

Carer Council Consultation February 2024

Carer Council 2024 topics

The Carer Council is planning systemic advocacy in the following areas:

- Respite
- Sibling connections
- *Children and Young People (Safety) Act* Legislation Review
- Communication to and from carers
- Access to therapeutic supports
- Recruitment of carers
- Carer Remuneration
- Care Concerns
- Mental health and peer support for carers
- Cultural connections
- Workforce consistency and training

While a schedule is not yet available to share, we will share one in due course.

Public consultation: March meeting 2024

Connecting Foster and Kinship Carers, on behalf of the Carer Council, invites carers to provide feedback on the following topics for consideration at our meeting on 5 March 2024:

- Care concerns
- Carer remuneration
- Respite

Connecting Foster and Kinship Carers, on behalf of the Carer Council, invites carers to provide their feedback on the above topics.

As carers have already provided extensive feedback on these topics, we have included a summary on input received about these topics.

The Carer Council will be briefed on what CF&KC-SA has previously heard from carers through our annual surveys, reference groups, information sessions carer advocacy service, carers directly contacting us, as well as Dr Fiona Arney's Report on the Independent Inquiry into Foster and Kinship Care. [Click here](#) to access our webpage with links to the Inquiry Report and our summaries.

We invite the South Australian carer community to provide additional feedback if there is anything the Carer Council should consider further. We encourage carers to share their experience, as it relates to these topics, only if you feel comfortable and

safe to do so. Your feedback will be stored confidentially and supplied to the Carer Council in an anonymous format.

CF&KC-SA acknowledges there is a long history of systemic advocacy in these areas. We acknowledge reports and inquiries have revealed similar problems and gaps to address over many years. For example, the Nyland Report (2016), and KPMG's Report into Foster and Kinship Care in South Australia (2017). CF&KC-SA and the Carer Council will endeavour to amplify carers voices to ensure feedback is heard by the Minister for Child Protection.

You may provide your feedback by:

- Emailing us at carercouncil@cfc-sa.org.au – please note you will receive an automatic reply noting your email has been received. If you do not receive an automatic reply, your email has not been delivered correctly.
- Completing our online feedback form:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CarerCouncilFeedback>
- Calling us to speak to our Project Lead, Lauren Gibbs (her usual work days are Monday, Wednesday and Thursday) freecall 1800 732 272
- Attending an information and feedback session.
 - Thursday 22 February at 6:30pm (online):
<https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/carercouncil-public-consultation-evening-session-tickets-826364928747>
 - Monday, 26 February at 10:30 in person at CF&KC-SA's Office, 2/224 Main North Road, Prospect: <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/carercouncil-public-consultation-day-session-tickets-826471407227>

The Carer Council will meet on 5 March 2024 to discuss the above topics in line with the broader topic of retention and attraction of carers.

What we already know:

Care Concerns

- Care concerns and removals are one of the top worries for carers.
- The care concern process is, at times, used to raise petty issues.
- The care concerns process does not provide Carers with natural justice.
- Concerns are often not raised directly, or clearly, with Carers.
- Concerns are not raised in writing.
- Carers are often not given a proper opportunity to consider the allegations and respond to them.
- Care concerns are often raised well after the event.
- Carers are not advised of their rights at the time a care concern is raised.
- Carers are not provided with, nor do they have access to, an explanation of the role and powers of the Care Concerns Investigation Unit (CCIU) or care concern investigation process.
- Carers are not advised of an investigation timeframe.
- Carers are 'left in the dark', while the investigation takes place – often for months.

- Investigations are often inadequate. For example, carers report that independent third parties (for example teachers, doctors, friends of the carers) are not approached or questioned.
- Investigations sometimes include children (including biological children) being interviewed without an adult present and without parental consent.
- Carers report being treated as though they are 'guilty until proven innocent' – even when they have given years of exemplary service as carers.
- Care concerns allegations remain on the carer's file (even if they are unsubstantiated) as a permanent record – some would say a 'permanent stain'.
- Carers are not provided with support during or after a care concern investigation.
- After completion of a care concern investigation, carers report they are sometimes required to continue to interact with DCP and agency support workers who during the period of the investigation treated them with contempt
- The care concerns process is not transparent.
- There are inconsistent interpretations and processes regarding what specifically is a Care Concern across offices and regions within SA
- Care concerns decisions are not open to independent review.

