

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 In late 2013, the Australian Government asked the Productivity Commission to inquire into childcare and early childhood learning.¹ The inquiry highlighted the role played by grandparents in the provision of informal childcare.² Far less visible, however, is the significant role and contribution of grandparents who take on the primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren.

1.2 Throughout Australia, there are tens of thousands of children being raised by their grandparents. These arrangements often result from a combination of adverse circumstances and produce challenges which are unique to the family situation. Although some issues have previously been examined,³ the challenges remain despite an upward trend in grandparent provided care.

1.3 This inquiry focuses on the unmet support needs of grandparents who raise their grandchildren and how to address those needs.

Terms of Reference

1.4 On 9 December 2013, the Senate referred the following matters to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee (committee) for inquiry and report by 30 September 2014:

Grandparents who take on the primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren when parents are unable or unwilling to do so, through a formal or informal care arrangement, including:

- (a) the practical challenges facing grandparents raising their grandchildren, and their support needs;
- (b) the role and contribution of grandparents raising their grandchildren, and how this should be recognised;
- (c) other challenges that grandparents raising their grandchildren face in undertaking their role, including in circumstances complicated by family conflict, mental illness, substance abuse, homelessness, child abuse or neglect, or family violence;
- (d) the barriers that grandparents raising their grandchildren face in acquiring legal recognition of their family arrangements, including Legal

1 See: <http://pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/childcare>.

2 Productivity Commission 2014, *Childcare and Early Childhood Learning*, Draft Report, Canberra, p. 94, available at: http://pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/138383/childcare-draft.pdf (accessed 25 September 2014).

3 For example: COTA National Seniors, *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, A Report of the project commissioned by The Hon Larry Anthony, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs*, July 2003; Parliament of Tasmania, Joint Standing Committee on Community Development, *Report on Issues Relating to Custodial Grandparents*, Report No. 2, 2003.

Aid entitlements for grandparents seeking to formalise their custodial arrangements through the Family Law Courts;

(e) the practical measures that can be implemented by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments and the community sector to better support grandparents raising their grandchildren, including key priorities for action;

(f) the specific needs of particular groups within the caring population, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander grandparent carers, grandparents caring for grandchildren with disability, grandparents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, grandparents with mental health needs, and grandparents with an informal care arrangement for their grandchildren; and

(g) other related matters.⁴

1.5 On 30 September 2014, the Senate extended the reporting date to 29 October 2014, to allow the committee further time to consider the submissions and evidence received throughout the inquiry.⁵

Conduct of the inquiry

1.6 The committee advertised the inquiry in *The Australian* on 5 February 2014. Details of the inquiry were placed on the committee's website and the committee wrote to over 130 organisations, inviting submissions by 14 March 2014. Submissions continued to be accepted after that date.

1.7 The committee received 176 submissions from a diverse range of individuals and organisations, including grandparents and their families, support groups, community service providers, legal professionals, the Federal Circuit Court of Australia, independent statutory authorities and the Tasmanian Government. A list of the individuals and organisations who made submissions is provided at Appendix 1.

1.8 Public hearings were held throughout Australia: Melbourne on 10 June 2014; Sydney on 13 June 2014; Canberra on 20 June 2014; Darwin on 5 August 2014; Perth on 6 August 2014; Albany on 7 August 2014; and Hobart on 19 September 2014. Transcripts of the hearings are available on the committee's website,⁶ and a list of the witnesses who gave public evidence at the hearings is provided at Appendix 2.

Acknowledgements

1.9 At the outset, the committee recognised the importance of engaging grandparents who are raising their grandchildren and those children in the inquiry. In addition to the receipt of submissions and evidence, the committee held a number of roundtable discussions in Perth, Albany and Hobart, as well as visiting the Larrakia Nation Bagot Community in Darwin. The committee appreciates how difficult it can

4 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 8–9 December 2013, p. 282.

5 *Journals of the Senate*, No.57–30 September 2014, p. 1550.

6 See: http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs.

be to discuss private family matters and is grateful to all the grandparents and their grandchildren for courageously sharing their experiences with the committee.

1.10 The committee thanks also those individuals and organisations who facilitated the committee's inquiry. In particular, the committee wishes to acknowledge: the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Inc. and CREATE Foundation for organising the appearance of grandchildren at the Melbourne and Sydney public hearings; the Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation for kindly arranging the committee's visit to the Larrakia Nation Bagot Community; Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren WA (Inc.) and Ms Christine Jeffries for their assistance in organising the appearance of grandparents raising grandchildren at the Perth and Hobart public hearings; and Ms Meredith Kiraly for the provision of background reading material in the early stages of the inquiry.

