



# Carers

*news*

Spring 2018

***Federal  
Budget***

How it affects  
carers

***Planning  
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# Message from Scott

Welcome to the Spring 2018 edition of Carers News.

In this edition I am writing to you as CEO of Carers Victoria. I would like to extend my gratitude for all the well-wishes I have received following my official appointment. This Carers News theme 'Why We Care' coincides with the new tagline adopted for National Carers Week on 14–20 October 2018. This annual event acknowledges the invaluable contribution of carers across Australia. We look forward to celebrating with you at one of our Mingle events across the state.

With carers providing unpaid care valued at over \$1billion every week, there are many reasons to care. 'Why We Care' invites businesses, organisations and the public to say why they care about carers. Read about how recent government policies and changes, including the release of the 2018–2019 Federal Budget, will impact carers. Discover what employers are doing to create more carer-friendly workplaces and some great examples of organisations making a difference.

'Why We Care' is also a call to action for carers to voice why they fulfil their caring role. We've started a little early by featuring inspirational stories from carers and their motivations for being a carer.

At Carers Victoria the reasons 'Why We Care' are simple. Many carers don't know where to turn when they need support and often feel invisible. We aim to provide support through education, counselling, fundraising and raising the profile of carers.



Our stories about the Odonate Gala Ball, Mildura Lunch 'N' Learn session, and Sanctuary Program are recent examples of how we achieve this. We also care about the future of carers and you can find out how the Victorian Carers Strategy will drive this vision for continuous improvement.

Most importantly, the more support we can offer as a community to carers, the greater opportunity there is for self-care: a crucial element to managing the effects of stress on the body and mind. Joining a support group is one way to practise self-care and we've included many others throughout this edition. You'll notice many are outdoor related because, along with National Carers Week, there is the arrival of glorious spring weather to celebrate.

We hope you enjoy this edition.

Kindest regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott Walker'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

**Scott Walker**  
Chief Executive Officer, Carers Victoria



**Above //** (Left to right) Michelle Swann (Chair, Tandem), Sue Peden (Chair, Carers Victoria), Premier Daniel Andrews, Scott Walker (CEO, Carers Victoria), Gabrielle Williams (Parliamentary Secretary – Carers & Volunteers), Madeline Buchner (CEO, Little Dreamers) and Marie Piu (CEO, Tandem).

These priorities incorporate insights and concerns raised by carers during a stakeholder engagement program conducted by Carers Victoria over the past 12 months to inform the strategy.

Carers Victoria General Manager of Policy, Strategy and Public Affairs, Annie Hayward, attended the launch and was acknowledged for leading the group working closely with the Government to deliver the project on time and budget. She was joined by Carers Victoria Carer Champion Mel Spencer, who participated in two of the carer consultations last year.

During her speech, Mel emphasised the importance of a dedicated Government strategy for carers. “We need to know that people are on our side, that we matter and someone is looking out for us,” she said.

# Victorian Government

## – Carers Strategy 2018–22

On Thursday 27 July 2018 at Parliament House, Martin Foley, Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing; Mental Health; Equality; Creative Industries and Gabrielle Williams, Parliamentary Secretary for Carers and Volunteers launched a whole of Victorian Government Carer Strategy 2018–22 recognising and supporting Victoria’s carers.

Carers Victoria played a pivotal consultancy role in the development of the Strategy which aims to improve supports and recognise carers for their important role in the community.

Carers Victoria CEO Scott Walker highlighted the significance of the milestone during his speech at the launch. “A whole-of-Government-Carer-Strategy is essential in ensuring carers

are respected, valued and supported, while having the same rights, choices and opportunities as other members of the community,” he said.

*“The Victorian Carer Strategy wonderfully reflects the diversity of Victoria’s 736,000 carers - recognising what we have in common without eliminating the important differences. The Victorian Carer Strategy highlights that carers come from all walks of life. Carers are represented in all genders, sexual orientations, cultural backgrounds, localities, employment and age.”*

— Carers Victoria CEO Scott Walker.

*“Ultimately, the right help, support and recognition will improve our overall wellness and contribution to society. That’s why I really welcome a Victorian Carers Strategy to make carers’ lives better.”*

— Mel Spencer, Carer Champion.

