Child Safety
PROCEDURE

Title: Complex Support Needs Allowance
Procedure No.: 612-3

Purpose
These procedures guide decision-making regarding payment of the complex support needs allowance based on the child’s individual needs to approved carers, and the actions required for the commencement, continuation and discontinuation of payment to approved carers.

This procedure gives effect to policy 612 Complex support needs allowance.

Eligibility
The complex support needs allowance will be provided to approved foster and kinship carers and provisionally approved carers who are caring for a child:

- who is subject to a signed assessment or child protection care agreement; an assessment order granting custody to the chief executive; a child protection order granting custody or guardianship to the chief executive; or an adoption care agreement; or where one of the child’s parents has consented to adoption or the need for consent has been dispensed and
- has been assessed as having complex or extreme support needs (determined in accordance with the guidelines for assessing support needs in the Child Safety Practice Manual) that consistently result in costs exceeding the Fortnightly Caring Allowance and high support needs allowance.

Where a thorough assessment indicates that a child’s strengths and needs do not warrant the provision of the complex support needs allowance, the child may benefit from provision of the high support needs allowance.

Long-term guardians and permanent guardians are eligible for complex support needs allowance if they were an approved foster or kinship carer and caring for the child when the long-term guardianship order or permanent care order was made; and either:

- the allowance was approved for the child prior to the making of the long-term guardianship order or permanent care order or
- the child has developed, or presents with, emerging special needs (whether short-term or enduring in nature) that were unknown or not present at the time the long-term guardianship order or permanent care order was made.

In addition, permanent guardians may only be provided the complex support needs allowance in exceptional circumstances for a time limited period (not exceeding six months) for the purpose of helping the guardian to establish a care environment to meet the child’s needs for the remainder of the order or where the child has emerging special needs and the allowance is required to support the guardian to establish a care environment able to meet the child’s newly emerged needs.
Eligibility for the complex support needs allowance is not affected by any Commonwealth or state payment or benefits.

**Scope of allowance**

The complex support needs allowance will be paid in addition to the Fortnightly caring allowance and high support needs allowance at one of three fixed rates. The current rates are published on the Queensland Government website.

It is expected that the complex support needs allowance will cover the full range of costs covered by the high support needs allowance, however it is paid for children whose complex or extreme needs result in greater direct and additional indirect care costs to the carer, due to more costly expenses, a wider range of expenses, and/or a greater frequency of expenses.

The complex support needs allowance is also expected to cover costs associated with the child’s medical needs, transport, recreation and leisure, skills development and family contact where these costs are not met through alternate funding streams (e.g. Child related costs, Medicare, National Disability Insurance Scheme). Examples of such costs are:

**Medical/disability**

- consultation with and treatment by general practitioners
- pharmaceuticals prescribed by a medical practitioner
- non-prescribed treatments for an ongoing medical condition or disability that are recommended by a medical practitioner
- allied health treatment, such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy, as recommended by a health professional
- treatment for a disability or mental health condition, as recommended by a health professional
- vaccinations and immunisation
- mobility aids or specialised medical equipment recommended by a general practitioner, specialist or other qualified professional
- specialised meal supplements for a stabilised or permanent functional disability
- other health products such as head lice and scabies treatment.

**Transport**

- all public transport costs
- additional mileage (in excess of the 250km covered by the Fortnightly Caring Allowance), to a reasonable amount depending on the rate of complex support needs allowance paid and the extent of other costs being met by the allowance.

**Clothing**

- all clothing costs, including school uniforms and clothing for special needs.
Recreation and leisure
- expenses associated with a child’s recreational activities and/or hobbies
- costs of equipment and fees associated with participating in sport and leisure activities
- camp fees
- additional costs associated with an identified strength or other area of excellence, including sports activities.

Skill development
- activities identified as part of an approved case plan with a focus on skill development.

Family contact
- costs associated with family contact visits (for example, any meals that may be required for the child or young person during the contact, or specific outing costs), life history activities and gifts from the child or young person to significant persons for specific occasions.

Additional indirect costs
- household maintenance (e.g. cleaning and gardening services)
- laundry and bedding costs
- assistance with meal preparation.

Where substantial expenses cannot be met by the complex support needs allowance, the carer may benefit from financial assistance through child related costs.

