



Creating Links submission on the Draft Report - Out-of-Home Care costs and pricing

1. Introduction

Creating Links thanks IPART for providing the opportunity to stakeholders to give feedback on the Draft Report for Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) costs and pricing. It is understood that IPART has been asked to assist the NSW Government to improve the performance and financial sustainability of the OOHC system.

To support this effort in providing feedback for the draft report, Creating Links supports the comprehensive submission provided by The Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA). In addition, this submission will include a case study that highlights the need to consider additional points of carer recruitment and assessment costs, as well as supporting cultural connections for children with a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background.

2. About Creating Links

Creating Links is a not-for-profit multicultural community service provider, dedicated to delivering a high quality of standards and service across South-West Sydney and the Greater Sydney region.

Established in 1972 as the Bankstown Community Services Co-operative, the organisation shared the same passion and belief that all children, young people, and families were entitled to live and grow up in safe, productive, resilient, and inclusive communities. In the early 2000's, Bankstown Community Services Co-operative transitioned to Creating Links and became a registered Foster Care provider in 2013.

Today, Creating Links has grown to provide Disability services, Foster Care, Child & Family services, and Financial Wellbeing that values:

- Our socially and culturally diverse community.
- Our ability to create opportunities to provide services and programs.
- Our collaboration and partnerships with various networks; and
- Our role in providing services in partnership with government.

3. Carer assessment costs

Draft decision 11 of the IPART report estimates efficient cost of recruiting a new carer to be \$18,190, noting that costs may vary in cases where a provider is referred a carer or must manage multiple recruitment rounds to find a suitable carer. Decision 12 of the IPART report estimates \$5,250 for the efficient cost of assessing a new carer; \$3,750 for the assessment cost and \$1,500 for associated travel, accommodation, and food costs.

The recommendations for costs of recruitment and assessment of carers suggest that a payment be made to the non-government provider when they take a child or young person into their program.



That suggests that a child is only likely to need one carer throughout their care experience.

The experience of children and young people throughout their care experience means they are likely to experience more than one carer. In the last 12 months there have been 14 children with Creating Links who have had more than two changes of carer. Often this is to accommodate a move to a permanent care arrangement or a return to family through relative and kinship care, unfortunately at other times it can be due to a change in a carer's circumstance or challenges facing the carer being able to meet the child's needs.

Carers often want to provide a certain type of care such as emergency and short-term care, or permanent care where they are wanting to grow their families and seek relational and legal permanency of a child. This can also lead to children experiencing multiple carers. We also know that the role of being a carer is challenging and over time carers make decisions to step away from caring for a variety of reasons. This means that non-government providers need to recruit carers beyond just the children they have in their care, and for growing the program, but also to replace carers as their circumstances change.

In the Financial Year 2023-2024 (FY23-24) Creating Links had 39 number of carer households leave their role as carer.

The assessment of carers is also complex, and simply because an assessment commences or is completed does not mean that a carer is available for a child. The cost of an assessment for a carer who is not subsequently authorised remains. It is unclear in the recommendations if the cost of assessments where an authorisation does not eventuate is covered in the recruitment cost.

Creating Links current average cost of assessment is \$5325 in comparison to the \$5250 that has been provided within the recommendations; however, it should be noted that these costs did not include any significant travel as indicated by the initial breakdown recommendation. In FY23-24 Creating Links received 55 applications, where assessment work commenced, with at least five (5) applications including completed assessment reports and being unable to progress to authorisation. From these 55 applications, 23 carers households were authorised (41.8%).

The IPART report acknowledged variations in cost. However, further consideration is needed regarding the assessment of multiple carers for one child when non-government organisations are asked to at the direction of DCJ or the court to determine the best possible carer for the child. The case study shows that following a Family Group Conference, four perspective kinship carers willing to be assessed to provide care to the children. Creating Links was asked to consider all possibilities and determine the most appropriate permanent carer for the children.

Creating Links recommends further consideration of the associated costs of carer assessments, particularly for carers with a CALD background. As a not-for-profit multicultural community service provider, additional interpreter costs often contribute to assessments exceeding the estimated \$5250 for carer assessments. Currently, 66 percent of children with a CALD background supported by Creating Links are either culturally matched or partially culturally matched with a carer. As highlighted in the case study, additional time and costs are required to ensure culturally appropriate



care for children.

The case study outlines that it is not only the costs during the assessment, but there can also be costs post assessment that contribute to the overall expenditure. Considering the lower cost assessment report and interpreter costs for assessment two, which is \$6160 and still above the estimated \$5,250, the draft decision on carer assessments has not considered additional costings post assessment, which in the case study was the cost of translating relative/kinship carer assessments from English to Chinese.

4. Supporting cultural connections

Draft decision 8 of the IPART estimates an efficient cultural care worker cost of \$1,260 per child from a CALD background per year with a non-government provider. Creating Links recommends that draft decisions 25 to 27, which apply to the support of Aboriginal cultural connections, be extended to supporting children with a CALD background.

