



Parents and Carers Reference Group Terms of Reference

Introduction and background

The *Early Years Strategy 2024-2034* (the Strategy) outlines how the Australian Government aims to support children and their families in a child's early years. To support the Strategy, the government has established the Parents and Carers Reference Group (PCRG).

Establishing the PCRG is a direct response to Priority Focus Area 1 of the Strategy, 'Value the Early Years - Embed the voices of children and their families'.

These Terms of Reference set out, amongst other things, the purpose and membership (including roles and responsibilities) of the PCRG, and will be binding on all PCRG members once they are considered and adopted at the first meeting of the PCRG.

Purpose and function

The PCRG was established on 26 November 2024 and will operate until 30 June 2029. The PCRG will:

- provide parents and carers with an opportunity to have a say on what the government is doing to support our youngest children
- allow the government to hear directly from parents and carers on what matters to them.

PCRG members will share their lived experience and knowledge and give feedback on government policy and services related to the early years. The PCRG's feedback will help the government make decisions and improve policies and services for children aged 0-12 and families.

While the PCRG will primarily focus on matters within the Social Services Portfolio, other Commonwealth departments may attend PCRG meetings to undertake consultation on relevant matters.

Roles and responsibilities

The Minister

The Australian Government Minister for Social Services (the **Minister**):

- will appoint all members, including the co-Chairs, except for the co-Chair representing the Department of Social Services (the department)
- will determine the duration of each member's term, except for the co-Chair representing the department
- will consider reappointments as vacancies arise
- may, if they choose, and in consultation with the co-Chairs, end the term of a PCRG member (as outlined below)
- may attend meetings of the PCRG from time-to-time.

The Secretariat

The department will provide secretariat services for the PCRG (and any of its time-limited working groups). The Secretariat will support the PCRG as required, including but not limited to facilitating all meetings, preparing and distributing minutes of meetings, and any communication about the PCRG with members, the co-Chairs and other stakeholders.

The Secretariat will also:

- in conjunction with the co-Chairs, assist to identify the discussion topics and items for meetings
- communicate with other Commonwealth departments on matters for potential discussion by the PCRG that are related to the purpose and function of the PCRG.

The co-Chairs

The co-Chairs have a key role in ensuring the PCRG effectively fulfills its purpose, and are responsible for:

- Ensuring the PCRG follows its Terms of Reference.
- Setting the agenda in consultation with the Secretariat. The co-Chairs will also invite members to nominate items for discussion.
- Inviting observers or guests to meetings of the PCRG from time-to-time, to provide specific knowledge, expertise or information on specific matters the group is considering.
- Ensuring all members have an opportunity to contribute to agreed discussion items.
- Verifying the accuracy of PCRG meeting minutes prior to distribution to members and publication.
- Agreement to the establishment of any working group(s) of the PCRG.

The department's Deputy Secretary Families and Communities will act as one co-Chair. The Minister will appoint the second co-Chair.

The Deputy Secretary co-Chair may chair a scheduled meeting of the PCRG if the other co-Chair is not able to attend.

Membership

The majority of members will be parents and carers from different backgrounds, and may include:

- biological parents
- adoptive parents
- sole parents
- legal guardians
- foster/kinship parents
- people living in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Australia
- people from different cultural backgrounds
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- people with lived experience of disability.

There will also be members from relevant peak bodies on the PCRG.

Size and composition

The PCRG will consist of around 20 members, initially comprised of:

- 5 representatives of peak parenting bodies
- 13 parents and/or carers from diverse backgrounds, the majority of whom have children aged 0-12 in their care.

One of the members will be appointed as co-Chair, alongside the department's Deputy Secretary Families and Communities.

All PCRG members must be living in Australia throughout the term of their membership.

All members must hold a current Working with Children Check or Working with Vulnerable People check.

The Minister has the discretion to limit or expand membership of the PCRG.

Appointment of PCRG Members

Members of the PCRG are appointed by the Minister as required.

Term

Members may be appointed for a term of up to two years, with the possibility to extend for a further two years.

End dates will be staggered so all members do not turn over at the same time.

Observers and Guests

The co-Chairs may invite observers or guests to a meeting of the PCRG if they can provide specific knowledge, expertise and/or advice on particular matters that the group is considering. These individuals may be required to sign confidentiality agreements and conflict of interest declarations.

In addition to the Secretariat, staff from the department may also observe meetings of the PCRG, as required.

Meetings

For a meeting to proceed, at least the Deputy Secretary Families and Communities co-Chair (or their proxy) and at least half of the then current number of PCRG members must be present.