Key concepts

1.11 For the purposes of this report, the committee uses two key concepts in relation to grandparents who have assumed the primary care of their grandchildren:

- formal care—grandparents who are raising their grandchildren as a result of:
 - Parenting Orders made by the Family Court of Australia or the Federal Circuit Court of Australia, pursuant to Commonwealth legislation; or
 - child protection orders made by a Children's Court, Youth Court or Magistrates Court, pursuant to state and territory legislation; and
- informal care—grandparents who are raising their grandchildren through private arrangements, which may or may not be known to child protection authorities.⁷

1.12 In addition, the term 'kinship carers' is used intermittently and should be understood to include grandparents raising grandchildren as a subgroup of all relatives who care for family members.

Statistical incidence of grandparents raising grandchildren in Australia

1.13 The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) conducts a comprehensive program of social data collections, and provides statistics on a range of matters relating to family and care responsibilities.⁸ However, the existing data does not easily allow for the identification and enumeration of grandparents raising grandchildren in Australia. The Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) described this task as:

...methodologically and conceptually complex, particularly because of the range of formal and informal arrangements that characterise grandparent care. Existing data on the number of grandparent carers, their characteristics

7 Brennan, D., Cass, B., Flaxman, S., Hill, T., Jenkins, B., McHugh, M., Purcal, C., & valentine, k. (2013), *Grandparents raising grandchildren: Towards recognition, respect and reward (Grandparents raising grandchildren)* (SPRC Report 14/13), Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, p. 14.

8 *Submission 93*, p. [1].

and circumstances have resulted in divergent and fluctuating estimates. An important reason for these differences and fluctuations is that the surveys they are based upon are not actually designed to capture grandparents' responsibility for grandchildren.⁹

1.14 In 2013, the SPRC reported analysing data from the 2006 Census of Population and Housing, which sought for the first time to identify grandparent-grandchild relationships within a household for children aged under 15 years. The SPRC concluded that there were (then) 8,050 to 35,926 families where grandparents may have had the primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren. A further 27,594 families were identified, where the household included a grandchild's lone parent who may have exercised parental responsibility.¹⁰

1.15 According to the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), data from the 2011 Census of Population and Housing indicates that there was (then) a total of 46,680 'grandparent families', that is, households where there were grandparent-grandchild relationships in the absence of parent-child relationships.¹¹

1.16 In its submission, the ABS cautioned that 'the value of census data is in identifying family structure and it is not necessarily able to define caring responsibilities between various family members'.¹²

Enhanced data collection

1.17 Submitters suggested that the ABS should further develop its data collection, particularly in relation to informal grandparents raising grandchildren.¹³ Wanslea Family Services Inc., a Western Australia-based community service provider, argued that a strong evidence base would allow for the provision of targeted supports and services:

The number, profile and needs of both informal and formal grandparent carers are underrepresented in government statistics and data, as well as Australian and state-based research. The needs of grandparent carers and the evaluation of services to support them need to be a priority in the Commonwealth Government's research agenda and associated funding priorities.¹⁴

1.18 Participants highlighted the Census of Population and Housing (Census) and the Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset as two data sources which the ABS could

9 Brennan et al, *Grandparents raising grandchildren*, pp 1-2.

10 Brennan et al, *Grandparents raising grandchildren*, p. 65.

11 *Submission 99*, p. 6.

12 *Submission 93*, p. [4].

13 For example: Dr Marilyn McHugh, *Submission 17*, p. 1; Victorian Council of Social Service, *Submission 96*, p. 5; Children's Commissioner, Northern Territory, *Submission 111*, p. 1; Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Inc. (Centre for Excellence), *Submission 169*, p. 9.

14 *Submission 150*, p. 10. Also see: Australian Medical Association, *Submission 82*, p. 4.

enhance, to provide more comprehensive information on the incidence and circumstances of grandparent care in Australia.¹⁵

1.19 In relation to the Census, for example, the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) suggested the inclusion of a question which identifies the 'caring relationship' in grandparent-headed families. By way of example, the AHRC referred to a question contained in the 'long' form 2000 United States Federal Census:

Question 19, United States Census 2000

(a) Does this person have any of his/her own grandchildren under the age of 18 living in this house or apartment?

Yes / No–skip

(b) Is this grandparent currently responsible for most of the basic needs of any grandchild(ren) under the age of 18 who live(s) in this house or apartment?

