



MEDIA RELEASE | Friday 20 February 2026 | World Care Day

Mildura, Victoria

World Care Day: Mallee Family Care backs national push to strengthen foster care

On World Care Day, Mallee Family Care (MFC) is highlighting the growing pressure on foster care and backing a national call for reforms that make caring more sustainable for foster carers.

MFC has signed on in support of the national **Future of Foster Care** initiative and the **National Foster Care Sustainability Group**, led under a Families Australia banner, which is urging nationally coordinated action to strengthen foster care and better support children and carers.

As at June 2024, there were 44,900 children in out-of-home care across Australia.¹ While this figure has remained relatively stable in recent years, the number of children living with foster carers has fallen by 21% since 2017, alongside an 88% increase in children and young people entering residential care — a shift associated with higher costs and can lead to poorer outcomes.

In Victoria, around 1,300 children are in foster care on an average night. Locally, in the 2024–25 financial year, MFC coordinated foster care placements for 78 children aged 0–18 years across north-west Victoria and south-west New South Wales.

Teresa Jayet, CEO of MFC, said World Care Day is an important opportunity to recognise children and young people with a care experience — and to back the carers who make safe, stable family care possible.

“Foster carers change lives every day. By offering stability, kindness and care, they give children and young people a chance to feel safe and to thrive,” Ms Jayet said.

“But fostering is harder to sustain than ever, particularly in regional communities like ours, where distance can make it harder to access the right supports. If we want more children to grow up in safe, stable family care, we need national reforms that support carers — not piecemeal fixes.”

Koondrook-based couple Jenny and Peter Nolen have provided foster care for more than 150 children over the past 35 years. All six children currently in their care require regular specialist medical and therapeutic treatment.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2025, Child protection Australia 2023–24 (web report), Cat. no. CWS 99, AIHW, Canberra, last updated 11 December 2025, viewed 17 February 2026, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2023-24/contents/insights/supporting-children>



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“Each week we’re travelling two hours to Bendigo or even further to Mildura or Melbourne, for their appointments,” Mrs Nolen said.

“Of course, we don’t think twice about doing this, because it’s so important for their development and their wellbeing. But it can become a juggle.”

Mrs Nolen said that any reforms aimed at making foster caring easier could help encourage more people to consider opening their homes.

“From my own experience, I can tell you foster caring is absolutely doable and incredibly rewarding – but carers need the right support around them to keep doing it.”

Jamie Crosby, CEO of Families Australia, said:

“We welcome MFC’s support for the Future of Foster Care initiative. Foster care is essential to Australia’s care system, but without stronger, nationally coordinated support for carers and children, we risk further decline in family-based care options for our country’s most vulnerable children and young people.”

Three practical national reforms being called for:

The Future of Foster Care coalition is calling on the Australian Government to progress three priority reforms:

- 1. Introduce a National Health Access Card for children in out-of-home care**
Ensure immediate no- or low-cost access to essential medical, developmental, therapeutic and educational services for children and young people in care.
- 2. Direct the Australian Taxation Office to clarify and update guidance on tax-free carer allowances**
So jurisdictions and providers can increase payments without imposing unintended tax burdens on carers.
- 3. Provide equitable leave for carers through amendments to the National Employment Standards**
Adjust the National Employment Standards to help foster carers in paid employment start or continue fostering. Carers fulfil a parenting-type role but are not currently afforded the same rights as parents.

MFC is urging the Australian Government to work with carers, services and the sector to deliver these reforms, removing barriers for state and territories that will help strengthen family-based care across Australia.

To learn more about the national initiative, visit futureoffostercare.org.au.

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