

ABC Mornings with Rory McClaren – Interview regarding recent AIFS Review of Carer Payments

20 August 2026

Rory McClaren (RMc):

It might be one of the most important jobs in our state, caring for people or caring for children who have nowhere else to go. Foster and kinship carers provide a lifeline for some of the state's most vulnerable children. So you'd think we'd be doing everything we can to try and support people willing to take on that role.

But new revelations show many carers are being underpaid. Russell Hooper is the CEO of Connecting Foster and Kinship Carers South Australia.

Russell, what is the review of payment showed?

Russell Hooper (RH): Hi, Rory, nice to be here. So the review is from the Australian Institute of Family Studies. So it's an independent government research organisation.

And what it shows is family based carer are delivering better outcomes for children and it's more cost-effective than alternatives like residential care. But the carers are being placed under unfair financial pressure.

The report actually highlights and quantifies this issue. It says depending on the family circumstances, it's between 120 to \$400 approximately per week.

RMc: Per week.

RH: Per week.

RMc: That's a huge amount of money, potentially over a year, Russell.

RH: That is - the current payment, the base payment, is between \$260 to \$447 per ...week... So it's actually quite a large portion of what it takes to care for children - as you said, some of the most vulnerable children in our state, who've often had quite traumatic upbringings and need that kind of family-based stability which foster and kinship care has provide.

RMc: Russell, for people who are not familiar with how this works, explain how the payments are structured, if you can. Who pays?

RH: Well, its incredibly complicated, but effectively the Department of Child Protection has a base payment, which is based on what age it is. Then, depending on the complexity, it can go up in terms of loading. And in addition to that, there's discretionary payments.

So the system is incredibly complex to navigate at the best of times and that's sometimes what organisations like mine do to help careers make sure they get the

financial support they need to deliver the therapeutic parenting to children and young people.

So I guess that's, it's a pretty bad answer because the system is so complicated, but it'd probably take a bit longer than this interview to explain.

RMc: Yeah. But, but, but is that in a, in and of itself, Russell, a disincentive for people to get involved? If, if you, as you've just explained, it is complex to get paid and on the basis of what you say this research shows, people are not getting enough.

RH: Yeah, I mean, most foster carers come into the system because they want to open up their homes and hearts to children in need. So that's the primary driver of why people are coming in. But it's made so much harder to manage with the financial pressures, which can lead to, you know, a lack of placement stability, or a lack of support for kids in terms of the everyday recreational activities.

So, I guess, yes, yes, you're right, but it's also important to know that these are pretty incredible people across our community who are doing their best out of, you know, out of kindness.

RMc: Have there recently been increases when it comes to the payments people can receive? Russell?

RH: Um, there was a couple of years ago, um, but it's still obviously not meeting the, the, the cost which this independent study had said it costs. But in that time, every time there's an indexation applied per year, it's not meeting CPI as well.

So that's a big issue that my members are raising with me as well in that indexation isn't meeting CPI every year. It's about 2.5% per year. The figures that I've just mentioned, I should say, based on 2024 data. Since then, housing and rental costs in South Australia have increased by about 25%. That is a lot more than 2.5% per year for the increase care of payments.

RMc: That is the voice of Russell Hooper. He is the CEO of Connecting Foster and Kinship Carers essay at 22 minutes to 10. Here on 891, ABC, Adelaide Mornings.

We were talking about the payments that foster and kinship carers receive here in South Australia. Russell, give us a sense if you can, how many people do you represent right now?

RH: Where represent over a 1000 carers in South Australia, but also we offer a care advocacy service to any foster carer, regardless of membership as well.

Yeah, so we get a lot of different perspectives through the consultation we do, the everyday work we do advocating for carers. And these financial pressures are coming up.

We did a recent survey around cost of living because obviously this year has been hard for everyone. And some of the things we're hearing, this quote will always stay with me, its "we'll have to stop doing everything fine if it keeps on getting worse".

You know, these activities, like, you know, swimming lessons, sports games, going to the movies, Netflix even, or the occasional treat, which are critical to like every child's upbringing. They're the things which go first because kids need to eat.

So, yeah, it's having really significant impacts. I'm hearing from carers who are dipping into their superannuation - if they have it - in order to make the basic needs for kids and kids in care.

RMc: This is very much a state issue, Russell.

RH: This is a national issue, but I'm coming with a state focus

RMc: Russell Hooper, thank you.

RH: Thank you.

RMc: We'll check this up as well. The Relevant State Minister would be Alice Rolls in this space as the Minister for Child Protection here in South Australia.