The Victorian Government has committed to ongoing consultation with carers, service providers and peak agencies about the progress of the Strategy’s implementation.

Stay tuned for updates in future editions of Carers News.



**Above //** (Left to right) Minister Martin Foley, Gabrielle Williams (Parliamentary Secretary – Carers & Volunteers), Mel Spencer (Carer Champion), and Scott Walker (CEO, Carers Victoria).

The five priorities announced in the strategy are:

- recognition, acknowledgement and respect;
- health and wellbeing;
- participation in the workforce, schooling and study;
- access to support and services; and,
- financial security.

### Carer Strategy

To view the Victorian Government Carer Strategy 2018–22, visit: [carersvictoria.org.au/news/article/4984/launch-of-the-victorian-carer-strategy](https://carersvictoria.org.au/news/article/4984/launch-of-the-victorian-carer-strategy)

# *The Sanctuary*

## *— A Haven for Carers*

Nestled away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, 12 carers joined Carers Victoria counsellors Linda Espie and Mary O'Mara to participate in a three-day residential group counselling program.

Delivered in partnership with Alfred Health Carer Services, the program provided carers with opportunities to express and explore the varied and unique understandings of their caring role.

Carers were invited to share their experiences and identify common themes from their situations. This prompted reflections and discussions leading to greater self-awareness of their reactions to, and acceptance of, change and transition.

An art therapy session enabled carers to explore their thoughts, feelings and experiences. During the creative process, the twelve carers were asked to 'notice' nature, body reactions, and self-care to capture their story in art and then share their personal meanings with the group.

The intense counselling experience was balanced with social activities and relaxing. On both evenings participants could opt for fun group activities in the recreation room or use the spa facilities or get an early night's sleep to unwind.

On the final day the group held a ceremony to support each carer in the transition toward leaving the sanctuary. They spun coloured wool to create a rainbow web and a visual link between all that represented their three-day experience.

The ceremony ended by cutting the web to symbolise the separating of 'ties' bonding everyone, and each participant kept a strand as a keepsake of their sanctuary experience.

*"We know the Sanctuary program makes an impact, our evaluation and feedback tells us so. Impact is also seen in the stories told by those we reach — the people who care for their loved ones in our community. When these people come together for group counselling, powerful personal insights and therapeutic connections occur."*

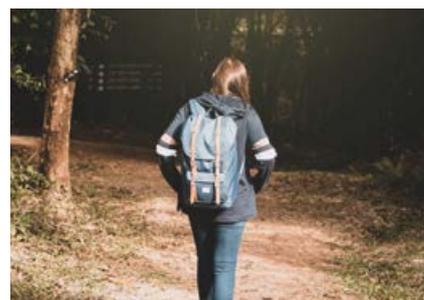
— Linda, Carers Victoria Counsellor.

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*"Both counsellors are extremely professional and knowledgeable and they managed and facilitated the sessions with sensitivity."*

— Carer feedback.

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Above // Carer reflecting in nature.

**To find out more about the counselling programs**

Contact Carers Victoria on  
**1800 242 636.**



Above // Gala Ball attendees participate in the auction to raise funds for young carers across Victoria.

## *Odonate Foundation Gala Ball* *— A Night To Remember*

On Saturday 26 May 2018 the Odonate Foundation hosted a Gala Ball to raise funds to support and assist Young Carers in Victoria.

The enchanting evening, celebrated by over 250 guests, was a night to remember.

There were many highlights including the captivating live band Higher Ground, a collection of generously donated raffle goods, outstanding table settings and a thrilling live auction hosted by none other than Collingwood football legend Tony Shaw.

With all proceeds going to young carers, Tony also generously donated his time as MC and auctioneer on the evening and believes young carer stories should be told.

Guests gained insight into the life of young carer and Victorian Young Carer Action Team member, Shaan D’Rosario, who was interviewed on the night by Tony.

The Odonate Foundation, led by Brian and Tiziana McKenzie, is a group of passionate, dynamic and professional individuals dedicated to supporting charitable organisations in the community. Odonate is a new beginnings foundation and the Gala Ball raised a very impressive amount of money to support young carers across Victoria. These carers are aged 25 years and under and provide unpaid care to family or friends with a disability, illness or aged care needs.