Care concerns can result in removals

- Often placement breakdowns happen rapidly- giving the carer and young person little time to fully digest the process.
- Sometimes these breakdowns happen after carers have repeatedly asked for support and education to better care for their young person and had these requests overlooked and ignored.
- Often carers are not consulted about the decision making that leads to young person being removed.
- The feelings of loss experienced by carers where a child has been removed (for various reasons) is similar to that of death, and is considered 'disenfranchised grief'.
- Carers from the CF&KC-SA Grief and Transition support group tell us that grief and loss experienced after a child leaves care, is not traditionally recognised by DCP, support workers, carer family members and social connections. Recent research conducted by Flinders University (in collaboration with CF&KC-SA) supports this observation.
- One carer reported when they shared with a friend that their young person had left their care, the response received was 'well, they were not really your child, were they? They've gone back to their family now'. Comments such as this have the potential to place a carer in an immense state of grief and guilt – that their feelings are not valid.
- One carer shared their family felt completely unsupported by DCP and their agency with regard to the stress and sadness they experienced when their young person left their family. Due to the significant distress their biological children experienced, the Carer elected to not continue providing family-based care, stating it was too traumatic for their biological children.

Carer Remuneration

Payments generally

- The payments carers receive (base payments and loadings) do not meet the full costs associated with the caring for the children in their care.
- Many carers pay for things out of their own pocket.
- There is a perception that DCP knows that this is happening and, by keeping payments low, is preying on the goodwill of carers.
- The payment system is complex and hard to understand
- Carers understand the huge differential between the costs associated with home-based care, and the costs associated with residential care. To quote one carer: 'We know we save the government a lot of money. We know we do a good job. This is no place for penny pinching'.
- CF&KC-SA research has revealed there is no solid research into the true cost of caring for a child in care
- the last time there was any extensive report into true cost of caring for a child in care in Australia was in 2002

CAT Tool and SNL Tool

- The Complexity Assessment Tool (CAT) and Special Needs Loading (SNL) Tool form the basis of the rate of the carer subsidy payment for individual children and young people
- The CAT Tool and the SNL Tool are not age appropriate and so, in some cases, are not fit for purpose.
- CAT and Special Needs re-assessments are often delayed, and carers are not provided back pay.

Additional funding / expenses

- There is inconsistency in what additional expenses DCP and agencies will approve. E.g. some offices seem to support private school fees in some appropriate circumstances, other offices appear to have a blanket policy that they will not.
- Expenses that relate to disabilities are an issue, as DCP will sometimes indicate that the expense should be met by NDIS and vice versa.
- The process for getting additional expenses approved is cumbersome and reimbursement is often slow, with carers reporting they feel like the DCP treats them as a "line of credit".

Insurance

The process for getting insurance claims is also very cumbersome and slow. Carers and children may be living in substandard conditions (e.g. significant holes in walls) while waiting for DCP to approve costs of repairs.

Temporary absences

When a child is temporarily absent from the carer's home (for example because the child is hospitalised beyond 21 days) carer payments are reduced for the time of the

child's absence. It takes no account of the fact that the child still has a home with the carer (for example that their bedroom and belongings are at the carers home).

Home loans

Carer payments are considered a 'reimbursement' for volunteering to care rather than 'income'. This significantly disadvantages Carer seeking a loan (for example: to secure sufficient sized housing for caring).

Particular impacts on kinship carers

Kinship carers are not provided with enough information about the true cost of providing care and how it may impact savings, superannuation & employment prior to taking on children and young people.

Parenting Benefits

Carers are unfamiliar with the range of entitlements they can access through Centrelink. Often it is through trial and error that carers find out the financial supports they are entitled to.

In particular carers report:

- they do not have access good clear information on parental entitlements
- support workers are also not always fully aware of parental entitlements
- available information on parental entitlements is not culturally appropriate or accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers
- feeling embarrassed to ask what they are entitled to, for fear of being stigmatised and being 'in it for the money'
- the process of securing entitlements can be both physically and emotionally demanding (it can include having to attend a Centrelink office with children in tow)
- not being able to prove eligibility for parental entitlements because they don't have the appropriate personal identification documentation.

Parental Leave

As the law currently stands, parental leave is provided only to an employee on:

- The birth of a child of the employee or the employee's spouse or de facto partner, or
- The placement of a child with the employee for adoption.

Often carers take time off work or give up their paid employment to spend time with a child placed with them and to settle the child in.

Employment

Carers have shared:

- There is an unspoken expectation when carers take on a child that they will either decrease or end employment to support their young person if it is required.
- Many carers do this willingly, but suffer financially.

- Carers report there is a lack of recognition for the actual hours (labour) that carers put into caring for young people, and many carers consider their role as carer to be their job; especially given the expectation to reduce or cease their employment.