In supporting the cultural connections for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care, IPART estimates:

25. An Aboriginal cultural worker cost of \$1,210 per Aboriginal child per year.
26. An upfront cultural planning cost for family finding and genealogy of \$6,700 per Aboriginal child entering care.
27. The cost of providing cultural programs for an Aboriginal child to be \$990 per child per year (exclusive of labour, overheads, and additional variable costs that enable a child to connect with their birth family and Country. The cost of enabling an Aboriginal child to connect with their birth family and Country is unique to each child, therefore such costs cannot be estimated with precision).

The NSW Child Safe Standards for Permanent Care (Standard 4: Identity) requires children to maintain a meaningful connection with community, culture, language, and identity. It is noted in the IPART report that non-government providers have reported children with a CALD background require additional casework time, accounting for developing cultural support plans, placement matching for children with carers that may have a similar cultural background and supporting relative/kinship carers who may not speak English navigate services or access information.

This additional casework required when developing cultural plans include the need for family finding, consultation with appropriate family members and cultural elders or advisors, often additional travel at times including overseas travel to ensure connection to family and culture. Some of the activities that are identified within a cultural plan, also require additional funding such as language classes, cultural dance classes, or engaging with a culturally appropriate mentor. Alongside additional translation and interpreting services for talking with parents, extended family, and significant others and at time with relative /kinship carers.

Creating Links has an expectation to deliver as a multicultural service provider in relation to DCJ funding, and currently 55 percent of children supported by Creating Link have a CALD background¹.

¹ This does not include Aboriginal children. 80 percent of children supported by Creating Links has an Aboriginal or CALD background.



The case study highlights that the complexities experienced during the carer assessment also extended to the case management of the children. As the family required an interpreter, this was an additional cost to consider with each contact visit. From October 2024 to April 2025, the total cost of an interpreter for the children in care was \$1,628.27.

Planning to have an interpreter present and the associated costs is one aspect of supporting children with a CALD background. The case study has not considered the other tasks contributing to the additional casework time required, including developing cultural support plans, or providing cultural programs that contribute to maintaining a meaningful connection with community, culture, language, and identity.

5. Creating Links Case Study

This case study explores the language translation costs associated with carer assessments and support for children with a CALD background; areas of the IPART report that require further consideration. Focusing on the translation costs highlights the complexity of cases where families have a CALD background, demonstrating how a single factor can contribute to a significant increase in overall expenses.

Creating Links were providing care for a family with multiple children who were of a Chinese background. The children were on interim orders and were residing with foster carers on an emergency/short term basis. Following a Family Group Conference, four prospective kinship carers were identified as being willing to be assessed to provide care to the children, and Creating Links were asked to consider all possibilities and determine the most appropriate permanent carer for the children. All prospective carers were from a Chinese speaking background. Two required translation services for the assessment to be completed and all prospective carers required the assessment report to be translated to Chinese to ensure they had a sound understanding of the report and the recommendations.

Four relative/kinship carer assessments were required to determine the appropriate carer for three children, with the family requiring English-to-Chinese translation. An external translating service was used for two of the four carer assessments, and all four relative/kinship carer assessments required translation to Chinese before being returned to the assessed relatives. The translated assessment ensured all family was able to understand why they were or were not authorised. There were additional translation and interpreting costs as Creating Links also provided a translated copy of our carer handbook and other essential documentation to carer applicants, alongside needing to identify a trainer that could deliver the pre-authorisation training in Chinese or have a translator attend the training provided to carers.

The costs for assessment and translation included:

- \$9900 for the assessment & interpreter for assessment one.
- \$460 for additional interpreter charges relating to assessment one.
- \$6160 for assessment & Interpreter for assessment two.
- \$17,425.38 to translate all the relative/kinship carer assessments from English to Chinese.



- \$2,925.78 to translate the carer handbook from English to Chinese
- \$150-\$250 per hour to translate training

In relation to the expenses for the children in care, a translator was required for each visit with a case worker. From October 2024 to April 2025, the total cost of translator was \$1,628.27.

To develop a cultural plan for a child that is Cultural and Linguistically Diverse it can take approximately 10-20 hours for a case worker to develop. If the child has limited or complex cultural connections (e.g. due to fragmented family information or intergenerational trauma), this process may take longer. When reviewing the plan annually, it can take approximately 3 to 6 hours to review. In addition to case worker labour cost, we also need to consider other associated costs including travel, should family reside interstate or internationally, translator, interpreter, cultural consultant fees, fees for resources, etc.

Should a cultural plan be complex and requires us to engage in a cultural consultant, the cost is approximately \$2000 per plan and \$1000 to review annually. This exceeds the allowance recommended by IPART.

6. Conclusion

Creating Links thanks IPART again for seeking feedback from stakeholders across the OOHC sector. We trust that the information in this document will help to inform the Tribunal's work. As Creating Links is a not-for-profit multicultural community service provider, it is important to outline the additional costs associated with carer assessments and supporting children with a CALD background, recommending that the IPART report provide further consideration to draft decisions 8, 11 and 12.