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MEDIA RELEASE: Victorian carer reimbursements amongst lowest in Australia

Victorian foster carers are reimbursed at among the worst rate in Australia, despite having the most children admitted to out of home care anywhere across the nation in the past year.

Dr Marilyn McHugh, of the Social Policy Research School, told the National Foster and Kinship Care Conference in Melbourne on Saturday that Victoria is "significantly under the estimate and second lowest across the nation (but) worst when taking into account complexities and the cost of living".

"Of particular concern is Victoria which, after NSW (17,800), has the highest number of children in out of home care (9,705) - but provides some of the lowest levels of carer subsidy," she said.

Dr McHugh was speaking at the conference which aims to shine a light on the plight of foster carers to meet the real costs of caring for vulnerable children in their homes.

Dr McHugh said it was worrying that Victoria also had the highest number of carers (568) leave the foster care system in 2015-16 leaving just 1564 carers.

Dr McHugh acknowledged there are many reasons carers leave the system but said research indicates 'adequate' financial support is a significant part of the support all carers require and financial strain is one reason that causes carers to stop fostering.

Victorian carers are paid between just \$189 and \$288 weekly to cover typical costs such as shelter, food, clothing/footwear, utilities, furniture, transport, leisure and personal care. Often medical costs are required to be paid by carers and may or may not be reimbursed at a later date.

Foster Care Association of Victoria CEO Katie Hooper said the Victorian subsidies do not meet the real financial needs of children in foster care and carers are often forced to bridge the gap.

She called on the Victorian Government to take immediate action on reimbursement and allowances to ensure carers remain in the system and that fostering care is an attractive model for new carers.

"Carers don't take vulnerable children into their homes for the money, but we must ensure they are given adequate funding to ensure they can give these children the best of care without being left out of pocket.

“What could be more important than ensuring the safety and care of a vulnerable child? And the longer we can place children with loving families, the better the system will work.

“Victoria should be attracting hundreds more carers, but the FCAV fears the poor reimbursement levels in this state is a barrier to this happening.”

Dr Marilyn McHugh, Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW

Please note Marilyn McHugh and Katie Hooper will be available at the Conference for comment tomorrow.

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