Yes / No–skip

(c) How long has this grandparent been responsible for the(se) grandchild(ren)? If the grandparent is financially responsible for more than one grandchild, answer the question for the grandchild for whom the grandparent has been responsible for the longest period of time.

Less than 6 months / 6-11 months / 1-2 years / 3-4 years / 5 years or more¹⁶

1.20 In relation to the Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and the AIFS supported the conduct of a longitudinal study.¹⁷ According to the AIFS:

[In addition to enumeration], such a study could also derive estimates on the circumstances that lead to these arrangements, the psycho-social and cultural characteristics of these families, the physical and emotional health of both the grandparents and the children, the stability of such arrangements, and the strengths and vulnerabilities that the grandparents bring to the task. These data are needed if a well-informed policy or service framework is to be developed.¹⁸

1.21 Professor Alan Hayes, Director of the AIFS, advised that the AIFS would like to place a longitudinal study on the agenda for future research: 'as a family type [grandparent provided care] is an increasingly important area that we do not have

15 For example: National Seniors, *Submission 131*, p. 6.

16 *Submission 133*, p. 21. Also see: Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), *Submission 99*, p. 13.

17 Dr Pamela Kinnear, Head, Continuing and Specialised Care Group, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 20 June 2014, p. 8; AIFS, *Submission 99*, p. 12.

18 *Submission 99*, p. 12. The submission indicated also the need for nested studies with respect to particular groups, for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, as well as the need to include children's perspectives.

sufficient information about at the moment'.¹⁹ The AIFS elaborated that the ideal approach would be a broad longitudinal study of ageing:

Within such a study, a large number of grandparents and a smaller number of grandparent families would be identified. Placing a study of grandparents within a broader study of ageing would provide a comparative frame of reference within which to evaluate the wellbeing and circumstances of grandparents and grandparent families. Adding a longitudinal dimension would enable an accurate tracking of the effects of grandparenting and grandparent family care on their wellbeing over time.²⁰

1.22 However, the AIFS proposed a 'more modest solution at this point'. The AIFS explained that a longitudinal study would require the construction of an unbiased sampling frame, including an expensive large-scale screening stage to locate grandparent-headed families which are 'relatively rare'.²¹ Instead, a national, cross-sectional, probability telephone survey, including a sample of grandparents raising grandchildren, would be a more 'cost-effective and more timely solution to the need to understand grandparent families better'.²² In addition, the AIFS recommended:

...a separate qualitative study of Indigenous grandparents in which the role of grandparents in providing care for grandchildren is investigated.²³

1.23 Dr Pamela Kinnear from the AIHW noted that Commonwealth, state and territory governments have recognised the importance of enhancing the evidence base,²⁴ with a broad commitment toward improving the Child Protection National Minimum Dataset:

Collecting data that can be compared across jurisdictions is...a priority. We have commissioned improvements in the Child Protection National Minimum Dataset...that collects data on children and family demographics, children's pathways into the child protection system, the type of abuse or neglect children experience, and demographic information about their carers. This data will include information on [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander], disability and culturally and linguistically diverse status, where possible.²⁵

19 *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 37. Also see: AIFS, answers to questions on notice, received 22 September 2014, pp 7-8.

20 Answers to questions on notice, received 22 September 2014, p. 3.

21 Answers to questions on notice, received 22 September 2014, pp 2-6.

22 Answers to questions on notice, received 22 September 2014, p. 6.

23 Answers to questions on notice, received 22 September 2014, p. 2.

24 *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 20 June 2014, pp 7-8.

25 Commonwealth of Australia, *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business, National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020, Second three-year action plan 2012-2015*, 2012, p. 30, available at: <http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/protecting-children-is-everyone-s-business-national-framework-for-protecting-australia-s-children-2009-2020-second-action-plan-2012-2015> (accessed 4 September 2014).

1.24 In addition to a longitudinal study, Dr Kinnear suggested that it would be beneficial to make better use of administrative datasets:

We could certainly get a better view using administrative data collections were we able to get the datasets sufficiently well enhanced to actually get some good specifications and then link it. To give you an example, if the Child Protection National Minimum Dataset was the gold standard of the datasets...you would be able to link that dataset to some other dataset—for example, the National Disability Services Dataset, or some of the housing datasets—and you actually get another view of the grandparent carer children in the child protection system who might also have disabilities, who might also have housing problems, et cetera.

