



## **Child Protection Reform**

### **2026 SA state election commitments**

As the **peak representative body for foster and kinship carers in South Australia**, Connecting Foster & Kinship Carers – SA Inc (CF&KC-SA) seek support for the following pre-election commitments ahead of the upcoming 2026 South Australian state election.

We believe South Australia *must* prioritise the dedicated support and retention of foster and kinship carers across the state, to sustain safe, secure, and positive care for children and young people under guardianship of the Chief Executive. Family based carers provide the solid foundation for children and young people to thrive and meet their full potential. It is crucial their caring role is supported, respected, and valued.

South Australia can and must do more to provide secure, safe, and responsive care for the growing number of children & young people under guardianship– including the families who care for them. The only way to achieve this is ensuring the support and ongoing retention of family based carers is prioritised and receives the dedicated investment carers deserve.

We call for:

**‘Prioritising carer support and retention’**

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#### **COMMITMENT 1**

**SUSTAINABLE INVESTMENT IN THE CARER PEAK BODY**

#### **COMMITMENT 2**

**ENSURE FOSTER AND KINSHIP CARER PAYMENTS ADEQUATELY PROVIDE FOR THE FINANCIAL NEEDS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

#### **COMMITMENT 3**

**PROVIDE ACCESS TO ALTERNATIVE, FLEXIBLE, REGULAR FORMS OF RESPITE SUPPORT FOR CARER FAMILIES**

#### **COMMITMENT 4**

**FREE STATEWIDE MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING SUPPORT FOR FOSTER & KINSHIP CARERS**

#### **COMMITMENT 5**

**FREE LEGAL ADVICE AND REPRESENTATION FOR FOSTER & KINSHIP CARERS**

#### **COMMITMENT 6**

**A SCHEME IS DEVELOPED TO PROVIDE SUPERANNUATION CONTRIBUTIONS TO CARERS WHILST THEY PROVIDE CARE**

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For more information or to discuss, please contact CF&KC-SA:

**Email:** [support@cfc-sa.org.au](mailto:support@cfc-sa.org.au) **Phone:** 1800 732 272

### COMMITMENT 1: SUSTAINABLE INVESTMENT IN THE CARER PEAK BODY

Foster and kinship carers perform a vital role on behalf of the state—yet often report feeling isolated, unheard, and undervalued. The existence of an independent, professional peak body dedicated to supporting, informing, and advocating for carers is not a luxury—it is a right.

It is crucial the voice of family based carers is amplified professionally and pragmatically, to ensure sustainable systemic change can occur.

CF&KC-SA is the independent peak body, and proudly provides essential, trusted support and information to carers navigating complex systems, often during moments of crisis or critical decision making. As the peak body, we proactively deliver system navigation, policy advocacy, and education for Carers while amplifying their voice to government and service systems.

We call for a commitment from government to ensure the longevity and impact of the carer peak body, specifically core funding for the peak body.

Carers report that:

- they feel reassured knowing they have access to an independent, professional service that represents their interests,
- the peak body plays a critical role in navigating challenges with the Department for Child Protection and other service providers,
- a trusted, non-government advocacy is essential to help carers feel safe, respected, and supported,
- without the peak body, many would have exited their caring role,
- the peak body's advocacy has achieved tangible policy and legislative outcomes that directly improve their experience,
- short-term and insufficient funding undermines the ability of the peak to plan, retain skilled staff and deliver consistent impact.

This work is essential to carer retention, wellbeing, and participation and ultimately achieving better outcomes for children under guardianship arrangements.

**We therefore call for:**

1. recurrent core funding for the carer peak body to reflect the growing complexity and demand of the role,
2. funding contracts that extend beyond single-year terms, to ensure continuity, staff retention and long-term strategic impact,
3. formal recognition that access to a peak body is a carer right and a core pillar of a strong child protection system,
4. ongoing support for the peak body's role in advocacy, systemic reform, carer engagement and direct service delivery.

As the peak body, CF&KC-SA has successfully demonstrated the power of independent, collaborative advocacy. We have delivered professional, solutions-focused support to hundreds of Carers across South Australia. This work can only continue with sustained and sufficient investment.

## COMMITMENT 2: ENSURE FOSTER AND KINSHIP CARER PAYMENTS ADEQUATELY PROVIDE FOR THE FINANCIAL NEEDS FOR RAISING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

South Australian carer payments are **still insufficient** in comparison to the full cost of caring for young people in family based care when benchmarked against other states and territories. Carers continue to report feeling exhausted and devalued, fighting for basic needs for their children and young people.

There continues to be a severe lack of transparency regarding reimbursements and entitlements and a lack of awareness by decision makers regarding the direct and indirect financial impact on carer families.

