



PRESS RELEASE
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Kinship carers welcome the Victorian Government's 2019 budget

Central to the support kinship carers offer the budget is the commitment to kinship care evident in the programs the budget funds and in the commitment to funding them across four consecutive years.

Anne McLeish, Director of Grandparents Victoria and Kinship Carers Victoria (GPV/KCV) says,

"The financial support provided to kinship care in the 2019 budget is nothing less than what is required to keep kinship care vibrant, and marching in line with the advances being made in the care of children with special needs. These funds will also assist in keeping kinship placements stable through acknowledging the expertise and strength of kinship carers and fostering those strengths across the whole cohort of kinship carers – the largest and most productive form of care for children in out-of-home-care.

"The slight increase in funding for kinship care over the next four years outlined in the budget papers is surely acknowledgement that kinship care is a growing area. It is currently the largest form of out-of-home care in Victoria and is expanding rapidly. While the increase in funds outlined in the budget may not keep completely abreast with the needs generated by the rapid growth in kinship care, neither can we be certain that the increase will not accommodate this. As current kinship carers become less dependent on support so will the system have room to respond to new kinship carers coming forward. The certainly this budget provides will quite possibly allow us to plan ahead and construct the right balance of support for carers across time as well as in real item.

It is to be hoped that a proportion of the funds being made available to support kinship care will be devoted to evaluation of the support offered to kinship carers and that such evaluations will take into account the experiences of kinship carers in addition to any available statistical evidence. Carers' voices are now being recognised as key to charting the way forward and we expect that this recognition will continue and become more intrinsic in any future deliberations.

GPV/KCV values the work of the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Liana Buchanan. In the past few years kinship carers and grandparents have developed a close working relationship with the Office of the Commissioner and have found the role played by this statutory authority to be crucial in raising debate about children and young people from the perspective of their rights. We applaud the government for having an agency with the capacity for independent critique of community action in relation to children and young people, especially in a time when there can be an inclination for some governments to 'bunker down' and stifle public discourse, particularly if that discourse in any way asks unwanted questions of government approaches. Support for advocacy such as that which the Commissioner provides is a cornerstone of democracy and reminds grandparents of the traditions of Labor governments of the past which were committed to open discussion. Well done Victorian Government!

Amongst this good news there is a note in the budget that causes concern. This is the range of massive cuts to the public service. Criticism of the public service is often popular, with an assumption that there are too many public servants who are all overpaid. GPV/KCV does not subscribe to this view and would be most concerned if the area of health and human services suffers through cuts to emerging work to support families engaging in the prevention of problems. GPV/KCV argues that early intervention and prevention approaches by the public service could play a crucial role – one every bit as crucial as that played by child protection services. Prevention then protection! is what GPV/KCV want. We call on the whole of government, from the Premier across all portfolios, to think in these terms. Perhaps the government could start by implementing a system of child impact statements that measures the effects of any government policy on families and children before they are implemented."

For further comment contact Anne McLeish on (03) 9372 2422 or 0428 937 224

Extract from Budget Paper 3: Service Delivery

Child Protection and Family Services Budget with budget in millions of \$					
Item	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Better assisting children in the statutory child protection system	-	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5
Civil claims costs for historical institutional child abuse	-	20.0			
Commission for Children and Young People	-	3.9	4.0	4.1	4.2
Kinship care	-	25.2	26.2	27.0	27.7
Progressing the children and families reform agenda	-	13.4	9.6	-	-
Supporting vulnerable children in need	14.1	26.9	-	-	-

Child Protection and Family Services

Kinship care

The Government's new model of kinship care which commenced in 2018 will receive ongoing funding. This will support kinship carers and children and young people living in kinship care. This initiative will also enable the provision of dedicated kinship care workers, help identify kinship networks earlier, reunite more children safely with their families and improve placement stability. These will all improve outcomes for children and reduce entry into residential care and other more intensive child protection services.

Commission for Children and Young People

Funding will be provided to enable the Commission for Children and Young People to continue to oversee the safety and quality of care for children as well as safeguard their rights and dignity. This initiative will contribute to the output of the Department of Health and Human Services' Child Protection and Family Services.

Better assisting children in the statutory child protection system

Funding will be provided to allow continued expansion of the child protection workforce which supports children at risk of neglect and abuse. These child protection workers respond to reports to groups such as early childhood workers, youth justice workers, and registered psychologists arising from the expansion of mandatory reporting of child physical or sexual abuse.

Civil claims costs for historical institutional child abuse

The management and settlement of civil claims for historical institutional child abuse will continue, with additional funding provided to meet forecast liabilities in 2019–20.

Progressing the children and families reform agenda

Funding will be provided to continue the reform of the Children and Families sector, moving it from a system of crisis responses to early intervention and prevention. The Better Futures initiative will continue to support young people leaving the care system. Trials of three innovative new models of out-of-home care – Treatment Foster Care Oregon, Keep Embracing Your Success (KEYS), and Sibling Support and Placement Service – will be maintained in order to build the evidence base for initiatives that support children to reach their potential. Aboriginal children and families involved in the child protection system will be provided with services and support to assist them in remaining connected to their culture. The funding will also include continued support for Care Leaver support groups and advocacy.

Supporting vulnerable children in need

Funding will be provided to meet the demand for care of children who are unable to live with their families. Further assistance will be provided to children with significant disability support needs who require residential care or a facility-based shared care placement not currently provided under the NDIS. Flexible support packages for carers of children on permanent care orders will continue. Maintenance works will also be delivered in care services properties.