The Odonate Foundation and Carers Victoria are currently planning how the funds will be expended in support of young carers.

“Carers Victoria extends a massive thank you to the Odonate Foundation Gala Ball Committee for their hard work and dedication towards what was a hugely successful evening. We very much look forward to working with them for next year’s Gala Ball where even more people have an opportunity to enjoy the event,” said Carers Victoria CEO Scott Walker.

“Carers Victoria also acknowledges the generous support of the gold sponsor Ability Financial Planning and silver sponsors Magic Hand Car Wash and Secon Freight Logistics who were instrumental in making the night possible,” he said.



Above // Founders of the Odonate Foundation Brian and Tiziana McKenzie.



Above // Young Carer and VYCAT member Shaan D’Rosario with Collingwood Football Legend Tony Shaw MC and Auctioneer.

### Like to help?

If you would like to help us create a better future for young carers, please make a donation by visiting: [givenow.com.au/supportvictorianyoungcarers](http://givenow.com.au/supportvictorianyoungcarers).





# *National Carers Week 2018* *14-20 October*

## *– Why We Care*

The National Carers Week 2018 theme invites both carers and the public to tell Australia 'Why We Care'.

'Why We Care' is a double call to action directly asking carers across the country to share why they fulfil their caring role, and inviting businesses, organisations and the public to say why they care about carers. This new approach continues to reinforce the tremendous contribution and importance of unpaid carers to the community and economy but, with carers relaying their personal motivations, in a more personalised way.

Carers Australia has secured Australian swimming superstars Cate and Bronte Campbell as champions to raise awareness about the diversity of carers. Cate and Bronte will draw on their personal experience in supporting their parents to care for their younger brother Hamish who has cerebral palsy. The sisters will share their story on TV and radio and use their public profile and massive social media following to promote 'why we care'.

There are many ways to engage in National Carers Week 2018. The easiest way is to help spread the word through your own social media channels and encourage family and friends to share your posts. Whether it's a status, photo or video, remember to use the official hashtags and tag @CarersAustralia when telling your story of 'Why We Care'. Also, 'like' the Carers Australia and your local Carers Association Facebook pages to see carer stories and activity updates throughout the week.



**Above** // Magician and mentalist Cath Jamison entertains carers at a recent Mingle event. We encourage carers to come together during National Carers Week.

Visit your local Carers Association website to see what events and activities will be run in each State and Territory. Some associations offer small activity grants to help carer support groups and organisations plan events during National Carers Week.

### Why we care

- Because unpaid care is valued at over \$1billion every week.
- Because many carers don't know where to turn when they need support.
- Because carers often feel invisible.

To get more involved, download a toolkit from the Carers Australia website for useful statistics and information to promote on social media and posters to display at work or local community venues. The toolkit offers guidance on writing to the local MP to voice the importance of carers and tips for hosting fundraising events. Be sure to register your event with Carers Australia to have it promoted online to other carers.

Nationally, Maven Dental Group will again show its support of unpaid carers across the country by offering carers a free dental appointment at participating clinics. Services include basic treatments such as free dental exams, X-rays, and teeth cleaning. Carers can also receive advice on treatment options for more complex procedures and government subsidies available to fund them. Check the National Carers Week website for further details.

No matter how big or small your involvement is with National Carers Week, every little bit counts toward greater recognition of the significant contribution carers make across Australia. And most importantly, take a moment to pause and celebrate the valuable impact your caring role makes to many lives.

To stay up to date about National Carers Week 2018 visit: [carersweek.com.au](http://carersweek.com.au) and your local Carers Association website or follow the Carers Australia and your local Carers Association Facebook pages.

## National Carers Week 2018

### Dates

14 – 20 Oct 2018

### Key hashtags

#Carers2018

#WhyWeCare

### More information

[www.carersweek.com.au](http://www.carersweek.com.au)

### Follow us

 /carersaustralia

 @carersaustralia



Above // Carers Victoria Carer Champion Mel Spencer.

# Why We Care — Carer Champion

Mel Spencer cares for her three children, Lana 17, Flynn 15 and Hope 12, diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). As a mother, Carer Champion and peer support group leader, Mel educates others about the challenges faced by carers and individuals living with ASD and advocates for their needs.

