obligations of the public service agencies can be hit and miss. Department of Human Services and Department of Social Services do recognise the unpaid care role of kinship carers in some policy, the recognition is mainly for grandparent carers.

Kin Raising Kids Tasmania recommends amending the Act to include all kinship carers in the definition of who is a carer.

Kiralý M, Hoadley D, Humphreys C. The nature and prevalence of kinship care: Focus on young kinship carers. *Child & Family Social Work*. 2021;26:144–152.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12797>

Developments in the policy landscape at a Commonwealth level since the Act's passage in 2010

Since the passage of the Act in 2010 Services Australia has recognised grandparent carers needing extra support to navigate the public service system and for the children, they care for to access additional support. Services Australia has employed Grandparent, Foster and Kinship Carer Advisers and regularly/meet with grandparent, kinship, and fosters carers on how to improve access to Australian Government Services. The introduction of the Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS) for children at risk include Wellbeing, Grandparent, Transition to Work and Financial Hardship. The ACCS excludes informal kinship carers (Older sibling, Uncles and Aunties) and those grandparents who still work and are not on healthcare cards.

Formal kinship and foster parents can access this subsidy. We all know children who are enrolled into early childhood education do better than those who are not.

the effectiveness of existing state, territory and international recognition of unpaid care (statutory or other practice)

The Tasmanian Carer Recognition Act 2023 was passed through parliament at the beginning of this year. The Tasmanian government commissioned a review of support for informal kinship carer in 2020 and one of the recommendations was to consider the needs and recognition of informal carers in policy. The first reading of the bill in the house, kinship carers were not identified. Kin Raising Kids Tasmania wrote to the parliament to advocate the inclusion of kinship carer recognition, the parliament listened and included informal kinship carers into the bill. This was not our preference as we would have like all kinship carers to be included.

Since the introduction the government has formed the Ministers Carers Advisory Council (MCAC) and the council includes five members with a lived experience of caring, one of the members is an informal kinship carer. The council has met once, the focus will be to develop the new Tasmanian Carers Action Plan.

The Tasmanian Government has engaged Carers Tas to conduct research into **“The Experience and Needs of Informal Kinship Carers Across Tasmania”** to inform the Carer action Plan. There have been numerous enquiries dating back more than 25 years. One of the questions in the kinship carer survey is connected to this enquiry asking for informal carer input. The outcome of including kinship carers in the Tasmanian Carer Recognition Act 2023 the government has realised they have no idea who we are, our needs or anything about the children we care for. This is the early days for the Tasmanian Government to include all kinship carers as a unique group for support to meet the wellbeing of our children and their kin.

How to better identify the role of unpaid carers in Australian society and the role of a reformed Act, with regard to:

Grandparents and kinship carers across Australia have been asking to be counted in the Australian census. Grandparents have been identified informally by government as a target group in need of extra support as evidenced in previous comments.

The result of identifying kinship carers in the Act, the Australian Bureau of Statistics will start to collect information on the number and demographics of kinship carers across Australia. The collated information will enable government to implement programs to improve the wellbeing of children living in kinship care and more targeted response from government to support carers to be engaged in the workforce and community.