

NSW Carer Advisory Groups – Terms of Reference

version July 2025

Purpose & Scope

Authorised Carers of children (Foster, Kinship, Guardian and Adoptive) are key to ensuring there are enough family-based homes for children in NSW government care. Their role is essential to providing nurturing, safe and stable alternative homes – either short-term or long-term. The supported and positive experience of carers is essential to the viability and sustainability of the role. Carers are on the front line, seeing and understanding the needs of the children in their homes and with vital insights from experience of their volunteer role in the Out of Home Care (OOHC) system. They are also in a role of advocate for the child in their home, to ensure their child has access to supports for their needs in line with their best interests. A flow on effect of the experience of existing carers is the potential for recruitment of further homes being opened for caring, as word-of-mouth is globally recognised as one of the key successful methods for carer recruitment.

Carer Advisory Groups (CAGs) are a forum where the voices and insights of carers are given a platform to raise and work towards solutions in relation to systemic matters. The groups are facilitated by Carers for Kids NSW program (formerly 'My Forever Family NSW'), operated by Adopt Change and funded by NSW Government. As the key program to support and advocate for carers, Carers for Kids NSW (Carers for Kids) delivers the CAG sessions and related work, to access key insights into systemic issues, elevate carer voices and identify opportunities to work together towards improved experiences for carers and the children in their homes.

The group is open to all NSW Authorised Carers (Carers) of children in out of home care. Carer Representative roles exist for the purpose of providing key representatives for the local group. Participants in the CAGs include the Department of Communities & Justice (DCJ) and non-government agencies (agencies) related to OOHC in NSW.

In summary, the purposes of the Carer Advisory Groups include to:

- Provide a platform where Carers, DCJ, non-government agencies and Carers for Kids can work together to strengthen services for carers – with a focus on carer support, retention, peer support, training and recruitment.
- Identify systemic issues that impact on the experience of carers and the children they care for and communicate this information to relevant stakeholders and advocate for change.
- Provide a locally focussed group for Carers, Carer Representatives, DCJ and agencies to work together on identified issues towards better outcomes for children and young people in care and a positively experienced role for Carers.
- Inform the work of Carers for Kids NSW to advocate for and support Carers across NSW.
- Provide a mechanism to inform government of the systemic issues and for involved Carers to be provided with key information in relation to plans and progress.

Background

The NSW Out of Home Care (OOHC) Standards are used by the Office of the Children's Guardian for the accreditation and quality improvement of OOHC services in NSW. The standards include that authorised carers should be given the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes and development opportunities and give feedback on how OOHC services are provided. In addition, recommendation 8 of the October 2024 Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) [system review into out-of-home care](#) was to ensure there are processes that actively seek, incorporate, and respond to feedback from carers. Carer Advisory Groups embed carer participation into DCJ district clusters so carers' voices may be heard and contribute to building a stronger OOHC system in NSW.

Carers for Kids NSW

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The Carer Advisory Groups provide a collaborative and interagency setting for carers to work alongside OOHC staff from both DCJ and non-government agencies to participate and contribute to the service system. Carers for Kids will support this process through information sharing, collation of issues and trends across the state and engaging with government and the sector to advocate for practice improvements and relevant policy changes. CAGs enable a localised approach to participation and help inform decision-making and improvements to carer-related matters across NSW.

Carer Advisory Groups contribute to Carers for Kids NSW documentation of a Quarterly Briefing Paper, to be provided to DCJ and the Minister. From time to time we may run an Annual Carer Advisory Group Forum (online) with an invitation to the NSW Minister and CAG members.

Objectives

Carer Advisory Groups benefit children and young people in care, their families and carers and the local delivery of the permanency support program, including OOHC services by:

- Authorised Carers, Carer Representatives, DCJ and agencies working together to improve services in the district/area, and across the State, by increasing carers' participation in service delivery issues.
- Providing a forum for authorised carers to offer feedback and raise issues on policies, protocols, service models and other issues – enabling the carers' perspective to inform local planning and service delivery and to also inform the statewide agenda.
- Improving carer support, recruitment and retention and complaints management by identifying issues and solutions and examples of best practice.
- Working constructively to promote a culture of continuous improvement in carer support and retention to benefit the delivery of OOHC in NSW.
- Highlighting matters referred by peer support groups or other carer groups where appropriate, particularly issues or topics that may have a broader (e.g. state-wide) aspect or learning (e.g. improving systems or practices).

