



**Early Childhood  
Australia**  
A voice for young children

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## Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Inquiry into Grandparents who take primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren

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Submission from Early Childhood Australia

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### *About Early Childhood Australia*

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) has been a voice for young children since 1938. We are the peak early childhood advocacy organisation, acting in the interests of young children, their families and those in the early childhood field. ECA advocates to ensure quality, social justice and equity in all issues relating to the education and care of children from birth to eight years.

[www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au)

## 1. Introduction

Over a million Australian kids are growing up with some form of care provided by grandparents. For some grandparents this means casual assistance with caring responsibilities while parents are at work. For others it means full-time home based care, often as a result of formal care orders or those with informal full-time care arrangements.

Early Childhood Australia's focus on grandparents is on their role in supporting children's early learning and development. While there has been a significant public debate on child care and early childhood learning through the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into child care and early childhood learning, there has not been a great focus in public debates on the role of grandparents including those who have full-time responsibility for caring for children.

ECA therefore welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Senate Standing Committee's Inquiry into Grandparents who take primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren. We would be happy to appear in person to answer any further questions you may have in relation to our submission.

## 2. Payments to grandparents

Grandparents are not eligible to receive payments directly from the Government for caring for their grandchildren in their own home if they are not the guardian of the children.

Grandparent Child Care Benefit (GCCB) is available to help grandparents who are the primary carers for their grandchildren and who receive an income support payment. For grandparent carers on income support GCCB pays the full cost of child care fees for each child in approved care for up to 50 hours a week.

ECA supports GCCB as it provides access to vital early learning experiences for children, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Registered care is also available for grandparents. It is a different payment and care arrangement to families who claim child care payments for using approved Child Care Benefit services. eg Long Day Care Centres, Before and After School Care Centres. Individuals providing this care, like grandparents, must be registered with the Department of Human Services (DHS/Centrelink).

Families using registered child care may be eligible for the registered care rate of Child Care Benefit per child if both parents are working, training or studying at some time during the week in which care was provided, but they are not eligible to receive the Child Care Rebate. The current Child Care Benefit registered care rate for a non-school (ie not primary or secondary school) child is \$0.666 per

hour, or \$33.30 for 50 hours (the maximum available) of child care per week. Child Care Benefit for registered care is not income tested.

To claim Child Care Benefit for registered care, eligible families must take their valid receipts (provided by their registered care provider) to their nearest DHS Service Centre (or Medicare office). Families must claim their Child Care Benefit for registered care within 12 months from when the care was provided. This means families have the choice of keeping their receipts and claiming it once a year and receiving a lump sum, or depending on how often fees are charged, more regularly.

The availability of Registered CCB is not widely known and the level of subsidy is so low that it is not providing children, families and grandparents with meaningful support. The administrative burden of claiming the payment for such a low return means that the payment is not achieving its original objectives. We believe the funding would be better directed at improving non-monetary support for all grandparents that deliver care for children.

**Recommendation: That Registered Child Care Benefit for grandparents is abolished and the savings redirected to provide non-monetary support for all grandparent carers.**

### **3. Grandparents' role in supporting children's early learning**

Early childhood educators recognise that parents, grandparents and carers are children's 'first teachers' and have the most important role in supporting early childhood development. The quality interactions between parents, grandparents and their children remain important, even as the child is attending early childhood education and care. The OECD suggests that the continuity of children's experience across environments is greatly enhanced when primary care givers and staff-members exchange regularly and adopt consistent approaches to socialisation; daily routines, child development and learning (OECD, 2006).

However, while Grandparents play an important role in supporting children's early learning experiences, this does not displace formal early childhood education led by qualified early childhood professionals.

From 1 January 2014, all early childhood educators must be qualified with a four year degree trained early childhood teacher in attendance at all long day care services. Early Childhood professionals deliver vital early learning experiences for children based on the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). The EYLF describes the principles, practice and outcomes essential to support and enhance young children's learning from birth to five years of age, as well as their transition to school.

### 3.1. Engaging Families in the Early Childhood Development Story

The *Engaging Families in the ECD Story* is a national project managed by the SA Department of Education and Early Development under the auspices of the National Early Childhood Development Strategy and the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC). South Australia is the lead state for the project.

*Engaging Families* aims to better engage parents, carers and the community to increase their understanding of evidence-based information from the neurosciences about early childhood development and thereby influence their interactions with children to maximise early childhood outcomes. It also aims to support public understanding of the scientific rationale for early childhood development initiatives and raise awareness of available services and programs. By promoting positive early development, many aspects of disadvantage, including later learning problems and developmental delays can be reduced. The project has been designed so that the nature of the key messages and the methods of communicating them take into account the needs and interests of the following groups:

- remote and regional communities
- families with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds
- refugees and new immigrants
- Indigenous communities
- 'hard to reach' families/parents/carers.

Sources: Report on Stage 1: [www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/ecd\\_story-final\\_project\\_report\\_of\\_stage\\_1.pdf](http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/_resources/ecd_story-final_project_report_of_stage_1.pdf); ARACY summary: [www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/118](http://www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/118).

ECA recommends further development of Engaging Families in the Early Childhood Development Story to extend its reach to all families with small children including grandparents. For a relatively small cost this project has the potential to deliver improvements to developmental outcomes of children by building awareness among grandparents of the importance of the early years for learning. This will also help grandparents to understand the role of early childhood education and care so that they are more willing to engage with learning in early childhood education services and continue this learning in the home.

While most grandparents are not able to deliver the same early learning experiences of quality early childhood settings under the EYLF, ECA believes that grandparents would benefit from practical resources to assist grandparents to be their grand child's first educator and also to engage their grandchildren in play based learning activities.

Many grandparents also find the ECEC system difficult to navigate and may not be aware of the National Quality Agenda and the improvements that have been made in early childhood quality of the past decade. Resources to assist grandparents to access the vital early learning opportunities provided by professional educators and teachers in child care and preschool settings would be welcomed.

**Recommendation: That the Federal Government commission the development of a ‘Grandstart pack’ with:**

- an early learning toolkit designed to be used by grandparents, supported by the latest research on early childhood development
- Information on relevant government subsidies for grandparents, as well as information on accessing the formal child care and preschool system

**Recommendation: that the Government establish a Grandcarers national email database, through which information about payments, child raising and community services can be disseminated.**

The Department of Human Services currently employs just 6 Grandparent Advisors. We note the Nationals party platform includes a commitment to employ more Grandparent Advisors and offer emergency payments.

**Recommendation: the number of grandparent advisors should be expanded to assist grandparents seeking advice on their children’s early learning and development, access to formal early childhood education and care and relevant payments.**

## 4. References

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2006). *Starting Strong II: Early childhood education and care*. Paris: OECD.