"When my son Flynn was first diagnosed no one believed him. They just dismissed him as naughty, but I realised as things progressed that I needed to advocate for my family."

Autism can be a hidden disability, Mel explains, with limited physical symptoms. This means people in the community often fail to understand the challenges faced by the person or carer.

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*"I work hard to educate school teachers about the challenges my children face. Getting them to understand, for example, my child cannot process 45 minutes of instructions in one session. To explain they are not 'acting out' but are feeling overwhelmed by information."*

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While advocating for her children has become easier over time, in the beginning it was difficult.

"Their behaviour could be so unpredictable. My husband and I couldn't even leave the house because we didn't know what would happen

or how to cope with it. Everything was overwhelming; my caring role was more hands on and we had to be in a routine, so the kids could cope with their everyday tasks. The routine was so important, but also very isolating."

Gradually Mel and her family learnt to manage their lives amongst the diagnosis, however it took time to learn to navigate the support systems available to carers.

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*"Asking for help you have to bare your soul and admit you are struggling, often to a stranger, which can be an emotional and distressing experience. I would make one phone call, and then end up in bed for the whole day feeling depressed. Sharing my situation, the fear of confronting how challenging things were, left me shattered."*

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Despite these challenges Mel found a way to cope. "I used to write scripts of all the things I needed to speak about.

When you have to explain your situation to someone you will get emotional, but a script helped me focus."

Years later Mel now trusts she can articulate her children's needs to advocate for them.

Mel's difficulty in finding supports and services for her teenage children led her to co-establish Different Journeys, an organisation which runs monthly peer support and social events for autistic teenagers and adults, and their families, at a venue in Melbourne's east.

She is also Lead Carer of Pathways for Carers, a monthly peer support walking group operating in five locations across Victoria. "Connecting with carers who are on a similar path to you is a huge help. I need a safe space to share my feelings," says Mel.

Each month the group invites a 'Guest Walker', which has previously included Victoria Police, the public transport authority and a de-cluttering expert.

"It's an opportunity to meet others and find out what's happening in the community while also raising the profile of carers. It releases endorphins and creates positive change for all."



Above // Sharon (left) and Kelly (right).

# Why We Care — *Rainbow Caring*

While marriage equality has been achieved and our society is now more accepting than ever before, there are still challenges faced by couples and friends in same-sex caring relationships. Kelly cares for her ex-partner Sharon and recalls how her life changed when she first met Sharon.

"It was 14 years ago and we just clicked. She was such a shining light and I was drawn to her.

We started dating and then in 2009 she had a stroke. Everything changed, it was like I had a different person in my life.

I was living in Adelaide but moved to Broken Hill to be closer and then we moved to Mildura where Sharon has family.

Before the stroke we both worked full time and were very social. Having the stroke made Sharon more anxious and she started relying on me in ways like never before. I tried working and caring for her at the same time but it was too much. Eventually we both had to leave our jobs and went from being comfortable financially to struggling on a pension.

It wasn't just the changes to our lives I had to contend with. The treatment we got through the hospital really shook me. I'd always believed there would be people who not only took care of Sharon but who would provide support for me as well. I was wrong.

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*The hospital staff wouldn't let me in to see Sharon because I wasn't 'family'. It didn't matter that we were in a committed relationship, I wasn't allowed in. That was really hard. I knew her more intimately than anyone and I was the only one who could communicate with her, even after her stroke. Eventually Sharon convinced the Head of Emergency to give me access but it was difficult being left on the outside for so long.*

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We were sent home two days after her stroke with no support. She couldn't even eat solid food or speak properly when they suddenly handed her back to me. All I was given was

instructions for her medication. As for Sharon, she was given a little speech therapy and then expected to navigate a new, terrifying, existence on the outside.

It would've been great to have a support worker or counsellor to guide us or be a friendly ear.

It was this experience which led me to complete a Diploma in Case Management and I've almost finished a Bachelor Degree in Counselling.

My caring has changed a lot over the last decade as Sharon becomes more independent. Most of my caring is now the little things; like reminding her to take medication or managing appointments.

I don't think I've ever identified with the term 'carer'. It's just something I do, even though we aren't together anymore. It's hard but there have been laughs along the way.

I still love the old Sharon and the new one."