Reporting – how CAGs views are heard

This happens in multiple ways, including:

1. Carers for Kids supports CAG carer members and advocates on behalf of the CAGs with DCJ, agencies and other key stakeholders. Through its quarterly meetings, systemic issues and solutions are identified in a collaborative and constructive way with DCJ, non-government organisations and carers, for local or statewide consideration.
2. Carers for Kids may talk to systemic issues at interagency forums, or at meetings with DCJ or the OCG. DCJ representatives also attend CAG meetings, hearing first-hand issues affecting carers in their caring role and options for improvement.
3. Carers for Kids manages the feedback loop for carer issues that are raised, with local issues monitored and referred back to the district with the goal of resolution. Carers for Kids ensures systemic issues raised at forums are followed up/ formally fed back into DCJ and NGO executives at the local and state levels. This feedback enables DCJ Head Office to consider and represent issues internally within the Department, to interagency forums and in briefings to the DCJ Secretary or to the NSW Minister.

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Membership

The CAG's are grouped around current DCJ district clusters to ensure alignment with local carers and agencies. The CAG composition is outlined below:

Carer Advisory Group Name	DCJ Districts
Sydney	Western Sydney & Nepean/ Blue Mountains
	Sydney, South Eastern Sydney & Northern Sydney
	South Western Sydney
Hunter	Hunter & Central Coast
Southern	Illawarra Shoalhaven & Southern NSW
Northern	Mid North Coast, Northern NSW & New England
Western	Murrumbidgee, Far West & Western NSW

Membership of the CAG should reflect the diversity of carers and carer types within each area of NSW and align with current DCJ district clusters, with consideration for the size and capacity of the group and the constraints of operating effectively. This grouping will be reviewed annually to ensure fit-for-purpose and sustainable. Composition of the CAG will include Carers, Carer Representatives, DCJ and agency representatives.

Carers:

- Authorised Carers are welcome to apply to their respective CAG via the application form. This includes authorised carers, kinship carers, guardians and adoptive via out of home care in NSW.
- Carers for Kids will appoint 2-4 Carers from each CAG to be Carer Representatives for that CAG, via a nominations (self or other) and appointment process, reviewed annually. The process will support diversity and suitability for the role.
- Carer Representatives will have the opportunity to represent the collective group of Carers and may be asked to represent the CAG in other forums or provide advice.
- Carers are encouraged to share insights and lived experience relevant to systemic issues and represent the collective views of carers, rather than individual / personal matters. It is noted that from time to time, this may be relevant for illustrating a point.
- Carer Membership and Carer Representative Roles will be reviewed annually, in line with financial year. The Carer Representative roles will be held for approximately the duration of the financial year. Carer Representatives are eligible for re-appointment.
- Carer Member applications will be open across the year and reviewed quarterly to join the next meeting.

Carers for Kids, DCJ, Agencies and Others:

- Carers for Kids representatives (as the facilitators) will attend all Quarterly CAG meetings.
- DCJ representatives will attend all CAG meetings.
- Agencies will be invited to attend and should be represented by a senior agency representative / employee who is able to contribute to discussions on relevant matters.
- Others may be invited to attend by invitation via Carers for Kids NSW in line with the Agenda.

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Application Process and Register of Interest:

Carers will be required to fill out an application form in order to join to CAG. As part of the application, carers must identify if they also have dual roles working in the sector including what their role is and the agency/ organisation they work for, to be recorded on the Register of Interest and to determine if there is a conflict of interest. This includes membership of other NSW advocacy groups supporting carers. Carers will be asked to submit a brief statement outlining strategies they will use to ensure professionalism and transparency while a member of the CAG. Carers for Kids will review, including seeking confirmation of Authorisation.

