

Completing an adoption Expression of Interest form

Information for people who wish to express interest in adoption

The Expression of Interest form is divided into three parts:

- Part A Making an expression of interest and meeting eligibility criteria**
- Part B Family and personal information and information about children requiring adoptive placements**
- Part C Adult household members**

There is no right or wrong way to complete the Expression of Interest form. Adoption Services is available to assist if you need help with completing the form, and will contact you if additional information is required or if your information requires clarification.

Part A requires you to provide information to establish your eligibility to have your name entered in the Expression of Interest Register.

For information about meeting the eligibility criteria for the Expression of Interest Register, please refer to *Frequently Asked Questions* on page 3. If you do not meet the eligibility criteria, you will not be able to have your name entered in the Expression of Interest Register.

If you are unsure whether you are eligible, please call Adoption Services on (07) 3097 5100 or 1800 647 983 (free call within Queensland) to discuss your circumstances prior to completing Part B and Part C of the form.

Once you have reviewed your eligibility, you can proceed to Part B of the form, if applicable.

Part B requires you to provide a range of information about your family, culture, ethnicity, health, countries of preference (for intercountry adoption) and the characteristics of children you believe you would have the capacity to parent. This information will assist Adoption Services in deciding which people will be selected to have their suitability to be adoptive parents assessed.

Part C requires you to record information about any other adult members in your household. This part of the form also enables adult household members to provide their written consent to being assessed and having criminal, domestic violence and traffic checks undertaken, should you be selected for assessment.

Completing an adoption Expression of Interest form

Information for people who wish to express interest in adoption

Information about adoption

Adoption provides a permanent legal family for a child who, for various reasons, cannot live with their birth family. An Adoption Order establishes a permanent relationship between a child and their adoptive parents, and removes the legal relationship between the child and their birth parents and relatives.

An Adoption Order in Queensland is made by the Childrens Court.

The number of children who are adopted each year has been steadily declining in all Australian jurisdictions over the last 30 years.

Expression of Interest Register

The Expression of Interest Register contains the names of people who have expressed interest in having their suitability to be an adoptive parent assessed. From this register, Adoption Services selects people to assess for suitability to be an adoptive parent to meet the needs of children who require an adoptive placement.

Your name may only be entered in the Expression of Interest Register if you, and if you have a partner, you and your partner, meet the eligibility criteria.

If your name is listed in the Expression of Interest Register, it does not mean that you will automatically be assessed, or selected to have your suitability to be an adoptive parent assessed.

The *Adoption Act 2009* requires Adoption Services to keep this register.

How do I make an expression of interest?

To make an expression of interest, you must complete the Expression of Interest form and send it to Adoption Services. An expression of interest can only be made using the approved form available from Adoption Services.

If your expression of interest is for intercountry adoption, you must state each country for which you wish to be considered.

Expressions of interest can be lodged at any time, once you feel you are ready, willing and able to participate in the adoption process.

If your name/s are entered in the Expression of Interest Register, there are a number of conditions you must meet. These are:

- You must continue to meet the eligibility criteria for your name/s to remain in the register.
- You must immediately notify Adoption Services in writing if your circumstances change affecting your eligibility or suitability.

You can update the information provided in your expression of interest, or change your preferences on the form, after your name/s have been entered in the Expression of Interest Register. This includes changing your preferences for the characteristics of a child you believe you have the capacity to parent or the country for which you wish to be considered.

The changes to your information or preferences must be provided to Adoption Services in writing.

If you have not been selected to have your suitability to be an adoptive parent assessed within two years of your name being entered in the Expression of Interest Register, your expression of interest will expire and you will need to lodge a new expression of interest. This ensures that people consider their decision to pursue adoption, and that the Expression of Interest Register only contains the names of people who are committed to the adoption process.

Completing an adoption Expression of Interest form

Information for people who wish to express interest in adoption

Frequently asked questions about completing Part A

Eligibility to have your name entered in the Expression of Interest Register

(Page 2 of the Expression of Interest form)

Q: Who is eligible to lodge an expression of interest?

There are some conditions a person must meet before lodging an expression of interest. A person will be unable to lodge an expression of interest if:

- their names are already in the Expression of Interest Register or the Suitable Adoptive Parents Register
- they have custody of a child subject to an Interim Adoption Order.

Q: What are the eligibility criteria for names to be entered in the Expression of Interest Register?

