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## Young Australian Families Stretched Thin Turn Away from Foster Care

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Young Australian families, grappling with soaring housing costs and demanding schedules, are increasingly unable to foster children, exacerbating the nation's foster care crisis. With over 46,000 children in out-of-home care and a critical shortage of carers, systemic barriers like the need for spare bedrooms and time-intensive responsibilities are deterring potential foster parents. This leaves vulnerable children at risk of unstable placements.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reports that as of June 2022, only 8,700 foster carer households were active, a decline driven by economic pressures and housing unaffordability. The requirement for a spare bedroom, mandated by Fostering Services National Minimum Standards, is a major hurdle, as rising property prices and rents make extra space a luxury. “You need a spare room, no exceptions,” said Deb Tsorbaris, CEO of the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, noting that many bedrooms are now home offices (The Guardian). Young families, often dual-income and juggling childcare, lack the time to meet foster care demands, which include training, home visits, and managing children’s trauma-related needs.

Victoria saw a net loss of 265 foster carers in 2020-21, per AIHW data, with similar trends in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Pauline Oliver-Snell, a veteran foster carer, told ABC News, “We need young people to step up,” but cost-of-living pressures make it tough. On X, @AusSocialWorker lamented, “Young families can’t afford to foster when they’re barely keeping up with mortgages.” The system’s reliance on unpaid carers, with only tax-free allowances for expenses, further discourages participation, especially when financial support lags behind rising costs.

The foster care crisis demands pragmatic solutions, like paid care leave or council tax exemptions, to ease burdens on potential carers. Baby Boomers, with more time and space, are seen as a growth cohort, but systemic overhaul is needed to attract younger families. Without action, the shortage will worsen, risking a return to institutional care for vulnerable children. Australia’s commitment to child welfare hinges on addressing these barriers to ensure safe, stable homes for those in need.