Benefits, entitlements and resources

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This advice is endorsed by the: Assistant Director, Child Protection Policy, Practice and Planning.

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Introduction and purpose

This Advice details benefits, entitlements and other resources that **may** be available to clients of the department, their family and kinship or foster carers.

Kinship and foster carers **are entitled to receive** caregiver reimbursements for each child placed in their care, once the placement is endorsed. For other benefits and entitlements applications are assessed on specific eligibility criteria.

The list of benefits and entitlements contained in this Advice is not exhaustive. Team managers and other experienced practitioners are likely to become familiar with other sources that may be available in their region.

Legislation

Note: Use the Legislation link on toolbar to access full text versions of the legislation.

Any sections of an Act noted in this Advice are partial references only and should not be relied on. Practitioners should refer to the Act for full details.

Financial Management Act

The reimbursement of carers is an administrative task and the authority to approve payment of reimbursements comes from the *Financial Management Act 1994*. Certain managers have been specifically delegated the Secretary's power to authorise caregiver reimbursements under the *Financial Management Act 1994*.

Victims of Crimes Assistance Act

The Victims of Crimes Assistance Act 1999 provides for compensation to victims for expenses occurred or reasonably likely to be incurred as direct result of being the victim of a crime. It also gives effect to the objective of providing financial assistance to certain victims for, and in recognition of, grief, distress or trauma experienced or suffered by them as victims of crime.

Standards and procedures

Caregiver reimbursement

Approved kinship carers and foster carers are reimbursed for costs associated with caring for a child, once the placement has been endorsed. Payments are made fortnightly by the Department of Human Services. The reimbursement to caregivers is a contribution to the ordinary costs for caring for a child.

Sometimes it may be appropriate for the caregiver to apply through the Commonwealth Child Support Agency for a parent to contribute toward the costs of caring for the child, especially if this is a long term situation. Young people aged 16+ are entitled to apply for the Youth Allowance.

Caregiver reimbursement rates are not affected by Centrelink or Commonwealth child support agency payments, or payments made by parents to the carer or Youth Allowance payments.

Caregiver reimbursements are paid from the date of the endorsed placement of the child and are made for each child in care.

Initiating reimbursements

Where a kinship care placement is made child protection practitioners are responsible for initiating caregiver reimbursements by filling in the 'Commencement payment form for caregiver reimbursement', available on CRIS. The team Manager must approve these forms having first sighted and reviewed the national criminal history check results for all relevant persons.

It is important that reimbursements are initiated as soon as possible after the placement is endorsed (not more than three days after the commencement of placement). The reimbursements are commenced once the practitioner has completed the 'Commence payment form' and forwarded it to regional finance coordinator, who then e-mails or faxes the completed form to the Care Giver Reimbursement Unit - DHS Head Office. At the time of completing this form the carer should be sent the 'letter to caregivers', Application for Direct Debit form, self addressed, stamped envelope for carer to return the completed direct debit form to the Care Giver Reimbursement Unit, level 6, DHS 50 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne.

There is sometimes a lag time between completion of the paperwork and the initial caregiver reimbursement, however once 'Commence payment form' is received, a cheque will be generated to the carer if there has been a delay in the return of the Direct Debit form to the Care Giver Reimbursement Unit/Caregiver help desk. Consideration could also be given to payment of a placement support grant if carers require immediate financial assistance. Payments cannot be made to a kinship carer until the placement has been endorsed according to relevant policy processes.

It is important to note that when a kinship care placement ceases, the child protection practitioner must complete a 'Cease payment form' and forward it to the regional Finance Unit within three days.

Where a kinship care placement becomes a permanent care placement with orders through the Children's Court of Victoria or the Family Court of Australia (a residency order) then the caregiver reimbursement continues until the child achieves 18 years or ceases to be in the legal care of the permanent carer.

See Related content for detailed information in the 'Guidelines for Caregiver Reimbursement Policies and Procedures'.

For caregiver enquiries the Caregiver help desk can be contacted on 1300 552 319.

In a situation where extra expenses are incurred, beyond what is considered the ordinary costs of care, additional financial support may be available.

Clients

Family Support Grants

Support Grants (FSG) are additional funding that may be applied for to support a child living at home. This applies to clients who are under statutory orders but who are not in out of home care. FSGs can be used for any reasonable expense that may assist the child and family.

The practitioner must apply via the team manager on the appropriate form. There is a usual maximum of $500 per family per year. For higher amounts, approval may be required from a more senior manager.

Placement Support Grants

Placement Support Grants (PSG) are additional funds that may be applied for to support a client in an out of home care placement. If regions are approached for Permanent Care Establishment grant or Shared Family Care Placement and Support grant these should be funded from Placement and Support grants.

