



Greens release plan to support Grandparent carers

Rachel Siewert 1 May 2019



The Australian Greens will ensure grandparent carers are adequately supported and recognised in taking on primary responsibility for their grandchildren. We support a rights-based, child-centred approach to child protection.

OVERVIEW

There are thousands of grandparents across Australia taking on the primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren when parents are unable or unwilling to do so. Grandparent care is the fastest growing form of out-of-home care for children in Australia, with half of the children in relative or kinship placements living with their grandparents. Some of the reasons grandchildren end up living with their grandparents include death of a parent, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues, family violence or incarceration. Our child protection system has fundamental problems and the Commonwealth must show national leadership on this issue. The Greens have a plan for addressing the underlying reasons that children enter the out-of-home care system and we have a plan to support grandparents in their role as grandparent carers.

ONE: INVEST HEAVILY IN EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION

As at 30 June 2018, around 31,800 children had been in out-of-home care for 2 years or more. As the number of children entering the child protection system keeps growing, we need to address the underlying reasons children are being cared for by their grandparents and other out-of-home care placements. The Greens are committed to investing heavily in early intervention and prevention programs that have therapeutic approaches and focus on helping children stay with their parents. We know that First Nations children are disproportionately represented in the out-of-home care system. The Greens will provide \$50 million over four years for First Nations out-of-home care projects that support First Nations families at risk of entering the system, including funding First Nations family support workers.

TWO: BETTER SUPPORT FOR GRANDPARENT CARERS

Many grandparent carers experience poverty and financial stress. Grandparent carers who are in an informal arrangement with no legal recognition of their caring role often lack access to the same financial assistance available to foster carers. The Greens urge the Government to investigate the development of an ongoing allowance for grandparent carers, with particular consideration to the unique financial pressures experienced by grandparents. These types of allowances have already been developed in New Zealand and the UK.

THREE: IMPROVE ACCESS TO EXISTING SUPPORTS

A recent study shows that grandparents can find service systems cumbersome and/or confusing. There are a number of ways we can reduce red tap and improve access to existing supports for grandparent carers. The Greens support all grandparent carers being exempt from participating in activity requirements for Newstart, regardless of whether they have a court order.

We also support calls for having Family Tax Benefit follow the child's residence, instead of the carer, to ensure grandparent carers have access to income when they are in informal caring arrangements. Grandparents can also find it difficult to access services and supports because the system does not recognise their caring relationship. The Greens support creating an easy system of identification that recognises grandparent carers as a child's primary carer to help facilitate access to essential services including Centrelink, Medicare, education and child care.

FOUR: MORE GRANDPARENT ADVISERS

Centrelink Grandparent Advisers play an important role in providing information and referrals to grandparent carers. The Greens support a review into the number and geographical allocation of Grandparent Advisers to ensure needs are being met in high-demand service areas, especially for grandparents in rural and regional Australia.

FIVE: RESPITE AND PRACTICAL SUPPORTS

Grandchildren being cared for by their grandparents often have complex care needs and experience a range of issues including abandonment, anger management and grief. The Greens are committed to ensuring grandparents have access to practical supports in their daily parenting roles and adequate respite services to give them a break when they need it. We also support recommendations for additional funding for relationship supports to assist grandparents to manage intra-family relationships.

SIX: DATA COLLECTION ON GRANDPARENT CARERS

There is currently limited data on the numbers and characteristics of kinship carers, including grandparents who have primary responsibility for the care of their grandchildren. The Greens are committed to collecting better data on grandparent carers through a set of questions in the census and other data collection measures to support effective service delivery and resourcing.

References

1 AIHW, Child protection Australia 2017-
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<https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/e551a2bc-9149-4625-83c0-7bf1523c3793/ai...>, page vi

3 Wanslea, Grandparent Carers Research Project,
<https://www.wanslea.asn.au/wanslea/research-and-evaluation/grandparent-c...>

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