# *How the Federal Budget 2018–19 affects carers*

A national integrated service delivery system, improved funding for aged care, and changes to Centrelink payments are key changes outlined in the Budget.

## **Integrated Carer Support Services**

Integrated carer support services will deliver online counselling, coaching, education and peer support services nationally, and a Regional Delivery Partner program will streamline local and regional level services from September 2019. The aims are to deliver a fairer more efficient distribution of carer support services, regardless of location.

## **Aged Care**

Increased spending on home care and residential places will help people to stay home longer and reduce waiting times for approximately 10,000 people in the national queue for a home care package at their assessed level of care. Plans to invest \$40 million toward facilities in rural, regional and remote communities will give older people and their carers more choice.

Greater mental health care support is a welcome focus, with \$102.5 million to support community mental health nurses for people aged over 75 years living at home and people with a diagnosed mental disorder living in aged care facilities. A pilot program will develop technological solutions

for people living with dementia at home and develop skills and strategies for their support networks.

Other funding boosts will go toward improving the My Aged Care website, new assessment processes and improved access to palliative care support in aged care facilities.

## **People with disability**

People with disability seeking paid employment will have more support, flexibility and choice when using specialist services to find mainstream employment. Providers will receive greater incentives to find sustainable jobs. People on NDIS packages seeking employment in Australian Disability Enterprises will have more choice and control.

People receiving support from programs transitioning to the NDIS will continue for five years and there will be additional funding for NDIS advisory services.

## **Centrelink**

Carers Australia and other organisations opposed proposed changes to the income test for Carer Allowance, increasing the Newly Arrived Residents waiting period, and incorporating previously unaffected payments

including Carer Allowance, Family Tax Benefit and Paid Parental Leave.

While all savings from new Carer Allowance income testing is to be reinvested in carer services, around 7000 Carer Allowance recipients and 400 holders of the Carer Allowance (Child Health Care Card Only) will lose eligibility to financial support.

The new means test for Carer Allowance passed into law on 29 June 2018. A family income test of \$250,000 per annum will apply to Carer Allowance and Carer Allowance (child) Health Care Card claimants from 20 September 2018. Carers with an annual income of less than \$250,000 will continue to be eligible.

Other proposed Budget measures must be passed by Parliament before they can come into effect.

## **Further details**

Visit [carersaustralia.org.au/media-centre/](http://carersaustralia.org.au/media-centre/) or [www.budget.gov.au](http://www.budget.gov.au) for further details.

For queries regarding income support payments contact the Department of Human Services (Centrelink) on **132 307**.

# Making Money Count



Whether it's a new car or a well-deserved holiday you're saving for, these tips may help you reach your financial goals faster.

## Saving tips

With a little bit of research and planning you can save thousands of dollars annually on the essentials:

- Ask your current energy, mobile, internet and insurance providers if you are getting the best deal, then call their competitors and see if they'll beat it.
- Bundle multiple services, such as phone and internet, with a single provider for further discounts.
- Conserve energy usage by turning off appliances and lights when not in use, replacing incandescent bulbs for LEDs, and buying energy efficient appliances.
- Base weekly meal plans on what's seasonal and discounted.
- Consider switching from branded products to generic supermarket brands.
- Look for expensive ingredients 'on sale', such as fish and meat, which can be frozen for later use.
- Save on takeaway by freezing big batches of homemade meals instead.

- Wait until the End of Financial Year and Christmas sales for huge markdowns on clothing and homewares.
- Search the local opportunity shop and buy, swap, sell websites for pre-loved bargains.
- Find the cheapest days and rates for fuel on the MotorMouth and accc.gov.au websites.

## Create a budget

Budgeting is an effective way to see how much money is coming in and out of a household. By calculating your total income and entitlements, you can plan how the money will pay for essentials and unplanned expenses.

When budgeting, aim to:

- Put money toward necessities first, such as the mortgage or rent, bills and groceries.
- Prioritise paying existing debts, especially those with high interest rates.
- Set aside money for emergencies such as a replacement tyre.

## Boost your income

Are you looking at ways to make more money? Consider the following ideas to boost your household income:

- Use the payment checker tool on the Department of Human Services website to see if you're missing any government payments you're entitled to.
- Declutter and sell unwanted goods on buy, swap and sell websites or host a stall at the local market.
- Rent out a spare room by finding a housemate on flatmates.com.au or asking family and friends for recommendations.
- Earn money when you're away by listing your home as short-term accommodation on Airbnb.com.