The true cost of providing care is still unknown, with contemporary research into the issue still absent.

The Complexity Assessment Tool and Special Needs loading tool are not fit for purpose and continue to need urgent attention.

Carers report that:

- reimbursements must be paid in a timely manner so that financial strain is minimised,
- current reimbursement delays impact the wellbeing of children - particularly in accessing timely services and support,
- there is persistent, pervasive stigmatisation they are “doing it for the money”,
- information regarding the payment process & decision making is not transparent or easy to understand,
- children are missing out on crucial support and services in their formative years due to an inappropriate Complexity Assessment Tool and Special Needs Loading tool.

Increasing the reimbursement of the base level payments will help with the retention of Carers and the future recruitment of new Carers.

In June 2025, the [NSW government](#) increased the base level foster care allowance by 20%, in recognition of the critical role of carers in keeping NSW children safe in family based care.

We call for immediately acknowledging the emotional, financial, and psychological commitment carers willingly and openly develop when they raise children and young people on behalf of the state.

### We therefore call for:

1. the commissioning of research to ascertain the true cost to Carers caring for children and young people under guardianship, which will serve as the foundation for carer payment increases,
2. an increase in base level carer payments across all ages ranges to either meet or exceed the National average,
3. the DCP Complex Assessment Tool and Special Needs Loading Tool to be age appropriate in its function; ensuring children and young people are receiving adequate supports as soon as required in their formative years, linked to objective assessment results and clear recommendations for therapeutic support.

We at the peak called for this election commitment as part of the 2022 election asks campaign. The peak was notified of a review was underway regarding the CAT & SNL tools are listed in the “every effort for every child” strategy as a forward agenda phase 3 piece in 2022. There has yet to be an outcome or reform of these tools, and carers continue to bear the cost. The commissioning of research into the true cost of care was supported by current government, prior to the 2022 election, yet has not been initialised.

We call for this to be urgently addressed for the immediate benefit for children and young people and their needs.

### **COMMITMENT 3: PROVIDE ACCESS TO ALTERNATIVE, FLEXIBLE, REGULAR FORMS OF RESPITE SUPPORT FOR CARER FAMILIES**

South Australian Carers are *still* not receiving adequate, appropriate, and consistent respite support for their children and young people.

Carers report that:

- they are not receiving respite in a timely manner,
- there is ongoing stigmatisation when accessing respite,
- the current formal respite arrangements are often inaccessible and/or inappropriate.

Carer families 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 foster and kinship carer families to have a break or help relieve pressure (e.g. babysitting, cleaning, gardening, holidays) would be more suitable and support the retention of healthy carers.

#### **We therefore call for:**

1. formal acknowledgement that Carers have the right to respite, which is not to be stigmatised as a reflection on their level of skill, commitment and love for their child or young person,
2. a commitment to providing respite care that is flexible, meets the needs of the young person and their carer family,
3. an increased commitment to recruiting more respite carers across all South Australia,
4. facilitating respite opportunities proactively for Carers, to preserve placements and retain healthy carers.

The provision of respite that is destigmatised and flexible in delivery is necessary for the retention and support of South Australian family based carers.

### **COMMITMENT 4: FREE STATEWIDE MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING SUPPORT FOR FOSTER & KINSHIP CARERS**

Foster and kinship carers provide care for children and young people who have experienced significant trauma, grief, loss, and disruption, in addition to navigating a complex child protection system increasing the pressure of providing care. In doing so, carers often sacrifice their own wellbeing—carrying the emotional and psychological weight of the system without complaint, for fear of retribution and judgement from the very system they are a key member of.

Many carers report struggling silently, not because they are unfit to care, but because the emotional demands of the role are immense. Access to mental health and wellbeing support should not be inconsistent, stigmatised, or dependent on which support agency a carer is connected to. Carers deserve free, confidential, and trauma-informed psychological support—offered proactively, not reactively—and delivered in a way that recognises the pressures of providing care on behalf of the state.

To sustain and support family based placements, we call for the establishment of a consistent, statewide model of mental health and wellbeing support for all Carers.

Carers report that:

- access to psychological support varies widely between support agencies,
- some are offered only two or six sessions, while others are unaware they are entitled to any support at all,
- requesting help is often stigmatised or perceived as “not coping”,
- many carers delay or forgo accessing help altogether due to shame, confusion, or cost,
- they want support that is confidential, easily accessed, and delivered by professionals who understand the child protection context and the lived experience of caring,
- accessing this support helps them remain resilient and continue caring long-term.