People must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- You are an adult who lives in Queensland.
- You or your partner (if applicable) is an Australian citizen.
- You are not pregnant.
- You must be resident or domiciled in Queensland.
- You are not an intended parent under a surrogacy arrangement, within the meaning of the *Surrogacy Act 2010*.
- You have been an intended parent for a surrogacy arrangement within the meaning of the *Surrogacy Act 2010*, but the surrogacy arrangement ended more than six months earlier.
- You do not have custody of a child under one year old, or who has been in their custody for less than 12 months (except for approved carers of a child under the *Child Protection Act 1999*).

If you are lodging an expression of interest as a couple, both people must meet the eligibility requirements for your names to be entered in the Expression of Interest Register and be living together.

Once a person's name has been entered in the Expression of Interest Register, they can be selected by Adoption Services to be assessed for suitability to be an adoptive parent.

If your expression of interest expires your name will be removed from the Expression of Interest Register.

If you are assessed as being suitable to be an adoptive parent, your name will be entered in the Suitable Adoptive Parents Register. If you have lodged an expression of interest as a couple, both people need to be assessed as suitable to be an adoptive parent to have your names entered in the Suitable Adoptive Parents Register.

Q: Are de facto couples eligible to have their names entered in the Expression of Interest Register?

Yes. A de facto couple are only eligible if both spouses express interest as a couple.

Q: Are same sex couples and single people eligible to have their names entered in the Expression of Interest Register?

Yes. Same-sex couples and single people are eligible to have their names entered in the register.

Q: Can I lodge an expression of interest if our names are already entered in the Expression of Interest Register or the Suitable Adoptive Parents Register?

No. You are not able to lodge another expression of interest if your name is already entered in the Expression of Interest Register or the Suitable Adoptive Parents Register.

Expressing interest in Queensland adoption or intercountry adoption, or both

(Page 2 of the Expression of Interest form)

Q: Can I express interest in both the Queensland adoption and intercountry adoption programs?

Yes. On the Expression of Interest form, you can express interest in both adoption programs.

If you express interest in both adoption programs, on your form, please indicate which program and/or countries are your preference.

Completing an adoption Expression of Interest form

Information for people who wish to express interest in adoption

Q: If I nominate one adoption program, can I change our preference?

Yes. If you express interest in one adoption program, and you decide later that you would prefer to be assessed as suitable to be an adoptive parent for the other adoption program, you can advise Adoption Services in writing. Adoption Services will contact you to discuss your change in preference.

You can nominate both the Queensland adoption program and the intercountry adoption program on your Expression of Interest form. You may be selected for assessment for either of the adoption programs, but not both. It is important to state if you have a preference for one program over the other.

For more information about the Queensland adoption and intercountry adoption programs, refer to the resource *Queensland and Intercountry Adoption Handbook*, which is available at www.qld.gov.au/community/caring-child/adoption/adopting-child-queensland/how-to-adopt-a-child-from-queensland

Frequently asked questions about completing Part B

Providing information about your family, cultural and ethnic background

(Page 6 of the Expression of Interest form)

When making a decision about placing a child with an adoptive family, Adoption Services is required to select a person/s who will best provide for the child's wellbeing and interests. Your cultural or ethnic background may be a relevant consideration in making a decision.

Each child has a range of needs which may relate to age and gender, education, cultural background, known or unknown medical conditions, disabilities, and social background.

In assessing a person's suitability to be an adoptive parent of a child who is from a particular ethnic or cultural background, Adoption Services will consider the person's ability and willingness to:

- understand the child's background
- help the child maintain contact with their community or language group
- help the child to develop and maintain a connection with their ethnicity or culture
- nurture the child's sense of ethnic or cultural identity.

Q: Will criminal history checks include information about offences that were committed when I was a young person?

(Page 10 of the Expression of Interest form)

Yes. The criminal history information able to be obtained under the Adoption Act 2009 includes any charges and convictions under the Criminal Law (*Rehabilitation of Offenders*) Act 1986.

The disclosure of information about charges and convictions, regardless of when they occurred, is necessary to identify any known risks to ensure children who require an adoptive placement are kept safe.

Q: Why do I need to provide information about my family's health?

(Page 11 of the Expression of Interest form)

Adoption Services is required to select a person/s who will best provide for a child's long-term care, wellbeing and development. One of the factors considered during the assessment is your health, and whether you will be able to provide stable, quality care for a child up until adulthood.