By linking datasets, you can start adding dimensions...There [are] all kinds of methodological and feasibility challenges with linking, but if you have actually got a good linkage key and you can do it, then it can be an incredibly powerful tool.²⁶

Growth in kinship care

1.25 Each year, the AIHW collaborates with the states and territories to manage the national collection of child protection data. This collection provides comprehensive statistical information on child protection and support services, and some of the characteristics of children within these systems. The child protection sub-collections include data on out-of-home care, foster carers and kinship carers.²⁷

1.26 At 30 June 2013, the AIHW reported that 40,549 children were in out-of-home care (a rate of 7.8 per 1,000 children).²⁸ The majority of these children (93 per cent) were in home-based care: 43 per cent in foster care; 48 per cent in kinship care; and 3 per cent in other types of home-based care.²⁹

1.27 Australian researchers have reported that kinship care is 'the fastest growing form of out-of-home care'.³⁰ The multiple reasons for this growth include:

26 *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 20 June 2014, pp 8-9. The Child Protection National Minimum Dataset collects information on the relationship between a kinship carer and the child or young person in care. However, its use is currently restricted by an ongoing assessment of the data quality and its scope, which does not encompass informal care arrangements: see Dr Pamela Kinnear, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 20 June 2014, p. 6.

27 AIHW, *Child Protection*, available at: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/child-protection/#collect> (accessed 4 September 2014).

28 Child protection Australia 2012-13, Child Welfare Series No. 58, Cat. No. CWS 49, Canberra: AIHW, p. 45.

29 Child protection Australia 2012-13, Child Welfare Series No. 58, Cat. No. CWS 49, Canberra: AIHW, p. 48. The proportion of children placed with kin varied across jurisdictions, ranging from 2.6% in the Northern Territory to 55.8% in New South Wales: see Table A28.

30 Smyth, C. and T. Eardley (2008), *Out of Home Care for Children in Australia: A Review of Literature and Policy*, SPRC Report No. 3/08, prepared for the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney, p. 9.

recognition of kinship care 'as having many advantages within the formal structures of child protection' (such as the preservation of family, promotion of cultural identity and reduced separation trauma); increased demand for out-of-home care placements; insufficient supply of foster carers; and relative expense for governments.³¹

1.28 Participants in the inquiry noted the growing trend toward kinship care.³² Dr Marilyn McHugh, a researcher based at the SPRC, expressed alarm with the trend, due to the high level of disadvantage experienced by grandparents raising grandchildren and their 'different (ie lesser) treatment' in some jurisdictions, compared with foster carers:

While Australian research is improving in the area of kinship care, specifically focussing on grandparent care, international studies note the vulnerability of kinship carers, often single grandmothers. Compared to foster carers, they are usually older, in poorer health, on lower incomes, and more reliant on income support payments. Compared to foster carers they are less likely to be employed or have university degrees or to receive training, case planning or supervision. [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] kinship carers are particularly vulnerable: most in strained financial circumstances have generally high levels of material disadvantage, including poor or inadequate housing. Many have sibling groups in their care.³³

1.29 The Australian Foster Care Association (AFCA) remarked that there is also a new trend emerging within kinship care:

We have grandparents who now are so old that they are starting to age out of the system or are finding themselves in a situation where they are unable to look after the grandchildren on an ongoing basis. There is now a need to start looking around at other kin from the next generation down—aunts, uncles or possibly even older siblings.³⁴

Reasons for grandparent provided care

1.30 Grandparents raising grandchildren often assume the primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren when the birth parents are unable or unwilling to do so. This inability or unwillingness occurs for a variety of reasons, including due to

31 Boetto, H. (2010), 'Kinship care: a review of issues', *Australian Institute of Family Studies*, p. 61.

32 For example: Australian Association of Social Workers, *Submission 132*, p. 4; Ms Meredith Kiraly, Member, Expert Reference Group, Australian Psychological Society, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 11.

33 *Submission 17*, p. 2. Also see, for example: Winangay Resources Inc., *Submission 107*, p. 3; Centre for Excellence, *Submission 169*, p. 10.

