



A Position Paper for the 2026 Victorian State Election

Introduction

Permanent Care and Adoptive Families (PCA Families) supports over 3,750 members and delivers Helpline, Flexible Funding, Better Futures/Homestretch, and Peer Support services on behalf of the Victorian Government to families and children unable to live with their birth parents.

This paper sets out PCA Families' priorities for the 2026 Victorian election. It endorses the five election priorities published by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, and adds a set of priorities specific to permanent care families, drawn directly from PCA Families' service data and lived experience of the sector over the 2025–26 year — a year that included the passage of the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025, continued cost-of-living pressure on carers, and PCA Families' own transition to full delivery of the Flexible Funding Program.

We ask all parties and candidates to commit to the priorities below ahead of the election.

Part A — Priorities Specific to Permanent Care Families

The priorities below reflect issues that are distinct to families on Permanent Care Orders, Family Court Orders and Special Needs Adoptions and are supported directly by PCA Families' own program data from the 2025–26 financial year.

Priority 1: Recognise Permanent Care as a Distinct Category

New priority — not currently visible in sector-wide platforms

The ask:

- Establish distinct data collection for children on Permanent Care Orders, separate from broader foster and kinship care statistics.
- Set allowance and support settings specific to the permanent care cohort, recognising that Permanent Care Orders sit outside standard out-of-home-care funding arrangements.
- Formally recognise permanent care as a distinct category in Victorian Government awards, reporting and policy design (e.g. the Victorian Protecting Children Awards).

PCA Families evidence:

- PCA Families has raised the absence of a distinct permanent care category with DFFH previously, including in relation to the Protecting Children Awards.
- Permanent Care Orders are legally and financially distinct from foster and kinship care arrangements yet are frequently folded into generic 'out-of-home-care' policy settings.

Priority 2: Increase supports to the Parents and Carers

New priority — direct carer wellbeing and capacity focus

The ask:

- Provide parity of access to services across all orders – Permanent, Kinship and Adoptive care

- Review the Carer Allowance payments, provide transparency in the transition to permanent care and clarity in the review process.
- Fund proactive identification and outreach to parents and carers of children and care leavers, rather than relying solely on carers to self-refer into support.
- Expand access to peer support, training and carer assistance programs so carers are better equipped to meet the practical, emotional and developmental needs of the children in their care.
- Resource dedicated carer wellbeing supports (including mental health, counselling, wellbeing and respite options) recognising that carer capacity directly affects placement stability.
- Improve transition supports to new parents including document access such as birth certificates, passports; and information on available resources in the community

PCA Families evidence:

- PCA Families' member survey identified mental health and specialist access, and a desire for more support, increased availability including greater access to helpline, peer support and wellbeing initiatives, as leading concerns among carers throughout 2025–26.
- The Helpline, Carer Assistance Program and Peer Support service all recorded consistently high satisfaction (95–100%) where accessed, indicating strong carer demand once engaged — the gap is in proactive identification and reach, not program quality.
- PCA Families have reported in increasing numbers the difficulties relating to low carer allowance payments that are not consistent with the complex needs of the child sometimes visible in foster care, often however emerging in adolescence.

Priority 3: Index and Expand the Flexible Funding Program

Directly linked to Priority 1 of the shared sector platform

The ask:

- Commit to permanent, indexed annual increases to the Flexible Funding Program allocation, rather than one-off top-ups.
- Index the Victorian Care Allowance to reflect actual cost-of-living, reducing reliance on discretionary funding to cover basic costs.

PCA Families evidence:

- Flexible Funding is now PCA Families' largest single service, around half of all client calls.
- Financial hardship remains a consistent top three theme in Helpline calls throughout 2025–26.
- PCA Families fully transitioned delivery of the Flexible Funding Program from OzChild during 2024–25 and has since tightened guidelines and budget categories in direct response to cost-of-living pressure on the fund and cuts to NDIS funding — a sign of underlying demand outpacing available funding.

Priority 4: Long-Term Funding Certainty for Permanent Care Service Providers

PCA Families' own case study in support of Priority 6 of the shared sector platform

The ask:

- Extend the five-year minimum funding agreement commitment specifically to statewide intake, helpline and flexible funding services delivered under DFFH service agreements.

PCA Families evidence:

- PCA Families' 2025–26 year included a CEO transition and an organisational restructure driven in part by cost and funding-cycle pressures.

- Short annual funding cycles constrain workforce planning and strategic investment in systems, at the same time PCA Families is absorbing growing service demand.

Priority 5: Strengthen Equity of Access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Carers

Equity priority, complementary to Priority 1 of the shared platform

The ask:

- Maintain and further resource culturally specific supports connected to the Flexible Funding Program, including Return to Country and cultural connection funding.
- Continue and expand funding partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, including the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA).

PCA Families evidence:

- PCA Families' 2025–26 data shows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients received approximately 11.5% of Flexible Funding spend against an estimated 5% share of the client base — a positive equity signal worth protecting and building on through continued, dedicated investment.

Priority 6: Fund the Implementation of the Stability Bill

New priority — time-critical, current-term issue

The ask:

- Provide dedicated implementation funding for workforce training and practice change required by the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025.
- Commit to a transparent, sector-inclusive review of the Bill's practical impact within 12–18 months of commencement.

PCA Families evidence:

- PCA Families lodged a position statement on the Bill requesting genuine consultation prior to passage.
- The Board has since noted that early practice impacts of the legislation are already being observed, ahead of any dedicated implementation support becoming visible.

Part B — Shared Sector Priorities

PCA Families endorses the **Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare's** election priorities for Victoria's children and families, and asks all parties to commit to:

- **Foster and kinship care:** increase foster care and kinship care allowances to fully cover the true costs of caring for a child and invest in the supports that carers need to provide safe, stable and nurturing homes.
- **Children with disability:** invest in a well-integrated disability support system which intersects more effectively with the NDIS and enables every child with a disability to access the services they need to thrive.
- **Youth justice:** provide every young person in the youth justice system with tailored, evidence-informed support addressing their educational, health, emotional and psychological needs, and set them up for successful reintegration.
- **Therapeutic services for children:** urgently expand access to specialist therapeutic services and early intervention for children and young people who have experienced maltreatment, including physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect and family violence.

- **Secure housing:** rapidly expand social and affordable housing stock so children, young people, care leavers and families experiencing disadvantage have access to safe, secure and stable housing.
- **Long-term funding certainty:** commit to and implement minimum five-year funding agreements for family services, to provide certainty, strengthen workforce stability and improve outcomes for children and families.

Recommended Next Steps

- Board endorsement of this position paper, including confirmation of Part B priorities and any amendments.
 - Confirm whether PCA Families will formally co-sign the Centre for Excellence platform, submit this paper as a standalone submission, or both.
 - Identify target audiences: government, opposition, and minor party spokespeople for children/families' portfolios ahead of the election.
 - Schedule briefings or meetings with key parliamentary contacts already engaged with PCA Families (e.g. Minister for Children, Shadow Minister for Children, relevant local members).
 - Prepare a shorter member- and media-facing summary version once the Board has endorsed the full paper.
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