Information about your family's health may identify whether there is a history of any significant health issues affecting your immediate and extended family, and what impact, if any, this would have on your own health, including life expectancy.

If significant health issues are identified within your family, this would be explored further during assessment.

Completing an adoption Expression of Interest form

Information for people who wish to express interest in adoption

Q: Can birth parents express a preference about the characteristics of adoptive parents they would like for their child?

Yes. Birth parents can express a preference for the characteristics of the adoptive family they would like their child to be placed with. Preferences may include religion, cultural background, age and lifestyle of the adoptive parents. Birth parents may also express a preference for having contact, either directly or through non-identifying correspondence, with the adoptive parents.

Adoption Services must consider the birth parents preferences when selecting the person best able to care for the child's wellbeing and interests.

Q: Why am I asked to describe the characteristics of the child I wish to parent?

(Page 13 of the Expression of Interest form)

Each year, Adoption Services will select a number of people to be assessed for suitability to be adoptive parents to a child requiring an adoptive placement. Adoption Services will consider the needs and characteristics of the child requiring adoption.

For the Queensland adoption program, Adoption Services considers:

- the characteristics of the child, such as their age, social and cultural backgrounds, and any particular medical needs
- birth parent preferences for the child's upbringing, such as religion, characteristics of the adoptive family, and the degree of contact in an adoption arrangement.

It is important that Adoption Services knows your preferences for the characteristics of the child you believe you have the willingness and capacity to parent when considering selection of people for assessment.

Open adoption and adoption plans

(Page 17 of Expression of Interest form)

Q: What is open adoption?

Adoption is no longer surrounded by secrecy. There is a greater acceptance of and support for single parent families, and the secrecy that applied to past adoptions to protect children from the 'stigma of illegitimacy' is no longer relevant.

Research has found that many adopted people want to know about their birth family, and birth parents want to find out about their children who were adopted.

Open adoption allows the child, adoptive parents and birth parents to know each other and the circumstances of the adoption. It also allows the parties to have contact with one another and exchange information, to the extent that all parties agree.

The *Adoption Act 2009* states that children have a legal right to access identifying information when they turn 18 years of age, and may access this information before they are 18 years old, with the consent of their adoptive parent.

After a birth parent consents to adoption, they can express their preference for having contact with the child and the adoptive family, or exchanging information after the child is adopted.

The birth parent may also express a preference for other birth family members, for example, the child's birth grandparents to have contact with the child and adoptive family, or exchange information after the child is adopted.

Adoption Services is supportive of an open adoption arrangement when it contributes to the child's wellbeing and best interests, and is accepted by all parties to an adoption. If birth parents and adoptive parents wish to have contact after a child is adopted, Adoption Services will prepare an adoption plan.

Completing an adoption Expression of Interest form

Information for people who wish to express interest in adoption

In some extreme cases, the Childrens Court can make an order restricting the exchange of identifying information between the parties, if it presents an unacceptable risk of harm to a person. As the order prevents parties from obtaining or exchanging identifying information, the adoption arrangement will remain closed.

For more information about open adoption, refer to the resource *Understanding open adoption – information for adoptive parents and birth parents*, which is available on the department website.

Q: What is an adoption plan?

An adoption plan is developed to support an open adoption arrangement. The plan enables the child, birth parents and adoptive parents to know each other and the circumstances for the adoption, exchange information and have contact with each other, to the extent that all parties agree.

An adoption plan details how and when the parties wish to communicate with each other, for example, indirectly through the exchange of photographs, letters and videos; or directly via telephone, or face- to-face contact.

An adoption plan is not legally enforceable and does not limit the adoptive parents' role and rights as the child's only legal parent.

Q: Are adoption plans mandatory?

No, in most cases, an adoption plan is not mandatory. However, adoption plans are mandatory if:

- the parties wish to have face-to-face contact with each other
- the child is, or has been under a Child Protection Order
- the prospective adoptive parents are not from the same Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community or language group as the child.

Q: Can parties negotiate an adoption plan after an Adoption Order is made?

Yes. An adoption plan can be negotiated between parties after an Adoption Order is made.

For more information about adoption plans, refer to the resource *What is an adoption plan? – Information for adoptive parents and birth parents*, which is available on the department website.

Q: What is the Mailbox Service?