34 Mrs Beverely Orr OAM, President, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 48. Also see: Ms Meredith Kiraly, Kinship Care Researcher and Consultant, Centre for Excellence, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 58; Ms Mary D'Elia, State Operations Manager, Bapcare, *Committee Hansard*, Hobart, 19 September 2014, pp 25-26.

substance abuse, risk of child abuse or neglect, death, incarceration, mental or physical illness, and disability.³⁵

1.31 National and international literature demonstrates consistently that the main reason for grandparents raising grandchildren is parental drug or alcohol misuse, combined with socio-emotional, family disruption and violence, mental illness and financial problems, resulting in child neglect and, less frequently, child abuse.³⁶

1.32 Ms Meredith Kiraly from the Australian Psychological Society confirmed that in Australia 'substance abuse is a big driver' of children being placed in kinship care,³⁷ to which Mission Australia added 'the substance misuse is interconnected with domestic violence, incarceration and mental health'.³⁸ A representative from Mission Australia shared the following experience of two grandparents raising grandchildren, who have participated in its support program (Grandparents Raising Grandchildren) for many years:

Paul and Leanne's eldest daughter Kerry left home at 15. She became involved with drugs and prostitution. Sixteen years later, Paul and Leanne have full parental responsibility for one of Kerry's six children, and they have had her for the last 14 years. They have shared the care of three of the other children with a minister for the last four years. The other two children are in separate foster homes, so they are not even in the same foster home together.

Six months ago, their daughter Kerry died from a heroin overdose, and the children's biological father has been incarcerated. While the five youngest children were in the care of their parents, they were sexually abused. They were exposed to domestic violence and were severely emotionally and physically neglected. As a result of the trauma, the children are all presenting with different challenges. The oldest daughter, who is 16, has commenced self-harming and is showing signs of poor mental health. The three grandchildren who are in Paul and Leanne's care have developmental delays due to exposure to heroin and trauma whilst in the womb. They display violent and sexualised behaviours at school and are all behind academically.³⁹

1.33 Grandparents also illustrated the manner in which their grandchildren had come into their care. Mr Eugene Hinkley told the committee, 'in early 2009, because

35 Families Australia, 'Grandparenting: Present & Future', *Family Issues Series No. 2*, January 2007, p. 19.

36 Brennan et al, *Grandparents raising grandchildren*, p. 90.

37 *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 11.

38 Mr Brett Fahey, Area Manager, New South Wales South Coast, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, p. 44. Also see: Dr Katrina Stratton, Co-ordinator, Research and Evaluation, Wanslea Family Services Inc., *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 6 August 2014, p. 22.

39 Mr Brett Fahey, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 13 June 2014, p. 42 (the names have been changed to protect the family's privacy).

of alcohol and drugs, our son-in-law and [daughter] went out one night and we have not laid eyes on either since'.⁴⁰ Ms Diane Robinson similarly stated:

When I got my grandchildren, it was informal because my daughter went into rehab. It was for a three-month period. I was happy to do that, but that three months has now been four years.⁴¹

1.34 Ms Jan Standen gave the following evidence:

My daughter abandoned her children in 2005. The little guy was only 18 months old. He will be 11 tomorrow. She has not been in their lives much over the past nine years; she comes in and out. She has borderline personality disorder, bulimia, drug and alcohol addiction and constant self-harming issues. I have not seen her for two years and neither have the kids.⁴²

1.35 As part of a 2010 study, the SPRC undertook the first national survey of grandparents raising their grandchildren in Australia. Over 300 grandparents participated in the survey, identifying parent behaviour and emotional issues as the predominant reasons for their having taken on the care of grandchildren.

Table 1.1 – Reasons for raising grandchildren

	N (grandchild 1) ^a	% of respondents ^b
Parent's drug or alcohol problems	207	67.2
Child neglect	99	32.1
Parent's mental illness	96	31.2
Domestic violence	70	22.7
Other (<i>please describe</i>)	53	17.2
Child abandonment	31	10.1
Mother's death	29	9.4
Parent's imprisonment	19	6.2
Father's death	16	5.2
Parent's physical illness	13	4.2

40 *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 6 August 2014, p. 35

41 *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 6 August 2014, p. 38.

42 *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 6 August 2014, p. 41.

Parent's employment commitments	8	2.6
Parent's unemployment	6	1.9
Total number of respondents	308	
^a Up to three responses per survey		
^b Adds up to more than 100 per cent due to multiple responses		

Source: Brennan, D., Cass, B., Flaxman, S., Hill, T., Jenkins, B., McHugh, M., Purcal, C., & valentine, k. (2013), *Grandparents raising grandchildren: Towards recognition, respect and reward (SPRC Report 14/13)*, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, p. 91.