Superannuation

The issue of superannuation (generating, accruing and accessing) is consistently raised by carers.

- Carers report that a reduction in working hours, often required to sufficiently care for a young person, reduces their earning potential and results in reduced superannuation. Their ability to generate or accumulate superannuation during their caring journey causes them significant worry, particularly when they consider their retirement years.
- At times, and because the resources provided by the state are limited, carers are forced to use their superannuation (or money they intended to contribute to superannuation) to fund services, activities and daily living needs for their young people.
- Carers report a strong desire to contribute towards their superannuation for example, to 'put money towards the future' rather than watch their money 'just go' whilst caring.
- Carers are aware their superannuation, and future financial security at retirement, is directly impacted.
- Superannuation is not discussed with carers at first point of caring or throughout the caring journey.
- It is challenging for rural carers to find work that fits with the needs of their young person and school hours, therefore their superannuation is impacted.
- Carers report choosing to take a lower paying position in order to fit in school drop offs and pickups and any 'unexpected pickups' required to best care for their young person, which in turn impacts the ability to generate superannuation.
- There is awareness that carers in residential care settings receive superannuation entitlements, and that this seems unfair.
- Workplace flexibility is a critical issue for carers, often leading to self-selecting out of work as the only option and as a result, negatively impacting superannuation accrual.
- Predominantly, it is female carers of a specific age group that are impacted negatively with regard to the ability to generate superannuation.
- Carers have thought about their lack of superannuation and are worried about how it will affect their financial circumstances during retirement.
- Carers have used their superannuation to fund services, activities and daily living needs for their children and young people, which the state should be funding as they are under the Guardianship of the Chief Executive.
- Carers who are specialist foster carers are expected to leave their paid employment to care.
- Carers continue to care for their young people, even after they have left state care.

- Carers underscored workplace flexibility as a critical issue because it has led to Carers believing that ceasing their employment is the only option to provide the care their foster/kinship children and young people require.
- Carers are committed to ensuring their young people don't miss out on participating in the social and cultural aspects of life so that they live a "normal life." This often means their foster/kinship children or young people engage in a number of extra-curricular activities (with at least one being a DCP requirement) and other social events. That said, the cost of petrol to drive to and from activities and appointments, birthday presents for friends, uniforms to participate in these activities, and club memberships (just so that their children can identify as part of community in their own special way), is both a financial and time cost that impacts carers negatively.

Young People over 18

Under the current system, DCP can provide payments to age 21 for young people under guardianship. CF&KC-SA understands that:

- education and employment parameters must be met by the young person in order for carer payments to be made after 18
- the carer payments are only base rate (meaning loadings no longer apply after 18)
- there are limited resources to support young people aged 18 to 21 to successfully transition out of care (for example: accessing and retaining housing, daily living skills, financial management and psychosocial support)
- The transition for young people with a disability may be never be complete or may be protracted.

Detrimental impact on carers

- Carers are feeling exhausted and devalued - fighting for basic needs for their children and young people.
- Carers are feeling stigmatised as 'only in it for the money'.
- Carers are feeling 'taken for granted' or even 'used and abused' by the state for whom they are providing an invaluable service.
- Children are missing out on crucial support and services in their formative years.

Respite

South Australian carers are not receiving adequate, appropriate and consistent respite support for their children and young people, especially since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Carers report that:

- they are not receiving respite in a timely manner (in many cases respite is not offered at all)
- there is ongoing stigmatisation when accessing respite
- the current formal respite arrangements are often inaccessible or inappropriate
- a one-size-fits all approach does not meet carer needs.
 - This is an ongoing and sustained issue. Carers have been raising it for years. It is regularly raised in surveys and at carer forums.
 - CF&KC-SA have regularly raised it with the department.

- Groups have been convened and reports written. But carers see no significant or sustained improvement.
- The proper provision of appropriate respite care is an issue that impacts directly on carer retention.
- CF&KC-SA know of a number of carers who feel they cannot continue to offer themselves as carers without better respite support.
- It also directly impacts the health of carers and their families. Carers ask for alternatives that fit with their lifestyles and are inclusive of all the children and young people in their family.
- Provision of services that support carer families to have a break or help relieve pressure (for example: babysitting, cleaning, gardening, holidays) would in some cases be more suitable support than traditional respite.
- there is a significant lack of respite for Kinship Carers (as one carer put it 'its hell to try to get respite')
- Past annual surveys have indicated that greatest challenges regarding their caring journey is lack of respite

Flexible Respite Payment

Advocacy in this area has resulted in the recent announcement of the flexible respite payment. Feedback on this is encouraged.