Council on the Ageing
Queensland

Child Safety Commission of Inquiry
Queensland Government
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10 March 2026

Submission to the Commission of Inquiry into Queensland's Child Safety System

Dear Commissioner,

Council on the Ageing Queensland (COTA Queensland) welcomes the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry into Queensland's Child Safety System.

This submission highlights the important role played by grandparents and older relatives[i] who provide care for children during periods of family crisis. It recommends that the Commission consider measures that strengthen support for these carers, particularly when children first enter their care during emergency family circumstances. Improving early financial assistance, service navigation and practical supports can help stabilise family placements and strengthen outcomes for children.

COTA Queensland is the state's peak body representing the interests of older Queenslanders. Our work focuses on improving policies and systems that affect the wellbeing, participation and security of older people across Queensland.

Child protection outcomes are closely connected to the wellbeing and capacity of the adults who provide care and stability within families. Across Queensland and Australia, grandparents and older relatives frequently play a crucial role supporting children when families experience crisis, disruption or trauma.[ii] These caregiving arrangements often arise suddenly when parents are unable to care for children due to issues such as family violence, substance misuse, mental illness or housing instability. Grandparents and relatives step in quickly to prevent children entering formal care arrangements.

In many situations grandparents or relatives initially assume care on a temporary basis during periods of family crisis. What begins as short term care can gradually become ongoing caregiving when family circumstances remain unstable or recovery takes longer than expected. Australian research indicates that grandparent caregiving arrangements frequently begin as temporary responses to family crisis but often continue for extended periods and may become long term or permanent care arrangements.

These transitions often occur without carers receiving formal recognition, financial assistance or coordinated support services.

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While kinship care is a central component of Australia's child protection system, many caregiving arrangements occur outside formal child protection processes.[iii] Grandparents and older relatives may assume full time parenting responsibilities before child safety services become involved or without formal kinship care approval. These arrangements can stabilise families and prevent children entering more intensive forms of care.

National data indicates that 44,900 children were living in out of home care in Australia as of June 2024.[iv] Family placements already represent a large proportion of these arrangements. Kinship carers also differ in important ways from foster carers. They are typically older, more likely to be single, live on lower incomes and are more likely to experience poorer health outcomes.[v]

Grandparents and older relatives who assume caregiving responsibilities can provide important benefits for children. These arrangements can support continuity of family relationships, strengthen cultural and community connections, reduce disruption to schooling and social networks and provide stability during periods of family crisis.

Programs such as *Time for Grandparents* in Queensland support grandparents raising grandchildren who are not approved kinship carers and therefore do not receive foster care allowances. The existence of such programs highlights the scale of informal caregiving arrangements.[vi] Many grandparents assume parenting responsibilities expecting the arrangement to be temporary. However, these caregiving roles can continue for extended periods. Without formal recognition carers may have limited access to financial assistance, legal authority or coordinated support services.[vii]

Many grandparents who assume caregiving responsibilities do so while already managing financial, housing and health pressures associated with later life. When temporary caregiving arrangements continue for extended periods, carers may face ongoing costs associated with raising children including housing, education, food and health care.

National research indicates that approximately one in four older Australians live in poverty, challenging assumptions that most older Australians are financially secure.[viii] Some grandparent carers rely on pensions, retirement savings or part time employment while raising grandchildren. Research has also found that some grandparent carers draw on retirement savings or sell assets in order to meet the costs of raising children.[ix]

The *Queensland Carers Action Plan 2024 to 2026* recognises that caring responsibilities can significantly affect carers' financial security, employment and social participation.[x]

Housing security also influences the sustainability of caregiving arrangements. National data indicates that around one in five older Australians rent rather than own their home, with older rental tenants experiencing significantly lower housing security and affordability.[xi] Grandparents who assume care responsibilities may need to move to larger accommodation and/or modify their homes to accommodate children or relocate closer to schools and services.[xii] Without appropriate housing these pressures may place strain on otherwise viable family placements.

Older carers may also face health challenges. The average age of a primary carer in Australia is 54 years, demonstrating that caring responsibilities frequently extend into later life. National data also indicates that 43.8 per cent of primary carers report living with disability themselves, highlighting the interaction between caring responsibilities and health needs.[xiii]

Grandparent carers frequently navigate multiple systems simultaneously including child safety services, health services, education systems and legal processes. Carers may face barriers such as complex legal pathways to guardianship, limited access to financial assistance and difficulty navigating fragmented service systems. Without legal recognition of caregiving roles grandparents may also encounter barriers accessing health services or making decisions on behalf of children.[xiv]

Insights from the *2025 Ageing Well Survey*, which collected more than 2,000 responses from older Queenslanders, reinforce these pressures. Survey respondents reported increasing cost of living pressures, housing insecurity, difficulty accessing health services and significant caregiving responsibilities within families. Many respondents described already providing care for partners, adult children with disability or other family members.[xv] These pressures shape the circumstances in which grandparents and older relatives may assume responsibility for grandchildren during family crises.

Children who remain within family networks often experience greater placement stability, stronger identity and family connections and reduced disruption to schooling and community relationships.[xvi] However, when carers lack adequate support, these arrangements may become difficult to sustain. Financial pressures, housing constraints and limited access to services can place strain on carers and when they lack access to timely information, financial assistance and practical supports, this can impact otherwise stable or viable placements.[xvii]

Where grandparents and relatives are able to safely support children during family crises, these arrangements can prevent children entering more intensive forms of out of home care. Strengthening early support for relatives who assume care during crises can contribute to placement stability, reduce placement disruption and help prevent children entering more intensive forms of care.[xviii]

Recommendations

This submission identifies four areas relevant to the Commission's consideration of Queensland's child safety system.

1. **Provide early financial assistance and practical support when children first enter the care of older relatives during family crises, recognising that temporary caregiving arrangements may continue for extended periods.**

2. **Improve service navigation for older relatives who assume emergency care responsibilities by providing clear access to advice and guidance on legal authority, financial supports and available services.**

3. **Expand practical supports for older carers, including grandparents and relatives raising children, through respite services, coordinated service access and housing assistance where accommodation constraints affect otherwise viable family placements**

4. **Ensure child safety systems remain accessible and reduce unnecessary administrative complexity, recognising that older carers may already be navigating multiple service systems during periods of family crisis.**

Council on the Ageing Queensland welcomes further engagement with the Commission on opportunities to strengthen systems that support grandparents and older relatives who assume care for children.

Yours sincerely

Darren Young
Chief Executive

References

[i] We recognise older carers as caregivers, carers, grandparents, grandparent carers, kinship carers, older foster carers, guardians and anyone who is supported in a formal system or not supported as a carer in a formal system and assists as an informal carer (undertakes an informal arrangement).

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