1.36 The SPRC also interviewed 20 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander grandparents raising grandchildren from New South Wales, South Australia and the Northern Territory. Again, the interviewees identified a range of reasons for the care, with drug or alcohol misuse, socio-emotional and financial problems featuring most prominently.⁴³

1.37 Although grandparents raising grandchildren assume the primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren due to factors relevant to the birth parents, one of the most significant motivations for a grandparent is his/her love for the grandchild. This love is often combined with a desire to keep the grandchild out of the foster care system, in contact with his/her siblings and within the extended family.⁴⁴

National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020

1.38 In April 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* (Framework). The Framework aims to ensure the safety and well-being of Australia's children and young people, by achieving a substantial and sustained reduction in child abuse and neglect over time.⁴⁵

1.39 The Framework is being implemented through a series of three-year action plans. The First Action Plan (2009-2012) created the foundation for the Framework (including performance indicators),⁴⁶ and the Second Action Plan (2012–2015)

43 Brennan et al, *Grandparents raising grandchildren*, p. 142.

44 Brennan et al, *Grandparents raising grandchildren*, p. 91.

45 Commonwealth of Australia, *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business, National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*, 2009, p. 11, available at: http://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/child_protection_framework.pdf (accessed 4 September 2014).

46 The performance indicators are located in Appendix B of the Second Action Plan.

outlines how all governments, the non-government sector and the community will progress actions to ensure that Australia's children grow up safe and well.⁴⁷

1.40 Outcome 4 of the Framework addresses the need for children and young people who have been abused or neglected to receive timely, appropriate, high-quality child protection and other support services. More specifically, Outcome 4.2 recognises that grandparents raising grandchildren need to be supported across a range of areas (including financial and non-financial supports and services).⁴⁸

1.41 As noted in the Second Action Plan:

All jurisdictions are experiencing difficulties in recruiting and retaining carers. Australia's diverse kinship carers are now the fastest growing demographic of carers, and it is important for governments and non-government organisations and the community to support them in their valuable role. As a society, we need to acknowledge and recognise the carers of our most vulnerable children and young people.⁴⁹

1.42 Mrs Beverley Orr OAM, President of AFCA and member of the implementation working group, advised that the Second Action Plan has progressed, albeit slowly:

It has been extremely difficult and challenging to get some commonality in understanding across some areas...[W]hat we have sitting around that table is all of the COAG agendas; then we have the non-government agendas as well. There has had to be some very strong negotiation...There has also had to be some pragmatic decision-making around what can be achieved immediately, what will take longer and what will take quite a bit longer.⁵⁰

1.43 A Western Australian Government representative agreed that work within the Framework is slow but 'we are getting some traction', for example, in relation to interstate liaison processes:

We have worked through those committees to establish interstate liaison officers, individual staff, in each of those departments, who meet regularly

47 Department of Social Services, *Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020—Second Action Plan 2012-2015*, available at: <http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/protecting-children-is-everyone-s-business-national-framework-for-protecting-australia-s-children-2009-2020-second-action-plan-2012-2015> (accessed 4 September 2014).

48 Commonwealth of Australia, *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business, National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*, 2009, p. 26. The Second Action Plan targets improved supports for grandparents raising grandchildren.

49 Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business, National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*, 2012, p. 23.

50 *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 10 June 2014, p. 50.

and have a range of protocols and operational guidelines...[T]hose officers take the lead within the individual agencies[.]⁵¹

Committee view

1.44 The committee is concerned that nationally it is not known how many grandparents have the primary care of their grandchildren and the circumstances in which those children are being raised. Without a sound evidence base, it cannot be possible for governments and community service providers to properly plan appropriate supports and services for grandparents raising grandchildren.

1.45 Accordingly, the committee considers it essential for the ABS to enhance its data collections and for the AIFS to conduct further studies, to more accurately identify the number and circumstances of grandparents raising grandchildren. In particular, the committee notes that the AIHW and AIFS support enhancing the Census and the Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset.

Structure of the report

1.46 The committee's report is structured in the following way:

- chapter 2 examines the role and contribution of grandparents raising grandchildren;
- chapters 3 and 4 discuss the financial and non-financial challenges experienced by grandparents raising grandchildren and the practical supports which could address these needs;
- chapter 5 examines other challenges arising as a result of the care arrangement, including due to complex family circumstances;
- chapter 6 considers the barriers encountered by informal grandparents raising grandchildren who seek to formalise the care arrangement;
- chapter 7 enquires into the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander grandparents raising grandchildren; and
- chapter 8 presents the committee's conclusion and recommendations.

51 Ms Emma White, Acting Director General, Department for Child Protection and Family Services (WA), *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 6 August 2014, pp 16-17.

