



Jenny Mikakos MP

Minister for Families and Children
Minister for Early Childhood Education
Minister for Youth Affairs

GPO Box 4057
Melbourne Victoria 3001
Telephone: +61 3 9096 0301
www.dhhs.vic.gov.au
www.education.vic.gov.au
DX: 210081

e4982785

Brenda Carmen
Chief Executive Officer
Permanent Care and Adoptive Families
Level 5
50 Market Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Ms Carmen / *Brenda*

Thank you for our meeting of 16 October 2018 to discuss support for permanent carers. I would like to acknowledge Permanent Care and Adoptive (PCA) Families' continued work to support and advocate for permanent carers.

During our meeting you raised a number of issues. I was concerned about the matters you raised and committed to providing PCA Families' a response in a timely manner. In line with this commitment, I would like to respond to each point as follows:

Current carer payments for young people on Permanent Care Orders who are undertaking VCE

In our discussions, you raised a number of questions regarding support for young people 18 years and over. I can confirm, care allowance can continue beyond 18 and up to 21 years of age when the young person is continuing post-secondary education.

To be eligible for care allowance a young person in permanent care who turns 18 years of age during the school year must be undertaking one of the following secondary education qualifications (full-time or part-time):

- the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE)
- the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) at intermediate level or higher
- Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualifications at Certificate II level or higher
- International Baccalaureate Diploma program
- VCAL at Foundation level or Certificate 1 in Transition Education.

Homestretch funding extension beyond 18

You asked whether the recent Homestretch funding announcement will apply to young people on Permanent Care Orders. In most instances, carers' access to client expenses ceases when a child in out of home care with an open case turns 18. Given flexible funding for permanent carers is most comparable to client expenses for closed cases, it is not proposed to extend access to Homestretch support for young people subject to Permanent Care Orders beyond 18, except in exceptional circumstances.

Concern about grandparents who are paying university fees for their grandchildren

You also expressed concern for grandparents who are funding their grandchildren's university education. Commonwealth initiatives are available, through HECS-HELP where young Australians are not required to pay university fees prior to commencing employment.

HECS-HELP is a loan scheme for eligible students enrolled in Commonwealth supported places, available at all public universities, to pay their student contribution amounts. Subject to eligibility, young people on Permanent Care Orders who are studying are also able to access Youth Allowance through the Commonwealth Government.

As your website highlights, the Skills First Youth Access Initiative is also available to young people on Permanent Care Orders under 22 years of age. The Skills First Youth Access Initiative enables young people to study without paying tuition fees. This initiative focuses on creating a viable pathway to education and employment that greatly improves the young person's chance to break out of the cycle of disadvantage.

I would also like to draw your attention to Raising Expectations, an initiative by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, which provides resources and access to support services to ensure the young person in care has all the tools possible to access university or TAFE.

You have released \$790,000 of your \$1 million in flexible support funding

Our discussion also raised demand for flexible funding provided to PCA Families. The department provides \$1 million in recurrent funding to PCA Families. In addition to this recurrent funding, PCA Families was funded \$2 million in 2018-19 for the provision of flexible funding support packages to existing permanent carers. As per the funding agreement it is important PCA Families prioritise funding to permanent carers on a needs basis and the department would be happy to discuss how this might be best achieved and the development of a business case to increase funding in future years.

Funding request of \$18,126 for a new data collection and case management system

I am pleased to inform you that your request for funding of \$18,126 for a new data collection and case management system has been assessed by my department and is approved. The department will be in touch shortly to confirm arrangements.

Permanent Care Orders being granted without a care plan or cultural plan in place

I also thank you for raising the issue of Permanent Care Orders being granted without a cultural plan in place, this is very concerning as the Children's Court is prohibited from making a Permanent Care Order unless a cultural support plan is provided with the application. If you provide details of these cases to my department, departmental staff will raise these issues with the Children's Court.

My department advises that the *Children Youth and Families Act (2005)* does not explicitly require a care plan for a child where an application for a Permanent Care Order is being made. However, departmental staff and the Children's Court must be satisfied the proposed permanent carer can meet the child's needs before recommending or making a Permanent Care Order.

Availability for permanent carers to attend Carer KaFE

During our meeting, the possibility of extending Carer KaFE to permanent care was discussed. While Carer KaFE is primarily designed for kinship and foster care, should places become available in any given session, permanent carers are able to access Carer KaFE training sessions.

There are other opportunities emerging that permanent carers can take advantage of:

- the Foster Care Association of Victoria has been holding Facebook webinars with topics relevant to carers and Kinship Carers Victoria has released a podcast series.
- the Department of Health and Human Services has also released a podcast series, Helping Carers Helping Kids, that permanent carers could find helpful. All of these are easily accessible on the internet.

I hope these responses have adequately answered of your concerns.

I take this opportunity to thank you again for the collaboration we have had over the past four years at a time of significant reform in the child and families services sector.

For further discussion, please contact Mary Roberts, A/Assistant Director, Out of Home Care Unit, on (03) 9096 0564 or by email Mary.Roberts@dhhs.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Jenny Mikakos MP
Minister for Families and Children
Minister for Early Childhood Education
Minister for Youth Affairs

24/10 / 2018