The application is made on the 'Protection and Care Client Expenses' form. PSGs can be used for any reasonable expense that may assist a placement to be made or support an existing placement. For example, purchasing goods and equipment that may be needed straightaway (for example bedding or car seats) and repeat exceptional costs (for example, therapy services).

The regional Placement Support Unit manages these funds and as such practitioners apply with the recommendation of their team manager. Each application will be assessed on its merits.

Client expenses

Client expenses are used for clients living at home or in out of home placements to improve or maintain the quality of the placement by providing financial assistance that directly relates to the client's expenses, for example, school books, uniforms, health care expenses etc.

The application is made on the 'Protection and Care Client Expenses' form. There may be regional variations in relation to these forms.

Educational and medical payments to home based carers

All eligible carers of children and young people placed in Home Based Care general, Intensive Home Based Care and Complex Home Based Care as well as Kinship Care or Permanent Care by the Victorian Child Protection service (regardless or whether the placement is subject to a Children's Court order or not) are entitled to receive the Educational and Medical payment, to assist them in meeting the educational, medical and health services needs of the children and young people in their care. These payments are made quarterly and are indexed annually. Carers who care for a child or young person for less than the full quarter but for a minimum of seven days will receive a pro-rata payment. These payments are made directly to a carer's bank account, by the Department of Human Services for the previous quarter.

Brokerage HRI and HRA

High risk infant (HRI) brokerage

These brokerage funds may be used to purchase expert parenting capacity assessments as well as baby goods and services for high risk infants and their families. Access to funding from the HRI program must be applied for and approved by the authorised regional delegate .

High risk adolescent (HRA) brokerage

HRA brokerage is provided to tailor a direct service response to meet an individual's specific needs. Brokerage funds may be used to:

- identify and purchase services that will meet the specific needs of high risk adolescents
- purchase individualised services not available through mainstream services

- enable individuals or groups of young people to access mainstream community services to assist their integration and participate in structured activities.

Brokerage funds will be provided in the context of the young person's case plan and individual program plan.

Access to brokerage funding will be determined by whether the young person is or has been on the High Risk Schedule. Funding from HRA brokerage must be applied through the authorised regional delegate.. Team managers or the Placement and Family Services Manager will have information regarding the allocation of funds in the region.

Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal

The Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT) was established by the Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996 to provide assistance to victims of crime by:

- providing financial assistance to victims for expenses incurred as a direct result of an act of violence (a crime) and
- allowing victims of crime to obtain financial assistance where compensation for the injury cannot be obtained from the offender or other sources; and
- providing financial assistance to certain victims as an expression by the State of the community's sympathy and condolence for, and recognition of, grief, distress or trauma experienced or suffered by them as victims of crime.

VOCAT consists of the chief magistrate and magistrates.

- To be eligible the act of violence must have:
- occurred in Victoria;
- be punishable on conviction by imprisonment; and
- involve assault or injury or threat of injury to one or more persons

Applications must be lodged with VOCAT within two years of the act of violence occurring, although it may be possible to gain an extension of this time from VOCAT.

Before lodging an application with VOCAT, attempts should be made to recover costs that have been incurred as a result of the act of violence from other sources (for example, Medicare or WorkCover).

For further information, refer to Advice number 1088 'Services for victims of crime (including VOCAT)'.

Contact the Legal Services Branch for advice on client's eligibility for compensation.

Payment and hardship assistance

Department of Human Services Concessions Unit

The Concessions Unit provides qualifying Victorian families with a one-off grant for household expenses for water and sewerage, energy, municipal rates and transport. Details of the concessions available and a list of the larger welfare agencies that provide financial and material aid are listed on the Department of Human Services Victorian State Concessions website (see External links).

Utility companies

Most utility companies offer a payment plan for customers experiencing hardship including:

- concessions
- payment extensions
- instalment plans
- hardship relief grants (one-off)
- financial counselling referrals

Welfare agencies

- There are a number of non-government welfare agencies that offer financial and material aid to people in need. Contact the agencies in your region for details of any financial assistance they may offer.
- For a list of other non-government welfare agencies go to Community Information Victoria website under Non-Government Agencies (refer to External links).

Federal funding (Abstudy, Health Care Card, TILA, Youth Allowance)

ABSTUDY

A young person may qualify for ABSTUDY if they are:

- an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australian
- an Australian Citizen
- Enrolled in an approved course (includes secondary school, TAFE, university and apprenticeships.

The available level of funding will be affected by various factors and assessed on a case by case basis (refer to External links).