Disability supports under the National Disability Insurance Scheme
The NDIS funds the reasonable and necessary disability support needs of eligible children with disability. The Principles to determine the responsibilities of the NDIS and other service systems outlines the disability supports the NDIS should be expected to pay for eligible children in out-of-home care, including:
- skills and capacity building
- community participation
- therapeutic and behaviour support
- transport costs
- equipment
- consumables
- home modifications
- supports to enable sustainable caring arrangements (such as additional respite and outside school hours care)
• disability-specific and carer parenting training programs
• coordination of NDIS supports.

Application and approval

The child safety officer, senior team leader or senior practitioner can make an application for the complex support needs allowance. If a staff member of a non-government foster and kinship care service or intensive foster care service (care service) consider provision of the complex support needs allowance appropriate, they are to discuss this with the child safety officer or make a written request for an application. All requests from care service staff for an application must be considered.

When provision of the complex support needs allowance is being considered for a child in care, the child safety officer will convene a placement meeting to discuss all available support options for the child, including the provision of financial assistance. The meeting will include the child safety officer, senior team leader or senior practitioner, the child’s carer, the care service worker, and staff of other services supporting the child, where appropriate. A support person or advocate for the carer may attend, if the carer desires. A staff member of the placement services unit may be included if necessary. The decisions reached at the meeting will inform completion of the Application for complex support needs allowance form.

The child safety officer, senior team leader or senior practitioner is responsible for completing the complex support needs allowance application form (with assistance from business support staff, as appropriate), however if the child is placed with a care service, the form must be completed in partnership with a staff member of that service.

A member of the placement services unit may also be consulted, where the unit has an active role in supporting the carer or coordinating the placement in partnership with a care service.

For a child in care, the application must refer to the Child Strengths and Needs Assessment, and may also refer to any assessment of needs conducted by the care service or other agency.

If a long-term guardian or permanent guardian requests a review of their child’s case plan, and is requesting additional financial support, the child safety officer, senior team leader or senior practitioner will arrange a meeting to discuss the guardian’s request and to make an assessment of the child’s current support needs and the support options available for the child. Long-term guardians or permanent guardians can receive complex support needs allowance for a child, in exceptional circumstances for a time limited period that does not exceed six months.

The child safety officer, senior team leader or senior practitioner is responsible for completing the complex support needs allowance application form. The process of assessing the provision of complex support needs allowance for a guardian is the same as for a foster or kinship carer. However the manager of the child safety service centre cannot approve payment the complex support needs allowance to a permanent guardian for a period greater than six months.

The outcome of the application will be decided by the manager of the child safety service centre.

Rate of payment

The manager of the child safety service centre may approve payment of the complex support needs allowance at one of three rates, in accordance with the appropriate financial delegations and standards.

The complex support needs allowance is provided in expectation of the expenditure necessary to meet both the direct and additional indirect care costs of the placement, rather than an acquittal of expenditure.

The decision regarding whether and which rate of complex support needs allowance to provide a carer is based on an assessment of the financial impact of the child’s needs, considering:

- the assessed strengths and needs of a child
- how and to what extent the child’s strengths and needs, as assessed by the child safety officer, senior team leader or senior practitioner, result in real increased costs to the carer
- how and to what extent the child’s strengths and needs, as assessed by the care service or other agency, as relevant, result in real increased costs to the carer (taking into account whether costs are covered through other funding programs such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme)
- the longevity and frequency of the expected additional cost
- other support options available or being provided, for example by a care service, which may mitigate the financial impact on the carer’s household and
- the provision of other financial assistance, for example through child related costs, which may mitigate the financial impact of the child’s needs on the carer’s household.

The outcome of the assessment will be a realistic evaluation of the expected total costs over the period for which the complex support needs allowance is being considered, or over the coming 12 months if an indefinite period is being considered.

The rate provided will be determined by the expected average fortnightly costs over this period that exceed the Fortnightly caring allowance and high support needs allowance, matched against the amount provided at each of the three rates. If the estimated average is between the amounts paid at two of the rates, the higher rate should be paid. For example, if the additional costs to the carer are approximately $200 per fortnight above the Fortnightly caring allowance and the high support needs allowance, the complex support needs allowance may be provided at the rate that fully covers these costs.

The assessment should take into account the additional costs presented to the carer indirectly as a result of caring for the child, for example additional costs in maintaining the household (such as cleaning and gardening services) or preparing meals for the family. The carer’s financial circumstance, including income and the receipt of Commonwealth benefits, will have no bearing on decision making.

In making the assessment, use the Application for complex support needs allowance form for prompts and to document the process. Where the child is placed with a carer supported by a care service, the assessment must be conducted in partnership with a staff member of that service.

