The SA Government Social Statement - Supporting Grandcarers and Advancing Priority Areas for a Better Future

Introduction

Grandcarers SA is a not-for-profit organisation that supports 1300 grandparents and other informal kinship carers (Grandcarers) who step in to raise over 2000 children when parents are unable to do so. In South Australia, it is estimated that over 7,000 children live in informal grandparent and kinship care arrangements. These families provide a vital safety net, offering stability and care to some of our most vulnerable children.

We commend the South Australian Government's commitment to a Social Statement and its three priority areas that underpin progress towards a better future for all South Australians. To achieve these priorities, it is essential that the unique needs of Grandcarers and the children they raise are recognised and supported.

1. Setting our children and young people up for life

Children in Grandcarers families have often experienced trauma, family breakdown, or parental substance abuse. In South Australia, the 2021 Census indicated that approximately 1,950 children are living full-time with grandparents – a figure likely to be under-reported.

Research by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) shows that children in grandparent care are more likely to experience developmental vulnerabilities, with 37% assessed as developmentally at risk compared to 22% of children in the general population.

We urge the government to:

- Provide dedicated funding for educational and wellbeing programs tailored to Grandcarers children. This could include trauma-informed school supports and dedicated school engagement officers to help Grandcarers navigate the education system.
- Enhance access to early intervention and mental health services for children in Grandcarers care, recognising their increased risk of anxiety and depression.
- Facilitate transition pathways to early childhood education and care, addressing barriers faced by older carers in accessing preschool and early years services.

Targeted investment in these areas can help address the 15% higher likelihood of school disengagement identified in Grandcarers families (SA Department for Education, 2023).

2. Building healthy communities

Grandcarers themselves often experience poorer health outcomes and financial hardship. A 2023 Grandcarers SA survey found that:

- 62% of Grandcarers are over the age of 60.
- 68% report significant financial stress, with many relying on limited fixed incomes such as the Age Pension.
- 54% report chronic health issues, exacerbated by the demands of caregiving.

Moreover, SA Health data (2023) highlights that older carers are more likely to experience mental health challenges due to isolation and stress.

We encourage the government to:

- Ensure Grandcarers are prioritised for health and wellbeing supports, including carer respite programs and community-based mental health services.
- Expand financial supports, such as a state-based Grandcarers Supplement to help with the hidden costs of raising children (school uniforms, therapy services, and extracurricular activities).
- Provide flexible, locally accessible respite and in-home support options, recognising the physical and emotional toll of caregiving

By addressing these issues, we can build healthier, more resilient communities and reduce the long-term burden on health and welfare systems.

3. Strengthening community cohesion, democracy and belonging

Grandcarers are a vital but often invisible part of our community. Many report feeling excluded from mainstream family services and community life. A South Australian Families and Communities (2022) report found that only 1 in 5 Grandcarers felt they had a strong voice in community decision-making.

Data from Grandcarers SA's 2024 Impact Report shows:

- 87% of Grandcarers feel more connected and less isolated after attending peer support and community events.
- 72% feel more confident advocating for their families when supported through formal networks and government recognition.

We ask the government to:

- Formally recognise Grandcarers families in state policy and community development frameworks, ensuring their needs are considered in family and child wellbeing initiatives.
- Fund community-building initiatives – including Grandcarers Day celebrations and regional gatherings – that bring Grandcarers families together and foster a sense of belonging.
- Include Grandcarers representatives in key decision-making bodies related to family services, child protection, and community development.

Recognising Grandcarers' unique role can help strengthen community cohesion and ensure all families feel a sense of belonging and democratic voice.

Conclusion

Grandcarers SA is committed to working with the state government to support Grandcarers families and ensure every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Targeted investment and policy recognition in these three priority areas will not only improve the lives of Grandcarers and the children they care for, but also build stronger, more inclusive communities across South Australia.

We look forward to continued collaboration and welcome the opportunity to co-design practical solutions that meet the needs of Grandcarers families and contribute to a stronger South Australia.