Medicare

A child placed in out of home care remains eligible for services funded through Medicare on presentation of a valid Medicare card (or a valid Medicare number). If parents are either unwilling or unable to provide a Medicare card or Medicare number, placement agencies and Child Protection can obtain these, provided the child is either already registered with, or eligible to be registered with Medicare. 'Obtaining Medicare cards for children in out of home care' provides information on this matter – see Related content.

Health Care Card

Commonwealth policy since 1 July 2001 has been that all children and young people in home based care are entitled to a health care card, either in their own name or by being added to the health care card of their carer.

A health care card can be claimed by or on behalf of children and young people in home based care, with a range of acceptable evidence as eligibility. This evidence does not necessarily include a court order or a birth certificate. This policy applies to children and young people whether they are on a child protection order or not and therefore, includes voluntary and Specialist Homelessness Services (formerly SAAP) placements.

Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA)

TILA is a one off support from the Federal Government to help young people who are leaving care to meet some of the costs involved in moving to independent living. TILA can help young people by paying for things such as school uniforms or tools for their first job, textbooks or items to set up a home, up to a total of $1,500. This is not a cash payment. Goods must be purchased by the organisation supporting the young person's application.

A young person qualifies for TILA if they are:

- an Australian resident and
- aged between 15 and 25 and
- approaching or experiencing a transition to independent living and
- at risk of an unsuccessful transition and
- have not received TILA previously and
- have been in or are currently in formal care (Child Protection order) or
- have been in, or are currently in, informal care.

The available level of funding will be affected by various factors and assessed on a case by case basis.

The criteria for TILA has not altered as a result to of the school leaving age in Victoria being changed to 17 years. This change however, does effect the eligibility for Youth Allowance (see below). As a result any decision made relating to a young person leaving care must consider that person's financial situation and eligibility to income support.

For further details contact the national service provider -Southern Youth and Family Services 1300 653 227or go to the TILA website – refer to Related content.

Youth allowance

A young person (including young people in out of home care) may qualify for a Youth Allowance if they:

- are between 16 and 21 years or up to 25 years if they are a full-time student.

You may be considered independent for the purposes of eligibility for Youth Allowance if you are aged 15-24 and:

- are above school leaving age in your state (in Victoria the school leaving age is 17 years as of 1 January 2010) or territory and
- are a refugee without parents living in Australia, an orphan or it is unreasonable for you to live at home or
- are in state care or only stopped being in state care because of your age
- have or have had a dependent child
- are or have been legally married, in a registered relationship, or living in a de facto relationship
- have parents who cannot exercise their responsibilities.

The available level of funding will be affected by various factors and assessed on a case by case basis. Young people may require assistance from the practitioner or carer to apply for the youth allowance.

For full details go to the Youth Allowance webpage (refer Related content).

Centrelink financial assistance

Centrelink offers clients financial assistance through:

- advance payment scheme
- financial information service
- bereavement payment
- refuge or asylum seeker assistance.

(Refer to External links.)

Considerations for good practice

Note: Use the Practice Resources link on the toolbar to access further Practice Guidance and Research.

- It is important for practitioners to assist clients in obtaining the benefits and entitlements available to them. In order to do this practitioners must be aware of the financial and material assistance offered by the department, community agencies, private companies and the Federal Government.
- With regard to victims of crime, the exploration of compensation should occur in a timely manner. Claims must generally be made within two years of the offence occurring. Practitioners should assist clients in obtaining compensation or seeking advice about eligibility.

Contact for further procedural advice

- Supervisor
- Team Manager or Practice Leader
- Regional placement coordination team
- Caregiver help desk/ Care Giver Reimbursement Unit on **1300 552 319** (email - caregivers@dhs.vic.gov.au or fax:1300 788 062)
- Regional accounts section
- Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaSCIA)
- Southern Youth and Family Services (TILA)
- Centrelink
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
- Regional welfare agencies
- Registrar VOCAT

Related content and external links

Note: Advice, Protocols and Policy Documents directly related to this Advice are listed below. To access the full range of Protocols and Policy documents use the Protocol and Policy links on the Home Page.

Related Content:

1088 - Services for victims of crime (including VOCAT)

Youth Protocol between Child Protection and Centrelink [PDF, 249.4 KB]

External Links:

Guidelines for the transfer of case management responsibility between regions [PDF, 291.0 KB]

Guidelines for Caregiver Reimbursement Policies and Procedures

Kinship Care Guidelines

ABSTUDY

Centrelink Home Page

Community Information Victoria: Non-Government Agencies

Department of Human Services: Victorian State Concessions

FaCSIA - Youth.

Obtaining Medicare cards for children in out of home care

Police Checks

Pre-employment/Pre-Placement Safety Screening Checks (Police Checks)

Transition for Independent Living Allowance (TILA)

Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT)

Youth Allowance

Checklist of required standards

For this Advice, there are no required standards.