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| Flexible funding for existing permanent carers |
| Service provider guidelines |

These guidelines are for the agency (service provider) administering flexible funding packages to existing permanent carers.

Flexible funding may be provided to support a child or young person subject to a permanent care order\*.

# Policy context

When a child is unable to safely return home after being removed from their parents’ care, a permanent alternative placement must be sought to provide stable ongoing care, to meet the child’s needs and support them to meet their potential. Flexible funding aims to support children and young people subject to permanent care orders.

Flexible funding can be provided to permanent carers to help meet additional needs of a child in their care, subject to a permanent care order, beyond those met by the carer allowance and other available funding sources (carer allowances and other funding sources are noted at the end of the document). A permanent care order confers parental responsibility for the child on the permanent carers, to the exclusion of all others. Permanent carers continue to receive a carer allowance to assist with covering the costs of care, including the education and medical allowance.

Children who have been placed in permanent care may have a range of issues which are a result of their history and exposure to abuse. Flexible funding packages are designed to meet some of these additional needs where necessary. The funding is specific to the child and should promote the child’s attachment and continuity of care, and help address issues which may be a result of abuse or neglect.

# Principles

Flexible funding:

* may be approved to cover partial, full, or ongoing costs
* will only be provided when the cost of the service, product, or activity, is beyond that reasonably covered by an existing care allowance, or other sources of funding
* cannot be used for salaries, or professional development
* may be provided directly to a carer, a retailer, or service provider.

# Target group

Flexible funding requests can be considered when:

* The child or young person is subject to a permanent care order made in Victoria, residing in an ongoing permanent care placement.

# What the funding will cover

Permanent carers continue to receive the carer allowance once a permanent care order is made, which includes an allowance for education and medical costs. Flexible funding is only available when all other funding options have been exhausted, and no other source of funding exists.

The funding may be used to:

* support access to services to address the therapeutic needs of a child which result from trauma or negative experiences
* support a child to access additional educational support not covered by the education allowance
* support additional health and medical needs of the child not covered by the medical allowance, Medicare, or private health insurance
* preserve contact between parents, siblings, and family members
* preserve cultural identity
* provide access to respite care
* cover costs related to child care beyond other subsidies
* assist with home modifications provided they are essential
* assist with essential vehicle requirements such as modifications, car seats, and upsizing
* assist with other services essential to support the placement.

The funding is not to be used for:

* legal costs
* staff salaries or professional development.

# Procedure

The service provider will administer flexible funding packages for permanent care of children and young people in accordance with these guidelines.

Permanent carers can apply for funding on more than one occasion.

The service provider must:

* receive requests for funding from existing permanent carers only
* verify the identity of a permanent carer and the existence of a permanent care order
* establish whether the permanent carer has received flexible funding at the time the permanent care order was made
* analyse the request
* gather information as required
* consider if alternative funding sources are available
* make any required administrative arrangement to ensure funding is spent as per approval
* maintain relevant records of financial requests and the outcome and provide reports of expenditure and other data to the Department of Health and Human Services when requested.

In relation to whether a permanent carer received flexible funding at the time the permanent care order was made, and the permanent carer cannot provide details of the amount provided, the service provider may contact child protection, to verify previous access to funding or flexible funding. Written consent of the permanent carer is required before child protection can provide this information to the service provider.

# Accountability

The Department of Health and Human Services is responsible for the funding and service agreement with the service provider. Regular reporting is required and will be reviewed.

Permanent carers are to contact **Permanent Care and Adoptive Families** to request flexible funding:

Telephone: (03) 9020 1833 email: info@pcafamilies.org.au

More information about other funding for carers including the *Financial support guide for home-based carers August 2015* can be found at:

<https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/caring-children>

\*The funding is also available to permanent carers receiving the Victorian Department of Health and Human Service carer allowance for permanent placements where the child is subject to a Family Court order, or a Special Needs Adoption.

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