Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

MEDIA RELEASE

April 2025

A Gold Card could be Lifesaving for Kids in Care, Say Doctors, Carers, and Young Advocates

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare urges government action

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare is urging the Federal Government to introduce a dedicated Gold Card for children and young people in out-of-home care, highlighting first-hand accounts from carers, health professionals, and those with lived experience to show just how vital this reform would be.

Children in care are more likely to suffer physical and mental health issues, yet barriers to care - including red tape, missing records, and delayed approvals - too often leave them untreated. A Gold Card would provide these young people with priority access to essential services, giving them the same right to timely, quality healthcare that every child deserves.

Dr Angela Williams, a medical professional and foster carer, says current healthcare systems fail to meet the needs of children in care. “Too often, we’re making do. Children arrive in care with no medical history, no Medicare card, no access to their past records and yet we’re expected to make critical decisions about their wellbeing. A Gold Card would be a game-changer: a clear, accessible tool that enables consistent, wraparound healthcare wherever the child goes,” she said.

Dr Williams recalled the case of a nine-month-old infant who had recently entered her care. Initially unsettled, the child showed no obvious signs of illness but drawing on her medical experience, Dr Williams sensed something more was going on. “By day two, a rash appeared, revealing the child had been unwell with a viral infection all along,” she said.

When she tried to get the child seen by a doctor, she was turned away by two clinics because she didn’t have the child’s Medicare card or proof of legal guardianship. “In the end, I had to take him to an after-hours bulk-billing clinic and say he was my son. I said I’d forgotten the Medicare card and paid the private fee myself,” Dr Williams explained. “That’s how desperate the situation had become. We shouldn’t have to lie or pay out of pocket just to get a child seen by a doctor. Healthcare isn’t optional. It’s essential.”

Long-time carer and foster care researcher and advocate Professor Stacy Blythe agrees. “In the 22 years I’ve been a carer, I’ve seen the damage that a fractured system can do. One carer told me it took over 12 months to get a Medicare card for a child. Others give up because the red tape is overwhelming,” she said. “A Gold Card would allow carers to access the services kids need - when they need them. That includes GPs, dental, mental health and paediatrics. It would stop children from falling through the cracks.”

Prof Blythe highlighted how gaps in health information not only hinder treatment but cause further trauma. “Children are made to retell their stories to each new specialist. It’s retraumatising. If the government is the legal guardian, then it must act like a parent and ensure continuity of care.”

PeakCare FamiliesAustralia Preserving A Vital System. The Future of Foster Care Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

For former foster child and advocate Bryce Groves, a Gold Card would have changed everything. “Healthcare is overlooked in the system. But it affects everything - our development, our confidence, our futures,” he said.

Having grown up in care, Groves experienced firsthand the delays and confusion around access to services. “Carers don’t always know the child’s needs. And when you’re in care, you’re already dealing with the consequences of someone else’s actions. If healthcare is delayed or denied, those consequences become lifelong. A Gold Card isn’t a handout, it’s a stepping stone to equality.”

Groves also pointed to the mental health toll of being in care. “I needed support. My foster mum had to pay privately for a psychologist and fight to be reimbursed. Not every carer can afford to do that. But every child should get that chance.”

The Centre’s CEO, Deb Tsorbaris, said the stories from Angela, Stacy and Bryce underscore why action is urgently needed. “We’re working with Families Australia and the National Foster Care Sustainability Group calling on the government to implement a Gold Card that guarantees priority access to medical, mental health, dental and specialist care for children in out-of-home care until the age of 21. This includes a centralised record system that ensures continuity, even when placements change.”

With healthcare already a central issue in the Federal election campaign, the Centre says the introduction of a Gold Card for children in out-of-home care is a practical and timely addition to current Medicare reforms.

“We’ve seen big commitments to Medicare and urgent care clinics,” said Tsorbaris. “A Gold Card would be a simple, high-impact way for the current or any incoming government to build on that momentum, ensuring the children in its own care system aren’t left behind. This is a solution that’s ready to go. It just needs political will.”

For more information visit https://www.cfecfw.org.au/

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

High-res images available: HERE

Available for interview upon request:
Please note we can arrange for carers or spokespeople in your state/region.

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Dr Lisa J Griffiths, Chair, National Foster Care Sustainability Group
Jamie Crosby, CEO, Families Australia
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Dr Angela Williams, foster carer, VIC
Prof Stacy Blythe, foster carer, researcher and advocate, NSW
Bryce Groves, care leaver, NSW

ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE IN CHILD AND FAMILY WELFARE

The Centre is the peak body for child and family services in Tasmania and Victoria. For over 100 years, the Centre has advocated for the rights and wellbeing of children, young people and families in Victoria, ensuring their right to be heard, to be safe, to access education and to remain connected to family, community and culture. For more information visit www.cfecfw.asn.au.