The Mailbox Service is provided by Adoption Services to receive and forward correspondence and other items, between parties to an adoption in Queensland. Birth parents, adoptive parents and the adopted person may choose to exchange letters, cards or small gifts with each other through the Mailbox Service.

The child can use the Mailbox Service if their adoptive parents give consent in writing. Extended members of the birth family, such as grandparents, can also correspond through the Mailbox Service, with the birth parent's consent.

Parties to an adoption can use the Mailbox Service to exchange identifying information, after a Final Adoption Order is made.

Changes to the *Adoption Act 2009* allows for the exchange of identifying information during the 12-month Interim Adoption Order period.

For more information about the Mailbox Service, refer to the resource *Using the Mailbox Service – Information for adoptive parents, birth families and people who have been adopted*, which is available on the department website.

Completing an adoption Expression of Interest form

Information for people who wish to express interest in adoption

Eligibility criteria for intercountry adoption

(Page 18 of the Expression of Interest form)

Q: How do we know if I/we meet the eligibility criteria of overseas countries?

If you express interest in the intercountry adoption program, you must nominate each country from where you would like to adopt a child. You must also ensure that you meet the eligibility criteria for each country and that Queensland has a program with that country.

It is important that you only nominate countries you wish to be selected for assessment. You can advise Adoption Services in writing if you wish to change your nominated countries.

Eligibility criteria vary between overseas countries. You must also meet the eligibility requirements under the *Adoption Act 2009* in Queensland.

If you change your preference after lodging your expression of interest, you will need to check that you meet the eligibility criteria of the new country or countries you express interest in.

Information about the intercountry adoption programs, and the eligibility criteria for each country, is available from the Intercountry Adoption Australia website www.intercountryadoption.gov.au

Frequently asked questions about completing Part C

Q: Why do adult household members need to sign the Expression of Interest form?

(Page 21 of the Expression of Interest form)

If you are selected for assessment, the *Adoption Act 2009* requires all adult members of your household to provide their written consent to being assessed and having personal history checks undertaken. Personal history checks include criminal, domestic violence and traffic history.

As part of the assessment of your suitability to be an adoptive parent, the *Adoption Act 2009* requires Adoption Services to determine whether you, or any member of your household, present an unacceptable risk of harming a child adopted by you.

This information cannot be obtained without the consent of the adult household member. It is requested that other adult household members give their consent at the time of lodging your Expression of Interest form to Adoption Services.

Consent of adult household members can also be obtained at a later stage, if necessary, in circumstances where an adult subsequently joins your household, or the adult household member is on holiday at the time you lodge your Expression of Interest form.

Q: What happens if adult household members do not give their consent?

Under the *Adoption Act 2009*, if an adult household member does not give written consent to being assessed and having their personal history checked, the assessment of your suitability to be adoptive parents cannot be completed.

Q: Do members of my household who are not adults need to provide their consent to personal history checks being undertaken?

Personal history checks for criminal, domestic violence and traffic history, will not be undertaken on any member of your household who is not an adult. Members of your household who are not adults are not required to sign the Expression of Interest form.

However, if you are aware that a member of your household, who is not an adult, has criminal, domestic violence or traffic history, you must provide details in the Expression of Interest form.

Completing an adoption Expression of Interest form

Information for people who wish to express interest in adoption

What happens next?

Q: What happens after I lodge the Expression of Interest form?

You will receive a letter from Adoption Services acknowledging receipt of your Expression of Interest form.

If Adoption Services requires further information, you will receive a letter requesting more information. If you do not supply the additional information requested within the required timeframe, your expression of interest will lapse, and you will be advised in writing.

If the information you have provided is sufficient, and your eligibility has been established, Adoption Services will advise you in writing when your name/s have been entered in the Expression of Interest Register. You will also receive information about the assessment and selection process, and assessment fees.

Further information

If you require further information or assistance, or to obtain a copy of the Expression of Interest form, please contact Adoption Services.

For more information about the realities of adoption and the adoption process, refer to the series of adoption videos on the Queensland Government website www.qld.gov.au/adoption

Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women

Adoption Services

Address: Level 11, 127 Creek Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Postal address: Locked Bag 3405
Brisbane Qld 4001

Phone: 1800 647 983
(free call within Queensland)
or
07 3097 5100

Email: ads@csyw.qld.gov.au

Website: www.qld.gov.au/adoption