CFECFW Fuel Crisis Sector Survey: What child and family services need

April 2026

Key asks to address the impact of the fuel crisis on child and family services across Victoria

The fuel crisis is compounding existing cost-of-living pressures and creating significant barriers to service access, travel, and operational sustainability for child and family service providers. The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare has analysed survey responses from organisations across Victoria, which show that the impacts of the fuel crisis are widespread and escalating rapidly.

Key impacts

1. Families' access to services and safety

- Significant increase in requests for fuel vouchers, taxi vouchers, food relief, and support for essential travel.
- Families are missing medical appointments, school days, and therapeutic sessions, often due to the cost of fuel.
- Some report heightened family violence risk, including coercive control related to vehicle and fuel access.
- Rising transport costs are contributing to social isolation, stress, and reduced capacity for help-seeking.

2. Service delivery disruption

- Reduced ability to conduct outreach, home visits, and community-based programs.
- More cancellations, postponed appointments, and increasing reliance on telehealth or phone-based support.
- Declining attendance at programs dependent on in-person engagement (e.g., supervised contact, playgroups, parenting programs).
- Concerns around maintaining child visibility and safety as outreach becomes constrained.

3. Workforce financial stress and retention risks

- Staff are under growing pressure due to unaffordable commuting costs, especially regional workers and employees on lower SCHADS levels.
- Increased requests for work-from-home arrangements, flexible schedules, and access to fleet vehicles.
- Some staff may be unable to sustain employment requiring long commutes, risking workforce shortages in already stretched teams.

4. Escalating operational costs for organisations

- Organisations report sharp increases in fleet fuel expenditure, with some forecasting a doubling of costs.
- Many are reallocating budgets away from other essential needs to maintain travel for critical work.
- Agencies fear that without external support, program viability and service reach will be compromised.

What the sector needs

1. Immediate support for families

- Additional emergency relief funding, especially fuel and grocery vouchers.
- Transport subsidies and practical supports, such as taxi vouchers if public transport is not an option.
- Additional support in rural, regional and remote areas, in recognition of the added challenges the fuel crisis poses
- Additional support for disaster-affected families reliant on diesel-powered generators.

2. Support for the child and family services workforce

- Temporary travel allowances and subsidies for frontline staff and students completing unpaid sector placements.
- Greater flexibility to work from home where possible and/or modify service delivery (hybrid/telehealth) were appropriate.
- Priority access to fuel during shortages for essential workers.

3. Funding adjustments for organisations

- Supplementary or indexed funding reflecting rising travel and operational costs.
- Recognition of rural, remote and regional travel burdens in funding models, including additional support to continue outreach services.
- Flexibility to modify service delivery (hybrid, telehealth) when necessary.
- More flexibility around funding to support clients and advocacy for more brokerage.

4. System coordination and policy clarity

- Consistent, sector-wide guidance from DFFH/FSV on expectations during fuel instability.
- Recognition of child and family services as essential services in any fuel rationing scenario.
- Clear protocols similar to COVID-era temporary arrangements (e.g., essential worker protections, service delivery adjustments).