## Remember!

Budget for a few little splurges to reward yourself and stay money motivated.

# Working to Care

Maintaining a work life balance is challenging. Adding a caring role to the equation presents further commitments and responsibilities. With 12 per cent of all working Australians identifying as a carer and an ageing population on the rise, more employers are finding ways to support carers in combining work and care.

**A** carer-friendly workplace enables employees to feel comfortable requesting flexible working conditions and leave entitlements without fear of negative reactions from management and staff. This includes allowing for different start and finish times, working from home and compassionate or carer's leave for planned or unplanned caring responsibilities.

Carer-friendly workplaces also acknowledge employees have responsibilities beyond the workplace by allowing personal mobile phone use during work hours and easy access to private rooms for confidential conversations. Many larger organisations also offer free counselling services for staff through an Employee Assistance Program and wellness programs to reduce stress and anxiety.

While the National Employment Standards set the minimum entitlements every employer must offer their employees under Australian law, most organisations go above and beyond. Some allow more than the minimum two days of unpaid carer's leave, provided each time an immediate family or household member needs care and support due

to illness, injury or an emergency. Others extend their compassionate leave policy to include relatives beyond immediate family.

The Fair Work Act 2009 also provides a legal right for carers employed within the national workplace relations system to request flexible working arrangements – provided they meet the definition of a carer under the Carer Recognition Act 2010 and are employed on a permanent basis for a minimum of 12 months. A request must be in writing and an employer must accept or decline within 21 days and provide details if a request is declined due to 'reasonable business grounds'.

Carers Australia offers businesses easy steps to take toward becoming a carer-friendly workplace. These include showing support for carers in the workplace by displaying a charter and applying its principles, and completing a questionnaire to identify where improvements can be made to support employees with caring responsibilities. Businesses can also apply to receive an official carer-friendly logo.

And the reward for businesses? Carers often demonstrate organisational, time-management,

multi-tasking, and problem-solving skills which are an asset in any workplace.

For further information visit:  
[carersaustralia.com.au/work-and-care](http://carersaustralia.com.au/work-and-care)

## Carer friendly workplaces

Westpac offers a comprehensive carer's leave policy and flexible work options. Employees caring for an elder receive a kit containing information on support services available.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has a Disability and Carers Employee Network which meets monthly to discuss work-related matters that may impact on them.

Commonwealth Bank Australia offers flexible working hours, work location, part-time work and job-sharing opportunities. Staff can apply for a career break and purchase additional leave.



**Above //** L-R Margaret Boulos (Carers VIC), Sue Elderton (Carers Australia), Sarah Walbank (Carers QLD), Simone Favelle (Carers TAS), Annie Hayward (Carers VIC), Anne Muldowney (Carers VIC), Felicity Mitchell (Carers WA), Tammy Wolffs (Carers Australia).

## *National Policy Working Group – Meets in Melbourne*

Policy staff across the national network of Carer Associations swapped their monthly National Policy Working Group (NPWG) teleconference for a face-to-face meeting at the Carers Victoria office to develop policy and advocacy priorities for the next 12 months.

**R**epresentatives from Carers Australia, Western Australia, Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania attended the two-day meeting held in July 2018. Following a warm welcome from Carers Victoria CEO Scott Walker, the group discussed current policy issues in each State and Territory. Each representative provided an update on behalf of their Carer Association:

- Felicity Mitchell from Carers WA presented input into the Review of the WA Carers Recognition Act, 2004.
- Margaret Boulos from Carers Victoria presented on emerging issues in NDIS Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA).
- Anne Muldowney from Carers Victoria presented a literature review on carers of older people and consumer-directed-care.

- Simone Favelle from Carers Tasmania presented on the carer policy landscape in Tasmania.
- Sarah Walbank from Carers Qld presented on national policy actions for LGBTIQ people in care relationships.
- Sue Elderton from Carers Australia presented on Integrated Carer Support Services (ICSS).
- Tammy Wolfs from Carers Australia provided invaluable secretariat support and time-keeping, including preparing a report for the network CEOs.

