

Australian Government  
Department of Families, Community Services  
and Indigenous Affairs

**AUSTRALIAN  
GOVERNMENT  
SUPPORT FOR  
GRANDPARENTS  
RAISING  
GRANDCHILDREN**

**AUGUST 2007**

Improving the lives of Australians

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**Overview of Presentation**

- Background
- Issues being experienced by grandparents
- Australian Government's initiatives and payments
- Next steps
- Discussion

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**Background**

- ABS Family Characteristics Survey 2003 estimated 31,100 children aged 0-17 years live with grandparents
- AIHW report at 30 June 2006 - 13,368 children in formal foster care (10,316 children with relatives, predominantly grandparents)
- Grandchildren may come into the care of their grandparents in one of three ways:
  - through parenting orders issued by the Family Court;
  - through care and protection orders made in the State and Territory court system; or
  - through (informal) arrangements made with the child's parents or with the State child protection authorities.

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**Issues being experienced by grandparents**

- **Recognition and acknowledgement for their contribution**
- **Financial issues**
  - find Centrelink system confusing with the number of payments and eligibility requirements
  - means tests may impact on the grandparents' own Centrelink entitlements
  - seeking equality for financial assistance with foster carers
- **Legal issues**
  - access to Legal Aid (which includes family home in the assets test)
  - confusion about the legal system and their legal rights
  - difficulties in establishing proof of care

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**Issues being experienced by grandparents**

- **Access to information about services generally**
- **Parenting and other relationship issues**
  - too old to be doing the things young children want to do
  - do not know what is current acceptable parenting practice
  - experience isolation from peer group
- **Support issues**
  - need for specialist therapeutic services, for example, counsellors and psychologists to assist with their grandchildren's behavioural problems
  - need for respite care
  - access to suitable child care services
  - recognition by the State Education systems

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**Responses to date**

- State and Territory responses
- Australian Government responses
- Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference (CDSMC) and Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CDSMAC)
- Council of Australian Governments

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### Australian Government's initiatives and payments

- The Australian Government provides a comprehensive range of benefits primarily through parenting assistance, family assistance and child care assistance
- These benefits and payments include Family Tax Benefit, Child Care Benefit and Grandparent Child Care Benefit
- All children in grandparent/relative care also have access to a non-means tested foster child Health Care Card

[www.facsia.gov.au](http://www.facsia.gov.au)      [www.centrelink.gov.au](http://www.centrelink.gov.au)

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### Family Tax Benefit

#### FTB Part A

- The Australian Government's Family Tax Benefit Part A helps families with the cost of raising children
- Family Tax Benefit Part A may be paid to families who have a dependent child aged under 21 years or a qualifying dependent full-time student aged 21 to 24 years

#### FTB Part B

- Family Tax Benefit Part B provides extra assistance to single parent families and to families with one main income where one parent chooses to stay at home or balance some paid work with caring for children

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### Child Care Benefit

- Child Care Benefit is a payment to help families who use approved registered child care
- Income tested – all eligible families can get **up to 24 hours of Child Care Benefit for approved care** without having to meet the work/training/study test
- Eligible families can get **up to 50 hours of Child Care Benefit for approved care** while working, training or studying.
- From 1 November 2004, the work/training/study test was waived for eligible grandparents who have primary care of their grandchildren. Grandparents may receive up to **50 hours of Child Care Benefit for approved child care** per week
- The hourly rate depends on the family income, whether the child(ren) attends school, the type of child care, and the number of children in child care

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### Grandparent Child Care Benefit

- Introduced on 3 January 2005
- A grandparent carer who receives an income support payment from Centrelink or the Department of Veterans' Affairs may be eligible to receive Grandparent Child Care Benefit if they have primary care of their grandchildren
- Grandparent Child Care Benefit covers the **full cost** of approved child care for up to 50 hours per child per week
- Again, no work/training/study test is applied

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### Foster Child Health Care Card

- The Foster Child Health Care Card is available to all grandparents (and foster carers) who are providing full-time care for their grandchildren through any form of arrangement
- This card can be claimed by grandparents, but is issued in the name of the grandchild
- The Health Care Card provides access to Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme prescription items, certain Medicare services at a cheaper rate and access to bulk billing for medical consultations

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### Other key support measures

- The Australian Government has implemented a number of measures to support grandparent and/or relative carers. These include:
  - expanding the eligibility criteria for the Transition to Independent Living Allowance to assist young people aged 15 to 25 years when they are about to leave or have left grandparent/relative care
  - through Centrelink, implementing a Customer Service Strategy to increase customer, community and staff awareness of issues facing grandparent/relative families
- In Centrelink Grandparent Adviser trial in WA

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### Legal support that may impact on grandparents

- The Australian Government has:
  - introduced a new approach to the family law system which, amongst other things, reinforces the important role that grandparents play
  - introduced a network of Family Relationship Centres which offers information, referral, advice and dispute resolution services and is supported by a website and national telephone network
  - provided funding of \$1.7 million over four years (until 2009-10) to legal aid commissions to provide family group conferencing in matters involving grandparents (Family Conferencing)

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### Access to information and resources

- The Australian Government has funded resources that contribute towards increasing all Australian families' access to information about the range of payments, services and support available
- These resources include the Centrelink *Are you a grandparent (or relative) caring for children?* booklet, the Australian Foster Care Association's *Supporting Carers of Other People's Children* handbook, the Raising Children website, and the Mirabel Foundation's *When the children arrive...* booklet

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### Supporting Carers of Other People's Children

- The Australian Government funded the Australian Foster Care Association (AFCA) to produce a national handbook for all foster, relative and kinship carers called – *Supporting Carers of Other People's Children: A handbook on support for foster, relative and kinship carers and the children and young people in their care*
- This handbook contains up-to-date, practical, consistent, comprehensive and cross jurisdictional information about applicable services, allowances and payments
- [www.fostercare.org.au/pubs.htm](http://www.fostercare.org.au/pubs.htm)

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### Raising Children

- The Raising Children Website is an Australian Government supported website providing parenting information for parents and carers (of children from before birth to 8 years) officially launched May 2006
- The information includes advice on raising children and accessing services, and is relevant to all people raising children
- The website is administered by the Raising Children Network, a consortium consisting of the Smart Population Foundation (Sydney), the Centre for Child Community Health (Melbourne) and the Parenting Research Centre (Melbourne)
- [www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

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### When the children arrive...

- The Australian Government funded the Mirabel Foundation to produce and distribute a national version of an existing booklet called – *When the children arrive...*
- Launched in April 2004, the booklet provides practical advice and information to grandparents, and other kinship carers, who take on the task of raising children, particularly as a result of the parent's substance abuse
- [www.mirabelfoundation.com/pubs.html](http://www.mirabelfoundation.com/pubs.html)
- [www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/Family/parenting-when\\_the\\_children\\_arrive.htm](http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/Family/parenting-when_the_children_arrive.htm)

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### Other Key Projects

- FaCSIA is a partner agency in the research initiative led by Professor Bettina Cass of the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of NSW to investigate the needs and special circumstances of both formal and informal grandparent carer families in Australia
- This research is expected to provide reliable evidence on which to base future policy making and service delivery
- Analysis of Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia data



### Next steps

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- Needs of grandparents are continuing to be a focus agenda point for CDSMC and CDSMAC
- Through these forums the Australian Government has been working with the states and territories to improve access to services and supports
- Australian Government will continue to work collaboratively with states and territories
- Australian Government will continue to identify and meet the needs of grandparent carers in areas where it has responsibility and/or a leadership role