Children’s support needs may result in different financial impacts on a carer’s household. In assessing this, refer to the Child Strengths and Needs Assessment, and any other needs assessment conducted for the child, as well as example costs listed above.
Scope
For example, if a child has been assessed as having complex needs that present some additional and regular medical costs that exceed the fortnightly caring allowance and high support needs allowance, then the allowance may be paid at the lower rate. Alternatively, if a child’s needs result in a wide range of additional costs, for example due to a chronic medical condition, then the upper rate may be appropriate.

Where a child is being supported by a care service or other agency, or with the provision of financial support from another state government agency, this may offset some of the costs presented to the carer. For example, the carer of a child with specialised medical needs that are being met with direct support by the care service may not require any additional financial assistance. However, if the child also has a need for expensive prescribed medication, the carer may regularly be out of pocket for these expenses.

Duration
The manager of the child safety service centre may approve payment of the complex support needs allowance for a child in care either for a specified period of time or indefinitely.

Decisions about the period of time for which the complex support needs allowance will be required are based on consideration of the child’s needs and the period of time in which they are likely to have a financial impact on the carer’s household.

If payment is approved indefinitely or for a period longer than six months, the continued need for payment will be reviewed every 12 months.

For a child subject to a long-term guardianship order to a suitable person or a permanent care order, the manager can approve complex support needs allowance for a maximum period of six months.

Where a child has a National Disability Insurance Scheme plan approved, the complex support needs allowance is to be reviewed to avoid duplication of costs funded through the complex support needs allowance and the child’s National Disability Insurance Scheme plan.

If a child for whom the complex support needs allowance has been approved changes placement, the child’s new carer will receive the allowance until a review of its continued need is conducted. This will take place within one month of the new placement commencing.

Administration and payment:
If approved, commence payment of the complex support needs allowance by completing the high and complex support needs allowance grid in the Details screen of the child profile in Carepay.

An end date for the allowance must be entered into Carepay.

The complex support needs allowance is paid fortnightly in arrears and cannot be paid in advance.

Each of the three complex support needs allowance rates are exclusive of the other, and cannot be paid concurrently.

When payment of the complex support needs allowance is no longer required, edit the existing high and complex support needs allowance grid item in Carepay to reflect a new end date for the allowance.

Where the complex support needs allowance is no longer required, but it has been decided that
ongoing provision of the high support needs allowance is required, the procedure for approving and commencing payment of the high support needs allowance will be followed. Carers are not required to provide receipts to demonstrate proof of expenditure of the complex support needs allowance.

**Dual payments**

When dual payments are made for respite placements, in accordance with policy 289 Dual Payment of Carer Allowances, both the primary carer and respite carer will receive the complex support needs allowance, on a pro rata basis, for the period of time that the child is in the respite placement. The Carepay system will automatically apply the complex support needs allowance to both the primary carer and respite carer where dual payments are approved. These dual payments may be made for up to 52 days for planned respite per child per financial year, and 20 days for emergency respite per child per financial year, as per policy 289 Respite placements and dual fortnightly caring allowance.

**Other Child Safety Services payments**

The complex support needs allowance will be paid in addition to the payment of both the Fortnightly caring allowance and the high support needs allowance. The high support needs allowance will automatically be paid where payment of the complex support needs allowance is approved and recorded for payment in the Carepay system. The procedure for approving and commencing payment of the high support needs allowance does not apply.

Where the direct and additional indirect care costs associated with caring for a child exceed the upper rate of the complex support needs allowance, the carer may be eligible for further assistance through child related costs, in accordance with the relevant policies and procedures, and at the discretion of the child safety service centre manager.

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**Links:**

Policy 612-3 – Complex support needs allowance

**Related Policies**

Case planning (263)
Expenses - Fortnightly Caring Allowance and inter-state foster payments (365)
Dual payment of carer allowances (289)
High support needs allowance (296)
Child related costs – Carer support (597)
Child related costs – Client support and family contact (598)
Child related costs – Education support (599)
Child related costs – Long-term guardian support (608)
Child related costs – Medical (596)
Child related costs – Outfitting (600)
Child related costs – Travel (595)

**Related Legislation or Standard**

*Child Protection Act 1999*

*Child Protection Regulation 2011 Financial Accountability Act 2009 Adoption Act 2009*

**Related Government Guidelines or Policy**

Child Safety Practice Manual

Statement of Commitment Between the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services and the foster and kinship carers of Queensland.

**Forms, Standard Letters or Memorandum**

Application for Complex support needs allowance

**Rescinded Procedure**

612-2 – Complex support needs allowance

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