



Government of **Western Australia**
Department for **Child Protection**

POLICY – ESTABLISHMENT PAYMENT TO INFORMAL RELATIVE CARERS

Department for Child Protection
Revised August 2012

POLICY - ESTABLISHMENT PAYMENT TO INFORMAL RELATIVE CARERS

POLICY STATEMENT

The Department for Child Protection (the Department) introduced a one off Establishment Payment for informal relative carers in January 2011, to assist with the costs involved when a child is placed in a family care arrangement.

The Establishment Payment is made within the context of child centred family support.

PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

The policy outlines the Department's support and financial assistance which may be provided to relatives where it is assessed that it is in the child's best interests to reside with those relatives.

For the purposes of this policy, informal relative carers refer to those relatives who assume responsibility for the care of children¹ in their family where the Department has had prior involvement and no legal or court action is required to promote and safeguard their wellbeing. Refer to definition of 'relative' in s.3 of the *Children and Community Services Act 2004* (the Act).

In these cases, the Department's involvement has been due to concerns for a child's wellbeing. A safety and wellbeing assessment (SWA) has been undertaken and a plan, under s.32(1)(b) of the Act, is developed with the relative/s to allow the child to remain with them².

BACKGROUND

It is estimated that each year, some 200 children in Western Australia (WA) are placed with informal relative carers. A SWA has been undertaken and a safety plan developed that allows the child to remain with the relative/s with the Department's agreement.

Unlike grandparents and relatives who raise children under formal arrangements such as court orders (approved foster carers) who receive a subsidy from the Department; informal relative carers do not. As with approved foster carers, informal relative carers may be eligible for assistance from the Commonwealth Government through the Department of Human Services. Some WA State Government assistance may also be available as per the criteria for all families.

When a child first goes to live with relatives, the Department acknowledges that the relative/s will need to purchase some basic items to accommodate the child. This may involve the provision of items such as furniture, bedding, clothing and age appropriate toys and equipment. The Department also acknowledges the role of relatives who take on the care for children who might otherwise be taken into the Chief Executive Officer's care.

¹ Throughout this document, the term, 'child or children', is used to refer to all children and young people under the age of 18.

² The Department has assessed that there are no concerns for the child's safety in the family care arrangement. The child is not in the care of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Department.

In response, the Department introduced a once off Establishment Payment to relatives who care for children as a result of a SWA where a plan has been developed [s.32(1)(b)]. The payment is provided for each child in the care arrangement.

LEGISLATIVE MANDATE AND PRINCIPLES

The principles of the *Children and Community Services Act 2004* (the Act) place a high priority on supporting and assisting families in fulfilling their responsibility in terms of a child's care and protection, in preference to formal proceedings under the Act.

The Department is guided by the overall principle that the best interests of the child are paramount (s.7 of the Act). Section 8 of the Act provides for matters that must be taken into account when determining what is in a child's best interests.

Section 9 of the Act includes a number of principles that identify that:

- *“parents, family and community of a child have the primary role in safeguarding and promoting the child’s wellbeing; and*
- *the preferred way of safeguarding and promoting a child’s wellbeing is to support the child’s parents, family and community in the care of the child”.*

THE SAFETY AND WELLBEING ASSESSMENT AND SAFETY PLAN

The SWA process will assist in determining the best outcome for the child. The SWA should be informed by the *Signs of Safety Assessment and Planning Framework* and a *Signs of Safety* meeting will be used as the forum for developing a plan with the family.

The plan will set out what actions are necessary to provide a safe living arrangement for the child in the relative/s' care. The child's parent/s must agree to the living arrangement. Parental responsibility remains with the parents.

When undertaking a SWA, the following issues should be considered in relation to the prospective living arrangements with relatives for the child:

- accommodation for the child;
- whether the relative's health will cope with the rigours and demands of caring for the child;
- the challenges associated where a child has difficult behaviours or a disability;
- disruption to other family members; and
- the costs involved.

The Department will take into account the child's developmental status and enable the child to participate meaningfully in the decision-making process, having due regard to the age and capacity of the child. The Department's decisions and rationale will be documented and demonstrate that they will better promote the safety and wellbeing of the child.

PROVISION OF PAYMENT

The decision to agree to the child living with relatives must be endorsed by the team leader and approved by the district director prior to an Establishment Payment being made.

Recipients will receive the Establishment Payment for a child only once. For example, if a child moves in and out of an arrangement with a relative, the Establishment Payment will only be paid on the first arrangement with that relative.

As of 1 January 2011, the payment is \$1,000 per child.

CHILD CENTRED FAMILY SUPPORT

The child centred family support approach ensures the provision of social services are offered to assist the child as the paramount consideration and, if appropriate, also to the child's parent/s or relative/s.

When a child lives with relatives, the Department will provide information on the services and supports that may be available to help them in their caring role. This could include information on services available in the community to support the family, a referral to the Department's Parent Support services or to non-government agencies, such as Wanslea Family Services, for respite opportunities.

RELATED POLICIES AND DOCUMENTS

- Casework Practice Manual
- Policy on Assessment and Investigation Processes
- Signs of Safety Child Protection Practice Framework
- Family Support (Responsible Parenting) Framework

GUIDELINES

The Casework Practice Manual will provide guidelines based on this policy.

EFFECTIVE DATE

1 August, 2012

REVIEW DATE

1 August, 2014

OWNER

Executive Director, Policy and Learning Directorate