

IPART Review Submission - Review of Out-of-Home Care costs and pricing

The proposed increases to financial support for carers, along with efforts to improve transparency and consistency from NGOs and DCJ, are welcome steps in the right direction. However, in my view, they fall short. They do not fully account for the actual costs of raising and supporting children in out-of-home care (OOHC), nor do they go far enough to address the troubling trend of experienced carers leaving the system.

My wife and I have been authorised foster carers for nearly 15 years. We have a spare room in our home and, more importantly, the compassion, resilience, and commitment to provide a safe, supportive, and trauma-informed environment for children and young people in need. We have shared our lives and our home with many children over the years. Yet, with heavy hearts, we've made the decision to step away from fostering once our current placements transition out of care.

This decision has not come lightly. Fostering has been one of the most profound and rewarding experiences of our lives. But the system has worn us down. And while there are many contributing factors, a significant one is the lack of adequate financial support. Too often, we've found ourselves covering costs out of our own pockets. For our family, this simply isn't sustainable.

Fostering is so much more than offering a roof over a child's head. It involves regular case planning meetings, home visits, carer reviews, supporting contact with biological families, and consistently advocating for the best interests of the children in our care. All of this demands time and emotional energy. Since we began fostering, my wife has only been able to work part-time in order to meet these obligations.

There's also the long-term financial impact to consider: lost income, reduced superannuation, and missed career opportunities. These are very real sacrifices, and they often fall more heavily on women. This broader economic cost to carers should not be dismissed as outside the scope of the review—it is a crucial part of the conversation.

Carers should not be expected to shoulder the financial and emotional burden of a system already under strain. The responsibility for caring for vulnerable children lies with the government and the community. It must be funded and supported accordingly.

I also question how IPART arrived at the proposed Carer Allowance levels. It's unclear whether they genuinely reflect the full cost of providing care. Are they responsive to the rapid increases in the cost of living? Do they account for respite carers who must maintain a spare room year-round but only receive an allowance for a few nights a week or month?

If we are truly committed to improving the OOHC system, then we must look beyond recruitment alone. Supporting and retaining experienced carers is equally—if not more—important. That means adequate and fair financial support, regular reviews to keep allowances in line with the cost of living (every 3–5 years at a minimum), and meaningful recognition of the time, energy, and love carers invest every single day.

Because when we fail to support carers, we fail the children in their care. And that's something the government must urgently address and prevent from continuing.