The group also heard from guest speakers on a range of topics. The Department of Human Services provided an overview of the Welfare Payments Infrastructure Project which will transform the way carers and people receiving care interact with Centrelink. A guest speaker from

Mind Australia, John Foley, presented on the 'Caring Fairly' campaign focused on improving the economic, social and cultural rights of carers.

The NPWG face-to-face meetings provide an invaluable opportunity for in-depth discussion and debate about important policy issues and to establish agreed goals and priorities. The group agreed future policy advocacy and research priorities include:

- Federal election platform.
- Carers and employment.
- Research into financial disadvantage among carers.

In tradition with previous meetings, a group dinner was held on the first night to continue conversations from the day and get to know one another a little better.

We look forward to the next meeting in 2019.



# *Policy Update*

## *– Advanced Care Directives*

**S**tarting a conversation about death and dying can trigger confronting emotions. Yet research shows advance care planning can eliminate some of the fear and anxiety surrounding end-of-life by knowing what to expect and feeling more in control. An Advanced Care Directive (ACD) can be used to outline your preferences and instructions for future health care and can be used to appoint someone to make medical treatment decisions on your behalf if you are unable. Without one, family members may be unprepared.

As a carer, it's important to understand the wishes of a person to ensure you can respect their decisions. It's equally important family and friends are aware of your choices and decisions around end-of-life care.

### **Everyone should have an ACD, but especially anyone who:**

- has a chronic or life-limiting health condition;
- is entering a residential care facility;
- believes their family may have different views, beliefs or value system;
- has a condition that may lead to a loss of capacity to make decisions (e.g. dementia).

ACDs can be confused with Wills, Enduring Powers of Attorney, palliative care or even euthanasia, which are all different and cannot be used to make financial or legal decisions. They are available in most states and territories albeit with unique features. For example, legislative changes introduced in March 2018 by the Victorian Government now enable people of any age with decision-making capacity (in other places you must be an adult) to make a legally binding ACD. The new laws allow directives to detail decisions on future medical treatments a person refuses or consents to, and values preferences (including religious beliefs) which must be adhered to, offering peace of mind that wishes cannot be overruled by family members or medical practitioners.

Preparing an ACD empowers everyone to face the future with greater confidence. Start by taking the time to reflect on your future medical treatment preferences and speak with family and friends to understand their wishes. A GP can advise on the right terminology to translate your wishes and the national program Advance Care Planning Australia (ACPA) offers a free advisory service to help navigate the process.

### **Where to get help**

#### **ACPA free nationwide advisory service**

Call 1300 208 582 9am – 5pm, Monday to Friday (AEST)

#### **Legal Services Commission South Australia**

[advancecaredirectives.sa.gov.au](http://advancecaredirectives.sa.gov.au)

#### **Department of Health and Human Services Victoria**

[www2.health.vic.gov.au/hospitals-and-health-services/patient-care/end-of-life-care/advance-care-planning/acp-forms](http://www2.health.vic.gov.au/hospitals-and-health-services/patient-care/end-of-life-care/advance-care-planning/acp-forms)

#### **Department of Health and Human Services Tasmania**

[www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/palliativecare/advance\\_care\\_planning\\_for\\_healthy\\_dying](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/palliativecare/advance_care_planning_for_healthy_dying)



## *The Value of Support Groups*

As a carer, finding time to look after your own needs can be challenging. Yet self-care is crucial to reduce the effects of stress on your body and mind. Joining a carer support group – where carers come together to assist each other in their caring role and to socialise – is an easy way to practise self-care and reap many rewards.

### **Connect with others in similar situations**

Carer support groups are an opportunity to interact with people who truly understand the impacts of caring. This can lessen the sense of isolation commonly experienced when friends, family and health professionals don't understand what it's like being a carer. You can share stories and advice and learn from others' experiences.

General carer support groups exist Australia wide and welcome all carers. There are also specific groups catering to particular demographics or situations – from men's groups to groups for carers of people with Alzheimer's disease. Others focus on aged care, disability or mental health. Find the right carer support group for your needs.

### **Gain emotional support**

Caring for someone can be challenging and may bring a sense of sadness, guilt, frustration and anger. Being in a support group offers a chance to talk about these feelings in a safe environment. Carers are often relieved to find their reactions are perfectly normal and will walk away with practical tips to manage stressful times.

