



A letter sent to all sitting members of the upper and lower houses of Federal Parliament

Grandparents Australia/Grandparents Victoria (GPA/GPV) has developed the enclosed 'Log of Claims' to be addressed in the forthcoming Australian election and beyond. The claims are fitting when considering both the current and future needs of the grandchildren of today and tomorrow.

Further, these claims should be the subject of ongoing action by government to ensure that the issues are addressed by a government-lead co-ordinated approach to both policy and practice in relation to each claim.

The claims do not in any way compete with what our community is currently doing to protect children and are made in the expectation that any future government is going to place a higher priority, across all portfolios, on all matters related to child protection.

GPA/GPV takes seriously the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), to which Australia is a signatory, and expects that leaders across Australia will do the same. The claims submitted by GPA/GPV are all based on the articles of the UNCRC.

Support for families

GPA/GPV believes that the positive outcomes for children in kinship care, the fastest-growing form of out-of-home care across our nation, are astounding, with many of our most traumatised children being turned away from a life of isolation and loneliness to one of fulfilment and ongoing connection with family. It is essential that the government support kinship carers by streamlining access to Centrelink payments and implementing the recommendations in the Australian Senate report into grandparents raising grandchildren (2013).

Access to legal procedures/rights

GPA/GPV believes that access to the legal system is a right that should be extended to all. The government should cease making changes to the Family Court until the Australian Law Reform Commission completes its current review.

We would appreciate an opportunity to discuss these matters with you. Failing that, we undertake to distribute widely any response to these matters that you care to share with us.

Yours sincerely,

Anne L McLeish OAM
Director

Helen Brown
Chairperson



Log of Claims

Election Australia 2018

GPA/GPV calls on all candidates to make clear their commitment to families and children

This log of claims is a benchmark against which GPA/GPV will judge the commitment of candidates in the forthcoming Australian election. GPA/GPV will distribute candidates' responses across Australia.

GPA/GPV calls on government to support the rights of families

GPA/GPV believes that families are an integral part of the social structure, that they contribute to overall national wellbeing, and that they are complex with diverse needs.

GPA/GPV also believes there is a need to recognise that every family has its own history and culture, including their ethnic culture and that the cultures of Australia's Indigenous peoples are especially vulnerable. As the first Australians their cultures warrant greater protection.

GPA/GPV holds particular concerns for kinship care families. These families are not adequately supported by a 'one-size-fits-all' welfare system, or an inflexible state child protection system.

GPA/GPV stipulates that the level and type of support families attract should be varied, and according to their needs and their rights to support.

Therefore, GPA/GPV calls on the government to establish a national committee to promote and encourage reference to and use of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as a framework for all actions taken on behalf of children.

As a matter of priority, this committee should review the government's and the wider community's performance in relation to protecting the rights of the most vulnerable families in our community.

Further reading:

- *GPV submission to the Federal Government on the Family Law Act. (GPV, 2018)*
- *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*

Protection of children's rights

GPA/GPV calls on government and agencies to document the impact that changes to legislation/policy will have on outcomes for children. Every piece of legislation, as well as all changes to regulations and practices, should be accompanied by a 'Child Impact Statement' (CIS) consisting of an analysis predicting the potential outcomes for child wellbeing in the short, medium and long term.

Each CIS must measure the extent to which policy and practice support adherence to the following rights for children and young people:

- to not be raised in poverty
- to know, and spend quality time with, their extended biological family
- to have affordable, quality health care, and early intervention in mental health issues
- to be safe from emotional and physical harm
- to have a free, comprehensive, quality education
- to participate in leisure activities
- to have a sense of identity
- to connect with the languages and religious beliefs of their family of origin
- to participate in decisions affecting their lives
- to be paid fairly for work
- to be treated fairly within the justice system

Further reading:

- *Child Impact Statements and Public Support for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. (GPV, 2018)*
- *UNCRC Articles:*
 - 7 - *Registration and the Right to a Name, Nationality*
 - 26 - *A Child's Right to Social Security*
 - 27 - *Standard of Living*
 - 18 - *Child-Rearing Responsibilities*

Access to legal procedures/rights

GPA/GPV believes that access to the legal system is a right that should be extended to all.

GPA/GPV believes that many children/young people are disadvantaged by not having identifying documents, particularly birth certificates.

Therefore, GPA/GPV calls on the Australian Government to:

- cease making changes to the Family Court until the Australian Law Reform Commission review of the Family Court is completed,
- legislate to guarantee the right of all children in Australia to representation in court proceedings affecting them,
- provide access to fully funded family mediation to reduce adversarial proceedings,
- implement national standards for registration of births. The standards would include the following provisions:
 - births to be registered before the family is discharged from the hospital
 - maternal and child health nurses to be trained/funded to follow up cases where a birth has not been registered
 - non-payment of welfare payments until a birth certificate for dependent children is produced

Support for families

GPA/GPV believes that any civilised society must have an equitable welfare system that ensures families have access to the necessities of life.

GPA/GPV believes that welfare measures should support families without stigmatising them, and empower them to better their circumstances, rather than crushing them.

Therefore, GPA/GPV calls on the Australian government to:

- cease operation of the Cashless Welfare Card program, until the government can provide

evidence showing the card benefits families and has no adverse consequences over time,

- support out-of-home care families by:
 - reducing red tape so that accessing Centrelink support is easier
 - reviewing Centrelink claims criteria for kinship carers, including eligibility for Family Tax Benefit payments
 - increasing the funding that enables the Centrelink Grandparent Adviser to travel to meet carers
 - reviewing the time allocations awarded to the Centrelink Grandparent Advisers to ensure that each state has adequate coverage, and creating an assistant to the Grandparent Advisers in the busiest states
 - Ensuring that the Centrelink Grandparent Adviser positions are funded for three years
- subsidise grandparents who are providing childcare to working families.

About GPA/GPV

Grandparents Australia Inc. was formed in 2002 to:

- promote the role and needs of grandparents and grandchildren,
- undertake public awareness campaigns and research projects relevant to the interests and needs of grandparents and grandchildren,
- liaise with the federal, state and local governments on matters of significance to grandparents and grandchildren.

Founded in 2001, Grandparents Victoria is a statewide community organisation of grandparents working together to shape a positive future for all children in Australia.

GPA/GPV addresses a wide range of issues and often campaigns for or against current programs affecting children and young people.

Grandparents Australia

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