



ABOUT FOSTER CARER REIMBURSEMENTS

Foster Care Association of Victoria Position:

Children and young people residing in foster care have a range of needs. Foster carers are provided with financial reimbursements to contribute to the costs of caring for children and young people. Reimbursements are based upon three levels of intensity of care; General, Intensive and Complex. There is no concrete tool for "classifying" children according to these three levels, rather there is a process of assessment which occurs at a regional level between DHS Child Protection, the DHS Placement and Coordination Unit (PCU).

BACKGROUND

Victoria has four categories of caregiver reimbursement: general, intensive, complex and therapeutic (The Circle Program). The provision of a particular reimbursement rate is based on:

- an assessment of the level of complexity of the child or young person's care needs and associated costs incurred by carers, and;
- the child or young person's age.

Each of the categories (except complex) has reimbursement rates which are graduated according to the age of the child or young person. Higher levels of reimbursement are provided for each (progressively older) age category (0-7 yrs, 8-10 yrs, 11-12 yrs and 13 plus). Prior to placement of a child or young person with a carer, agreement should be reached between the Community Service Organisation (CSO) and Department of Human Services Placement Coordination Unit (PCU) as to the most appropriate category of care for the child or young person, and in turn the reimbursement level.

CAREGIVER REIMBURSEMENT RATE CATEGORIES

General Care (representing approximately 60% of children in foster care)

Most children and young people in the general care category are likely to present with some behavioural, emotional and physical needs which vary, depending upon the individual child/young person. 90% of children/young people in this care category must be subject to child protection involvement. The remaining 10% allowance within this category covers voluntary community placements such as respite care, and short term emergency child care needs within the community.

Intensive Care (representing approximately 30% of children in foster care)

Children and young people in the intensive care category present with behavioural, emotional and physical needs which are greater than those of children/young people in the general care category. 100% of these children and young people will be subject to child protection involvement.

Complex Care (representing approximately 10% of children in foster care)

Children or young people in the complex care category present with significant behavioural, emotional or physical needs that place them in the extreme, upper 10% of all children and young people in foster care. These children and young people require specific, concentrated and strategic service responses to meet their individual needs. 100% of these children or young people will be subject to child protection involvement.

Therapeutic Foster Care

Carers offering Therapeutic Foster Care through the Circle Program are reimbursed at a different rate.



CAREGIVER REIMBURSEMENT RATE REVIEW PROCESS

If foster carers believe consideration should be given to re-classifying the category of care for which they are being reimbursed, they should raise the issue with their CSO to ensure the most appropriate process is followed to better meet the child or young person's needs.

Reimbursements are not necessarily the only means through which additional care needs can be met. Each Department of Human Services (DHS) area has a set amount of supplementary (additional) funds and resources to support children and young people in out of home care. It is important foster carers liaise with their CSO to follow proper processes for seeking additional/supplementary funds. If foster carers wish to be reimbursed for something in particular, it is important to seek information as to sources and availability of funding prior to the expense being incurred to avoid difficulties arising from financial requests being denied.

In addition to caregiver reimbursements, an annual Education and Medical Expense Payment, and Education Assistance Initiative monies, are paid via the reimbursement system (quarterly instalments) to carers of children and young people placed in statutory home based care.

Foster carers who care for a child or young person for less than the full quarter but for a minimum of seven days (which do not have to be consecutive) will receive a pro-rata payment. Whilst foster carers are not required to formally account for the expenditure of this allowance, there is an expectation this allowance will be fully allocated to the child or young person's medical or educational expenses prior to any requests for additional funds being made in this regard.

Regarding day-to-day medical or dental expenses, the benefits available via the public health system, and services available to children and young people with Health Care Cards, should be utilised.

The foster caregiver reimbursement is not classified as income, and does not have to be declared as earnings for the purposes of Income Tax, Family Tax Benefit or Child Support through the Commonwealth Government, or housing/personal loan assessments through financial institutions.

THE DHS CAREGIVER REIMBURSEMENT HELPDESK (PH) 1300 552 319

This phone number is for any foster, permanent or kinship carers, statutory or non-statutory, and for professionals to call directly.

Whilst foster carers would usually have their reimbursement queries answered via their CSO, sometimes carers and professionals need to find out quick or specific financial information about the nature of caregiver reimbursements.

The Helpdesk is designed specifically for this purpose. Helpdesk staff can answer your questions about when your payments are starting, when they will cease, any money owed to you or by you, information about indexation and any additional allowances, such as the New Placement Loading (General Care category only), or Education and Medical allowance.

The Helpdesk is staffed by Department of Human Services staff. Helpdesk staff are not part of the child protection program and will therefore not be able to discuss child protection related issues, nor are they able to conduct reviews of reimbursement levels.