The PCRG will meet at least 3 times per year (at least one of which will be in-person if possible) and can consider holding additional meetings as needed.

Working groups

Where required, the co-Chairs may agree to establish a time-limited working group to focus on a particular item the PCRG is considering. A working group will comprise no more than 6 PCRG members and would be dedicated to consulting on or discussing a particular matter affecting families and children aged 0-12.

Reporting

The Secretariat will develop and maintain information relating to the PCRG at [Parents and Carers Reference Group | Department of Social Services, Australian Government \(dss.gov.au\)](https://www.dss.gov.au/parents-and-carers-reference-group), as required.

The department will publish a formal communique summarising the discussion had at each meeting.

The Secretariat will draft an annual activity report for the PCRG, in consultation with the co-Chairs, to be provided to the Minister for their information after the end of each Financial Year.

The Secretariat will support the PCRG to contribute, as required, to reporting processes under the Strategy or its associated frameworks.

Standards of conduct and duties

Members of the PCRG must at all times:

- Perform their functions in accordance with all relevant laws (including work health and safety laws), these Terms of Reference and the terms of their appointment.
- Act in a collegiate, collaborative and respectful manner when discussing and resolving issues.
- Perform their functions with a reasonable degree of care and diligence.
- Perform their functions honestly, in good faith and for a proper purpose.
- Not improperly use their position or information obtained because of their role as a PCRG member:
 - to gain, or seek to gain, a benefit or an advantage for themselves or any other person
 - to cause, or seek to cause, detriment to the department, Commonwealth or any other person.
- Make reasonable enquiries if relying on information or advice provided by others.
- Not engage in “corrupt conduct” as defined in section 8 of the *National Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2022* (Cth).

To assist in effective information sharing, members of the PCRG will:

- Share information based on their lived experience and knowledge of parenting or caring for children aged 0–12.
- Actively participate in all meetings or submit a formal apology through the Secretariat if they are not able to participate at any point in time.
- Respect and observe the confidentiality of the PCRG proceedings where required.
- Be mindful of the potential for real or perceived conflicts of interest to occur, and to declare such interests to the co-Chairs or Secretariat as and when they arise.
- Give careful regard to matters that affect diverse communities including First Nations, LGBTQIA+, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, families with complex needs, and rural and regional communities.
- Ensure meetings are culturally safe and responsive.

Remuneration

The department will pay sitting fees to members of the PCRG unless they are representing a peak body or are employed on a full-time basis by the Australian Public Service (APS) or a state or territory government.

- A member employed on a full-time basis by the APS or a state or territory government will receive sitting fees if they are participating in a personal capacity and will not receive a salary from their usual place of employment

(i.e. if they are participating in the PCRG on their own time, for example a non-work-day or have accessed leave without pay arrangements).

- A full-time employee of the APS or a state or territory government who is otherwise ineligible to be paid sitting fees, may be paid for reasonable pre-meeting preparation time and post-meeting follow-up work where they undertake that work out of business hours on their own time.

In the setting of sitting fees, the department will be guided by rates set by the Australian Government Remuneration Tribunal for similar work, outlined in the *Remuneration Tribunal (Remuneration and Allowances for Holders of Part-Time Public Office) Determination 2024 (the Determination)* (as amended from time to time).

Members eligible for remuneration will be paid for reasonable pre-meeting preparation, time spent in PCRG meetings and PCRG working group meetings, including travel time to and from the meeting, and post meeting follow up work, as required.

Travel (flights, accommodation, out of pocket) and support requirements

The department will organise and cover the costs of travel and accommodation to face-to-face meetings for all members.

The department will provide travel allowance for members eligible for sitting fees, at the rates outlined in the *latest Remuneration Tribunal (Official Travel) Determination*.

Where a member needs a support person to assist them to attend any meeting of the PCRG, the department will organise and cover the costs of travel and accommodation for the support person as well as the member. A support person may only attend a meeting of the PCRG with prior approval from the department, and the department must be given sufficient notice to consider such arrangements, preferably 6–8 weeks prior to the meeting. Sitting fees will not be paid to a support person.

The department may reimburse a member for childcare costs that the member would not normally pay, if the childcare is necessary to support the member to attend a PCRG meeting and provided the department has agreed to the arrangement prior to the PCRG meeting. Receipts will be required, and these arrangements will be entered into on a case-by-case basis.

Deliverables and Intellectual Property

Ownership of all Intellectual Property rights in all reports, deliverables or other material created by the PCRG and its members in the course of or connection with the work of the PCRG will vest immediately on their creation in the Commonwealth.

