

Information for carers who currently receive the Supported Care Allowance

Why are changes being made?

The NSW government is currently implementing significant changes to the child protection system in NSW in response to the *Report of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in New South Wales*. The planned changes are set out in the government's five year plan: "*Keep Them Safe: A shared approach to child wellbeing*". This plan and other information regarding the changes can be found at www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au.

The overarching goal of *Keep Them Safe* is that all children in NSW are healthy, happy, and safe and growing up belonging in families and communities where they have opportunities to reach their full potential.

Changes include introducing new child protection reporting and referral arrangements that will provide an alternative way for children and families to access support services. These changes will enable Community Services to focus its efforts on those children and young people who are at risk of significant harm and may require out-of-home care by people other than their parents.

What is changing in respect of the Supported Care Allowance?

Changes made by Parliament to legislation called the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* mean that the Supported Care Allowance may only be paid where an assessment by Community Services determines a child or young person to be 'in need of care and protection'. These children or young persons are unable to safely remain with their parents.

The new law about when the Supported Care Allowance can be paid applies equally to all supported carers. This applies to carers currently receiving the Supported Care Allowance and new care arrangements where the Supported Care Allowance will first be paid after 24 January 2010 when the changes take effect.

Who currently receives the Supported Care Allowance?

Currently, the Supported Care Allowance is financial assistance that can be paid by NSW Community Services to a range of people, including grandparents and other relatives or kin, who are looking after a child or young person who is not living with their parents.

Care of a child or young person by relatives or kin may occur because:

- they have been given parental responsibility by either the Children's Court of NSW, or under the *Family Law Act*, or
- an informal or family arrangement has been made without any Court orders.

If you have parental responsibility by way of Children's Court Order then you are not a person to whom this information applies – even if you get a Supported Care Allowance.

When is it changing?

The changes to the law start on 24 January 2010.

From that date carers who receive the Supported Care Allowance and who are looking after a child or young person where there is no court order need to be reassessed: particularly if there was no child protection involvement by Community Services prior to the allowance being approved.

Carers where there is an order under the *Family Law Act* and who currently receive the Supported Care Allowance will also be reassessed.

Community Services anticipates that the first of these assessments will occur after April 2010.

A thorough assessment of Community Services involvement with the child or young person for whom you are caring before they came to live with you takes time and needs to involve the carers, parents where possible and the child or young person. Therefore, the assessments of all the children and young people that need to be completed may not be finalised for up to 12 months.

If Community Services decides that a child or young person in supported care would no longer be in need of care and protection if returned to their parents then carers will be notified in writing of the decision. Payments will not be changed or stopped until the assessment has been completed and the carer has been advised. Carers will be advised of how they can seek to have these decisions reviewed.

No changes to the Supported Care Allowance will require you to make any repayment of allowances already received.

How will I know if I am affected by the changes?

If you currently have a child or young person in your care as a result of either the Minister or yourself being given aspects of parental responsibility by the Children's Court the Supported Care Allowance will continue to be paid to you.

If you currently have a child or young person in your care where there is no Children's Court order and you receive the Supported Care Allowance you may be affected by the changes.

If you currently have a child or young person in your care where there is an order under the *Family Law Act* and you receive the Supported Care Allowance you may be affected by the changes.

Carers affected by these changes will receive a further letter from Community Services advising them that an assessment will be done and setting out a time for the assessment to be completed. No change to your allowance will be made without this further letter.

Who can I contact if I need more information?

If you have any questions about these changes and how you may be affected please call the Supported Carers Information Line on 1800 994 686 (freecall), Monday to Friday between 10:00am and 1:00pm as from Wednesday 27 January 2010.

This service can answer general inquiries about the changes, but not questions about your specific circumstances regarding the payment of the supported care allowance. Community Services will address your specific questions during the assessment.

Other supports for grandparent carers and other relative or kin carers

The NSW Government's *Keep Them Safe* action plan highlights the shared responsibilities of government and non-government organisations working together to support and protect vulnerable children. Grandparents and other relatives or kin carers may be eligible for support from a range of organisations. Some of these are listed below.

Type of Support	Organisation	Telephone
Information for carers	Community Services Supported Carers Information Line Mon-Fri 10:00am-1:00pm	1800 994 686
Financial assistance	Centrelink www.centrelink.gov.au	13 6150
Financial assistance	Family Assistance Office www.familyassist.gov.au	13 6150
Information and support for carers	Connecting Carers NSW www.connectingcarersnsw.com.au	1300 794 653
Information and support for Aboriginal carers	Aboriginal Statewide Foster Carer Support Service www.absec.org.au	1800 888 698
Information and support for carers	Foster Parents Support Network NSW www.fosterparentsupportnetwork.org.au	9608 8494
Grandparent carer support groups	Council on the Ageing (NSW) Inc – COTA (NSW) www.cotansw.com.au	9286 3860 or 1800 449 102
Resources and information for grandparent carers	Grandparents Raising Grandchildren NSW www.raisinggrandchildren.com.au	9286 3860 or 1800 449 102