Carers for Kids may reject applications if:

- the Carer's role with another organisation is deemed to be a conflict of interest to the operation of the CAG.
- the Carer has been a previously CAG member and/or not adhered to the Meeting Code of Conduct.
- during the verification process, it is determined that a Carer is not an Authorised Carer.

Member Responsibilities

- Treat all members with courtesy and respect in accordance with the CAG **Code of Conduct**.
- Co-operate with others to ensure the meetings operate effectively and efficiently.
- Act with diligence and care in carrying out the duties of the Carer Advisory Group.
- Action any items identified and assigned in the meetings in a timely manner. Report on progress within agreed timeframe where possible.
- Disclose any conflicts of interest, including financial or personal benefit.
- Refrain from raising individual issues or cases at meetings and ensure the focus reflects the best interest of children and young people and a constructive approach.
- Work collaboratively to identify and discuss opportunities for positive change in processes or policy areas, in a solutions focused manner
- Contribute constructively to discussions on other OOHC referred by DCJ or other OOHC bodies/groups (for example peer support groups, CREATE).
- Keep the content of the meeting confidential at all times. The CAG meeting contents noting that information shared is for the purpose of system improvement and not individual case resolution. This does not preclude the sharing of links to resources, trainings and non-confidential information between carers where appropriate.
- Preferably notify Carers for Kids at least 24 hours prior if unable to attend a meeting.

Carers for Kids NSW additional responsibilities

- Convene and Chair meetings, ensuring that accessibility requirements have been considered.
- Prepare the meeting Agenda seeking input from group members and circulate two weeks before meetings (including any required resources).
- Ensure meetings are purposeful and efficient and that all members are treated with courtesy and respect in accordance with the Meeting Code of Conduct.
- Record action items and report on updates in following meetings.
- Promote the activities or actions (where appropriate) of the Carer Advisory Group to carers within the district/area e.g. via agency and carer networks.

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Carers for Kids NSW

- Distribute minutes within three weeks following the Carer Advisory Group meeting.
- Prepare a Quarterly Briefing Paper summary of the key matters from the CAG meetings.
- Seek input from members on possible amends to the CAG Terms of Reference (usually annually).

Meeting Frequency and Content

Each Carer Advisory Group will meet four times per year, in line with financial year quarters and will have an associated Agenda provided in advance. Meetings will be held online and the meeting link will be provided with the calendar invite / Agenda.

Standing agenda items will include **Carers for Kids NSW Updates**, **CAG Carer Key Points** and **DCJ Updates**. Specific topics/themes for discussion will be added to each agenda with a focus on a specific statewide systemic issue and/or concerns that have been identified by the Carers for Kids team. Members will be reminded two weeks before each meeting to confirm attendance and propose any agenda items. The cut off for agenda items will be one week before each meeting.

The meetings will be chaired by a Carers for Kids NSW delegate. At the discretion of Carers for Kids NSW, from time to time the meeting(s), or section of the meeting, may be Co-Chaired by a Carer Representative.

An in-camera session with Carer Members and Carers for Kids NSW representatives will typically be held immediately prior to the commencement of the all-members quarterly meeting. This is to allow Carers to discuss items, including sensitive matters, in-confidence, prior to other members joining the official meeting.

Supplementary informal meetings may be held between Carer Representatives and Carers to continue to progress matters, to identify and summarise key issues to be raised during the CAG Carer Key Points agenda section, or to collaborate on projects arising from the CAG meetings.

Expenses

Membership on the Carer Advisory Group is voluntary (unpaid). Where a carer is required to travel distance, then travel may be claimed or reimbursed at the discretion of the OOHC Manager from the relevant OOHC Agency or DCJ.

Recognition of Participation

It is recommended that Carer participation on the CAG be recognised on the Carer's file. Similarly, participation on the CAG by agency staff should be recognised as a learning and development opportunity. From time to time training and forum opportunities may be offered to all members.

Agreement

I accept the Carer Advisory Group *Terms of Reference* and the associated *Code of Conduct*, as a term of my membership.

Name: _____

Agency/Organisation: _____

Role / Carer Category: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

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