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Senate backs help for grandparents raising grandchildren

PATRICIA KARVELAS THE AUSTRALIAN OCTOBER 29, 2014 7:57PM

A SENATE committee has recommended that the Commonwealth and States do more to help grandparents raising their grandchildren, including extending foster care allowances to grandparents without orders from a court and new respite services for exhausted grandparents.

The report is the result of a national inquiry into grandparents raising their grandchildren, conducted by the Senate Community Affairs References Committee.

WA Liberal Senator Dean Smith, who initiated the inquiry, said the report is a first step in a much needed conversation about the unrecognised role played by grandparents rearing their grandchildren.

A collaborative approach between Commonwealth, state and territory governments is the best way to assist grandparents raising grandchildren, according to a report tabled in the Senate today.

“The reality is that there are an ever increasing number of grandparents who take on the primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren in circumstances where parents are unwilling or unable to do so,” said Senator Smith.

“It is now time for all governments to face up to their responsibility in supporting this all too easily neglected group in our community.

“This inquiry focused on the challenges that grandparents raising 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.

“The recommendations provide a practical basis for easing the emotional and financial hardships faced by grandparents across every community in Australia.”

The committee recommends that state and territory governments consider providing training to grandparents raising their grandchildren, to better support them in their daily parenting roles.

The committee recommends that the Australian government, through COAG, convenes a national forum specifically for grandparents raising grandchildren and their local support groups, non-government organisations and representatives from the Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

The committee recommends that the Department of Social Services’ Children’s and Families Secretaries’ Group undertake a trial program that makes available to grandparents vouchers to assist meeting the cost of educational tutorial expenses, including the cost of ICT training for grandparents raising teenage grandchildren.

They want the Department of Human Services establish a sub-committee within the Older Australian Working Group to enable ongoing engagement with grandparents raising grandchildren.

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