For the purposes of this clause, **Intellectual Property** includes any:

- (a) copyright
- (b) design, patent, trademark, semiconductor, circuit layout or plant breeder rights (whether registered, unregistered or applied for)
- (c) trade business, company or domain name
- (d) know-how, inventions, process or confidential information whether in writing or recorded in any form
- (e) any other proprietary or personal rights, or licence, arising from intellectual activity in the business, industrial, scientific or artistic fields.

Conflicts of interest

Members of the PCRG must comply with the Conflict of Interest Declaration and Undertaking entered into upon their appointment.

Under the Conflict of Interest Declaration and Undertaking, PCRG members have (among other things) an ongoing obligation to disclose all interests, pecuniary or otherwise, that may affect the impartial performance of their functions.

Prior to each meeting, members will be prompted on whether their conflict of interest declarations require updating.

At meetings, if a situation arises where a member needs to make a declaration of possible conflict of interest they should do so to the co-Chairs immediately.

At the discretion of the co-Chairs, a member may still be able to participate in PCRG discussions when they have declared a real or perceived conflict of interest.

Confidentiality

PCRG members may receive confidential material that has privacy or security implications.

Members must comply with the Deed of Confidentiality entered into upon their appointment.

PCRG members may seek advice from the Secretariat where they have queries about confidential information and circumstances in which it may be shared beyond the PCRG.

Where a member needs a support person to attend any meeting of the PCRG with them, the support person may be required to sign a Deed of Confidentiality Declaration and Conflict of Interest Declaration.

Privacy

As part of the PCRG's responsibilities and roles, PCRG members may have access to personal information as defined in the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth).

As set out in the Deed of Confidentiality that the member must sign at their appointment, PCRG members must abide by the provisions of the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth), including the Australian Privacy Principles set out in that Act.

The Australian Privacy Principles are available on the Australian Government Office of the Australian Information Commissioner website at [Australian Privacy Principles | OAIC](#).

Working with vulnerable people

As part of the PCRG's responsibilities and roles, members may be required to engage with vulnerable people, which may include children.

PCRG members are expected to understand and comply with the requirements of engaging with vulnerable people, as set out on the Australian Institute of Family Studies website at [Pre-employment and volunteer screening checks | Australian Institute of Family Studies](#). PCRG Members are required to hold a current Working With Vulnerable People registration or equivalent. Where a member needs a support person to assist them to attend any meeting of the PCRG, the support person will not be required to hold a current Working With Vulnerable People registration or equivalent.

Resignation and termination of members

A PCRG member may resign by giving written notice to the Deputy Secretary, Families and Communities co-Chair. The resignation takes effect on the day it is received by the co-Chair, or if a later day is specified in the resignation, on that later day.

When a member resigns, the co-Chair (with the assistance of the Secretariat) must notify the Minister.

A co-Chair may resign by giving written notice to the Minister, with the exception of the Deputy Secretary Families and Communities co-Chair.

The Minister may terminate the appointment of a member without cause by providing no less than 2 weeks written notice of the termination (14 days).

The Minister may terminate the appointment of a member immediately, if:

- in the Minister's opinion, the member has not met the PCRG members' standards of conduct and duties in these Terms of Reference
- the member is absent, except on leave of absence, from three consecutive meetings of the PCRG
- the member engages in paid work that, in the Minister's opinion, conflicts or may conflict with the proper performance of their duties.

Review

The Department will work with the PCRG to review and reassess these Terms of Reference and, if required, make any amendments to the Terms of Reference to ensure they remain consistent with the functions of the PCRG and:

- support and inform the implementation of the Strategy through its Priority Focus Area 1, 'Value the Early Years - Embed the voices of children and their families'
- help the government make decisions and improve policies and services for children aged 0–12 and families.

As part of this review process, the PCRG will work with the Department to review its performance.

Where a review indicates that an adjustment to PCRG membership or scope settings is required, the department will advise the Minister. The Minister may make changes to the membership and scope of the PCRG in response to this advice.

Contact details

PCRG@dss.gov.au

Table of Substantive Amendments

Version	Date	Amendments
1	December 2024	na
2	April 2025	• Under Remuneration, added detail in relation to meeting preparation time and post-meeting follow-up work undertaken out of business hours by employees of the APS or a state or territory government. • Added detail under Travel and support requirements about support persons and childcare costs, where required. • Under Confidentiality, noted the requirements would apply to a support person who attended a meeting with a member. • Under Working with vulnerable people, noted the requirements do not apply to a support person.
3	April 2026	Under Term, added, “with the possibility to extend for a further two years”. Under Meetings, add ‘if possible’ to the in-person meeting.