

Barnardos Australia

Response to NSW Budget 2025

Barnardos Australia (Barnardos) never gives up on children. We know what works to keep children and families safe, happy, together and thriving.

As a major provider of foster care services in NSW, Barnardos welcomes the NSW Budget 2025 announcements, and we are looking forward to continuing to work with government towards our shared goals for NSW children and families.

Child Focused Initiatives

A \$1.2b package specifically focused on the NSW foster care system is a centrepiece of this budget announcement.

Creating stability for children in care is vital to ensure they can recover and thrive, and pro-active planning for children to safely return to family from foster care is always Barnardos' priority. Specialised foster care teams are essential for children on Interim Court Orders to maximise their opportunity to return home, with foster carers providing intensive support for parents and their children as part of a strong team around the child.

Children in foster care with Barnardos Temporary Family Care programs are 2.9 times more likely to be safely returned to their family than other children in NSW foster care and we look forward to possible expansion of this specialised model as a component of NSW Budget 2025 investments.

The crucial role of foster carers has been recognised with the announcement of a 20% increase in foster carer allowances. Money is never the driver in the decision to become a foster carer, but the cost of living and housing pressures mean that it is an increasingly difficult for many people in our communities to make the decision to care. Increasing foster care allowance rates will have a significant impact on recruitment of new foster carers as they navigate the unique needs of each child in addition to day-to-day life costs.

Barnardos supports hundreds of carers to provide healing care for children who have experienced trauma, including up to 120 children on Interim Care Orders every year. Foster care is more than a bed, and foster care is not a lifestyle choice for children. Foster carers are experts, and fierce advocates for the needs of children in their care.

Addressing Family Violence

Navigating the legal system and showing up to court can be one the most difficult processes for women and children escaping domestic and family violence.

Without the right support, victim-survivors of family violence can be retraumatised by having to face their perpetrator in court. Barnardos welcomes the significant investment in justice reforms to help

protect victim-survivors of DFV. A new Hub will support women and children to take part in legal proceedings in a trauma-informed environment without having to see their perpetrator and provide them with counselling, legal aid and financial advice.

Barnardos works in collaboration with many government support services and over the last 12-18 months we have seen the significant increase in demand for Victim Support Services. We are pleased the NSW government is responding to the demand for this service and increasing capacity for more victim-survivors.

Children are sadly and too often the hidden victims of violence. Barnardos welcomes the budget announcement of new child support staff positions to support child victims of sexual offences. Sexual abuse is arguably one of the most confronting issues facing children, causing lifelong trauma. Barnardos knows first-hand the ongoing trauma for children of giving evidence in a court. Investment in the direct support of children in this area is essential.

Barnardos foreshadows and welcomes further investment for similar child-specialist roles for children in family violence situations and is concerned that baseline funding for DFV frontline services has not been increased in the budget announcements. We have worked with Domestic Violence NSW and other family violence support providers in calling for a 50% increase in funding for frontline services. Wait times to access services is over two months, placing children, young people and women at even more risk because of remaining in unsafe situations, or becoming homeless. This is unacceptable for children.

People Needing Homes

Every day we see more families at risk of losing their homes – families who can't afford rent as well as essential food and healthcare for their children. The cost-of-living crisis is far from over and Barnardos is pleased to see a significant \$20m investment in crisis accommodation and transitional housing. This will help families in the short term, and we urge NSW government to also remain focused on the longer-term solution which includes increasing social housing supply and homelessness support services.

Barnardos has called for five-year contracts for homelessness services and domestic and family violence services over an extended period. We are pleased to finally see NSW government act on this. The impact of this is great: it means that families can count on continuity, keeping children safer and connected within their own families. This also provides additional safety and comfort to children and families by building relationships and trust over the longer term, and at the same time skilled and specialised workforce security.

We need more investment in early intervention

Barnardos welcomes the Minns government's focus on improving the lives of children. And as always, we urge greater focus on increased early intervention and prevention services to reduce

demand on crisis services, enabling greater numbers of NSW families to build relationships and connections which enhance life outcomes for their children.