**We therefore call for:**

1. the immediate provision of professional psychological support to all carers across SA that is fully funded, easily accessible and highly confidential, similar to the models provided in [Victoria](#) and Queensland,
2. this service to be consistent across all regions and agencies, trauma-informed, and provided by professionals with an understanding of family-based care and the child protection system,
3. carers to be proactively informed of their right to access this support, including via induction materials, websites, and routine casework practice,
4. DCP and agencies to publicly endorse the normalisation of psychological support for carers, removing stigma and promoting it as a strength,
5. an automatic referral pathway for Carers under investigation to receive free psychological support, as is currently offered in Queensland.

We at the peak know that strong, supported Carers are the foundation of a stable child protection system. Without mental health and wellbeing support, South Australia risks losing carers to burnout, isolation, and stress. The provision of mental health support is crucial to support and retain South Australia’s foster and kinship carers.

#### **COMMITMENT 5: FREE LEGAL ADVICE AND REPRESENTATION FOR FOSTER & KINSHIP CARERS**

Foster and kinship carers ability to pursue reviewable decisions in the South Australian Civil Administrative Tribunal (SACAT) was a significant milestone—one CF&KC-SA proudly advocated for, granting specific legal rights to carers in legislation. However, these rights remain increasingly inaccessible for many carers due to the lack of available, affordable legal representation.

Carers frequently find themselves self-represented at SACAT hearings, facing legal teams from the DCP, Crown Solicitor’s Office, and other parties. This power imbalance is intimidating, unjust, and erodes the principle of natural justice.

We call for urgent investment into legal services to ensure carers can exercise their legal rights and are not left to navigate complex legal systems alone.

Carers report that:

- they are often unrepresented while facing multiple legal professionals from other parties,

- community legal services often cannot assist due to income thresholds, catchment boundaries, or conflicts of interest,
- pro bono legal help is difficult to secure and inconsistent,
- they feel overwhelmed, distressed, and unable to adequately represent the best interests of the child in their care,
- legal representation is routinely available to birth families and the DCP, but not to carers—despite their vital role.

We therefore call for:

1. the implementation of a dedicated, state-funded legal service for carers, delivered in partnership with an independent community legal provider, like the successful [Queensland model](#),
2. legal representation to be made available to any carer referred by the peak body who is subject to a SACAT matter,
3. ongoing funding to support the continuation and expansion of legal partnerships already brokered by CF&KC-SA,
4. the development of education and resources to assist carers in understanding their legal rights and the SACAT process.

The lack of access to legal support in an adversarial environment actively undermines carer participation legal proceedings, specifically their right to natural justice.

#### **COMMITMENT 6: A SCHEME IS DEVELOPED TO PROVIDE SUPERANNUATION CONTRIBUTIONS TO CARERS WHILST THEY PROVIDE CARE**

South Australian foster and kinship carers continue to report serious concern about their long-term financial security, particularly in relation to their ability to generate and maintain superannuation while actively caring for children and young people. The financial impact of caring—reduced income, limited career progression, and lack of superannuation contributions—is a consistent theme raised by carers, especially by women nearing retirement age and those in regional areas. There is currently no mechanism in place to acknowledge or offset this impact, despite the known disparity between unpaid carers and those in residential care settings who receive superannuation entitlements.

Foster and kinship carers have the right to a dignified retirement, free from financial stress.

We call for urgent action to support the long-term financial wellbeing of carers and prevent them from retiring into poverty after years of service to the state.

Carers report that:

- caring responsibilities require them to reduce or exit the workforce, which directly impacts their economic participation and the generation of superannuation,
- an unspoken expectation they will leave work to meet the needs of the child or young person in their care,
- superannuation entitlements, and the future impact on said entitlements is not discussed at the start of or during the caring journey,
- some use existing superannuation to pay for services, activities or costs related to the child or young person to meet the needs not covered by DCP,
- they would contribute to superannuation if they could, but have no surplus income to do so,
- a lack of workplace flexibility results in self-selecting out of employment to provide care,
- they are aware of the inequity between their circumstances and those of paid residential care workers who receive superannuation.

**We therefore call for:**

1. the establishment of a scheme to enable carers to have superannuation contributions made by the South Australian government while they provide care for children and young people,
2. clear, accessible information for carers regarding superannuation including voluntary contributions and long-term financial planning, made available from the beginning and throughout the care journey,
3. the inclusion of superannuation considerations in any future research into the true cost of caring, to ensure Carers' retirement needs are fully understood and addressed,
4. investigation of alternative financial supports such as tax offsets or a care bonus paid directly into superannuation.

We at the peak body regularly raise this issue as a key element of systemic advocacy however no specific measures have been introduced to address the financial and retirement insecurity faced by carers. Without intervention, carers will continue to bear the lifelong economic cost of providing care on behalf of the state, impacting the retention, and future recruitment, of foster and kinship carers.