

Submission to the Community Affairs Committee

**Social Security legislation Amendment  
(Improved Support for Carers) Bill 2009**



A national voice for families of children with a disability

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The Australian Association for Families of Children with a Disability is a national organisation representing children with a disability and their families. We are recognised and funded through the Department of Families, Housing, Communities and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). We are a non-profit, community-based organisation run by families, for all families who have a child with any type of disability.

## **VISION**

The vision of AAFCD is to provide children with a disability, the opportunity to live meaningful and fulfilling lives within safe, supportive and appropriate environments. As part of this vision AAFCD acknowledges the critical role that families play in providing the necessary care and support to children with a disability and recognises their need to be supported in this role. AAFCD will achieve this vision by:

1. **Educating** national public policy-makers and the broader community about the needs of children with a disability and their families.
2. **Advocating** on behalf of children with disability to ensure individual choices and the best possible support and services are available to them from government and the community.
3. **Informing** families about the rights and entitlements of the child with a disability to services and support.
4. **Celebrating** the successes and achievements of children with a disability.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The principles that guide the work of AAFCD are:

**Children the priority:** that the safety and well-being of children with disability is paramount and consistent with Australia's obligations under the international Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

**Respect:** for the views and interests of children with disability and their families.

**Recognition:** of contributions made by families to ensure the safety and well being of children with disability.

**Inclusion:** to ensure that children with all types of disability, from all cultural and religious backgrounds and from different family structures are supported by the work of AAFCD.

**Responsiveness:** to ensure that full advantage is taken of strategic opportunities that arise from the political and social policy environment that benefit children with disability.

**Collaboration:** with relevant non-government, government and private sector partners to promote the interests of children with disability.

**Transparency:** within AAFCD's governance structures, decision-making processes, financial expenditure and reporting activities.

## **SOCIAL SECURITY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (IMPROVED SUPPORT FOR CARERS) BILL 2009**

It is acknowledged that the Federal Government has responded to the needs of parents caring for their children who have disability. AAFCD actively participated in the Carer Payment (child) Review Taskforce during 2007 and as a result is well placed to comment on the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Improved Support for Carers) Bill 2009.

AAFCD has also partnered with Carers Association Victoria and Palliative Care Victoria in a separate joint response to the legislation amendment bill, which highlights the benefits and challenges surrounding the legislation.

### **Eligibility**

Eligibility for Carer Payment (child) based on the assessment of care load rather than medical or functional criteria provide a more equitable process. How this assessment is determined is critical to accurately capturing the level of care provided. This is particularly relevant when supporting children with autism, developmental delay, intellectual disability and mental illness. Children with little or no understanding of personal safety and who are unable to undertake tasks without intense support, constitute a high care load. Hours of constant care to supervise, assist with basic tasks and monitor behaviours of concern must be captured by the Disability Care Load Assessment Tool through the development of relevant questions and adequate weightings.

### **Carer Allowance**

Automatic eligibility for carer allowance if a person is ineligible for the Carer Payment (child) will provide a more streamlined approach both for the applicant and Centrelink staff.

### **Continuity of Qualification**

The decision to maintain continuity of Carer Payment (child) whilst a child is hospitalised also is considered a wise decision when the administrative costs of suspension and re-allocation are taken into account.

AAFCD recommends that "continuity of qualification" also includes "continuity of payment".

### **Multiple, Shared or Exchange Care Responsibilities**

Changes proposed under these categories recognise the multiplicity of care situations that exist within the community and are consistent with the "care load" approach to determining eligibility for the Carer Payment (child). It will also be important to ensure that the process to accurately measure varying configurations of care is as streamlined as possible.

Due to the changing nature of some caring situations, formal arrangements would need to be used to determine eligibility.

### **Short Term and Episodic Care**

This category will address the needs of families who require support in unexpected and extreme circumstances. The interruption to workforce participation when a child is very ill has a profound impact on the whole family. Their ability to manage the resultant stress and recover financially is significantly impeded.

AAFCD has supported the continuation of the Carer Adjustment Payment which would complement the Carer Payment (child) in circumstances where such critical situations arise.

### **Terminal Illness**

Always a very difficult time in families' lives, a more sensitive approach to managing eligibility for Carer Payment (child) is welcomed. The expansion of eligibility beyond 16 years of age also demonstrates compassion for families living through very difficult times.

### **Certification Personnel**

Broadening the range of professionals who can certify eligibility for Carer Payment (child) is commended and is aligned with a broader assessment of "care load" beyond the medical model.

### **Communication**

It is important that an effective communication strategy to publicise the Carer Payment (child) is implemented and includes community languages and plain English versions.

### **Child-Adult Entitlements**

Streamlining the transition between Carer Payment (child) and Carer Payment (adult) needs to be reviewed to identify and rectify inconsistencies that might exist as a result of the proposed legislative amendments.

**Elizabeth McGarry**

Chief Executive Officer

