

Carer Council Communique

February 2025

Update

Meeting topics

The Carer Council held its fifth and sixth meetings on consecutive days on 10 and 11 February 2025.

The Carer Council covered four topics over the two meetings, these being:

1. Continuing the topic of workforce consistency and communication with carers, with a particular focus on complaints and accountability.
2. Therapeutic supports for children and young people.
3. Adherence to the newly refreshed *Statement of Commitment to foster and kinship carers (Statement of Commitment)*.
4. Mapping the journey of a family-based carer.

Attendance

10 February 2025

Members: Alexandra Ingleton, Dana Wright, Ellese Nelson, Emily Ware, Gai McMichael, Gail Ward, Jakob Schmaal, Kailah Hurditch, Kate Thomas, Lorraine Joy (Chair), Peter Kennedy, Suzanne Scanlon

Guests:

- For an opening talk: Jackie Bray, Chief Executive, Department for Child Protection
- To present on the Department for Child Protection Complaints process: Department for Child Protection staff members Kris Swaffer (Director, Office of the Chief Executive) and Claire Di Carlo (Manager, Complaints and Feedback Management Unit)
- To present on the role of the Ombudsman in SA's child protection system: Emily Strickland, South Australian Ombudsman

Support: Dana Shen, Facilitator; Lauren Gibbs, Carer Council Project Lead, CF&KC-SA; Fiona Endacott, CEO, CF&KC-SA (partial attendance)

Apologies: Nil

11 February 2025

Members: Alexandra Ingleton, Dana Wright, Ellese Nelson, Emily Ware, Gail Ward, Jakob Schmaal, Kailah Hurditch, Kate Thomas, Lorraine Joy (Chair), Peter Kennedy, Suzanne Scanlon

Guests:

- To present on therapeutic supports for children and young people: Dr Robyn Miller, CEO at MacKillop Family Services and member of the Child Protection Expert Group
- To present on Department for Child Protection Processes in accessing therapies for children and young people: Department for Child Protection staff members Simone Mather (Executive Director of Out of Home Care), Amy Kane (Director of Carer Services) and Lauren Cook (Manager of Psychological Services)

Support: Dana Shen, Facilitator; Lauren Gibbs, Carer Council Project Lead, CF&KC-SA; Fiona Endacott, CEO, CF&KC-SA (partial attendance)

Apologies: Gai McMichael

Themes arising from the meetings

The overarching theme of the two meetings was better adherence to the **inform** pillar of the *Statement of Commitment*. In Council discussions, it was clear that improvements to information-sharing is an issue of critical importance to carers regarding both complaints and accountability and therapeutic supports for children and young people, with carers not feeling adequately informed enough to utilise the current child protection complaints systems, nor initiate and participate in DCP processes to access therapeutic supports for their children and young people.

Further themes throughout discussion on **complaints and accountability** included:

- The current organisational culture in child protection that has an aversion to complaints.
- Data collection on complaints.

Further themes throughout discussion on **therapeutic supports for children and young people** included:

- The importance of improving access to therapeutic supports for children and young people as a high priority for the carer community.
- The skill and knowledge of caseworkers as the first step in the chain to access therapeutic supports.
- Issues in carer voices requesting help, with DCP requiring recommendations of professionals first to action requests.
- Carers feeling a power imbalance between staff and carers.
- Lengthy timeframes to access therapeutic supports.
- Capacity of the workforce – both the capacity of case management, as well as public and private therapeutic clinicians to take on new clients.

- A need for supports for carers while their children and young people are waitlisted for direct therapeutic supports.
- Lack of information shared with carers:
 - Throughout the referral process
 - In report sharing
 - On therapies available

Meeting outcomes

The Carer Council formed 18 recommendations, including:

- 10 recommendations on complaints,¹ consisting of recommendations on information-sharing, dispute-resolution, organisational culture, as well as advice on improved data collection.
- 8 recommendations on therapeutic supports for children and young people, which included recommendations on improvements to the existing process for accessing therapeutic supports, as well as recommendations on new and improved processes.

The Carer Council also:

- Provided advice on better adherence to the *Statement of Commitment* regarding complaints, as well as therapeutic supports for children and young people.
- Resolved that it would continue to provide advice on better adherence to the *Statement of Commitment* in relation to future topics before the Council.
- Commenced its project on mapping the journey of a family-based carer.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the Carer Council will be held on 12 May 2025.

Contact

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¹ Including recommendations made at meeting 4, the Carer Council has made 13 recommendations to date on complaints and accountability.