### **Relax and socialise**

Demands of caring often leave little time for social activities. Joining a support group can provide a regular outlet. Some carer support groups host informal meetings at cafés or neighbourhood houses, or allocate a meeting for a special social event. Having a peer network can lead to new friendships and improve general wellbeing.

### **Educate and learn**

A support group is valuable for discovering information on policies, entitlements, community services and special carers' events. Some groups also arrange guest speakers on topics of interest.

### **Play an active role**

Some carer groups actively raise community awareness or advocate the rights of carers or the person receiving care. A support group can be an effective channel to have your voice heard and make a difference.

A carer support group is what you make of it: whether it's a sympathetic ear you're seeking or more, joining a support group can be a rewarding experience.

*Joining a support group reinforces you can find support from others along the carer journey.*

### **Join a support group**

Consider if you want to join a general or specific carer group and participate in person or online.

1. Contact your state Carers association to enquire about carer groups in your area on **1800 242 636**.
2. Register with your chosen support group and attend the next meeting. It's free to join\* and most groups meet once a month for a couple of hours.

\*Some groups may ask for a small contribution toward refreshments or leisure activities.



## *Open Gardens* — ***In Full Bloom***

Public and private gardens across Australia open their gates in spring to showcase nature at its finest. Remember to bring a camera and gain inspiration for your garden.

### **Victoria**

Forest Glade Gardens in the Macedon Gardens is one of Australia's finest private gardens and open daily (except total fire ban days). Admission is free for people with disabilities and their carers, and the level pathways make it easy to navigate the grounds. There is no on-site parking or public toilets, so plan ahead which areas of the five-hectare garden are a must see.

The Royal Botanical Gardens Cranbourne on Melbourne's outskirts has a garden appealing to all five senses and delivers a stimulating experience with nature. All paths within the Australian Garden precinct are suitable for non-motorised and electric wheelchairs, and non-motorised wheelchairs can be hired.

Plan a country getaway to see the 'The Witches' garden in Mitta Mitta. This wheelchair friendly two-hectare garden offers scenic views from a Monet-inspired bridge and features a 'Witches' cottage popular with children. The garden is open most days and has on-site accommodation but best to call in advance.

### **South Australia**

Adelaide's Urrbrae House Historic Precinct Gardens features a sensory garden with captivating colours, scents and textures. The garden displays artistic ceramic tiles created by people with disabilities to reflect triumphs and challenges in their own lives. Accessibility is available across most of the park but limited to the top floor of the heritage house only.

Mt Lofty Botanic Garden in the Adelaide Hills has a scenic Lakeside trail offering universal access via a downloadable audio trail and braille embossed interpretations of artistic sculptures.

The Burra District Open Gardens runs from 21–28 October and is a

perfect weekend getaway for garden lovers. Check the event website for a listing of accessible gardens.

### **Tasmania**

The Tasmanian Arboretum near Devonport is rumoured to be the best place on the island to see wild platypus. Its gravel Sylvan Circuit is suitable for electric wheelchairs and there are toilet and carpark facilities for mobility impaired visitors.

Avi-Fauna and Flora Gardens is a short drive from Hobart and its seasonal displays are wheelchair friendly, while the Rhododendron Garden near Burnie offers an internationally renowned garden design and a tearoom accessible to visitors with limited mobility.

**Google search each garden or event name to check for any admission fees.**

Visit the following websites to check for other open gardens in your state:

[opengardensvictoria.org.au](http://opengardensvictoria.org.au)

[opengardenssa.org.au](http://opengardenssa.org.au)

[bloomingtasmania.com.au](http://bloomingtasmania.com.au)



# 10 Ways to *Enjoy Spring*

## 1 Visit a botanic garden

Head to an open garden to embrace the fresh air and admire the flowers in bloom. Pack some sandwiches for a scenic picnic lunch.

## 2 Eat fresh

Stock up on seasonal fruits and vegetables and make a nutritious smoothie or salad.

## 3 Bring the outdoors in

Open the windows to let the spring breeze in or decorate your home with a bouquet from your garden.

## 4 Wear splashes of colour

Shed the dark winter woollies and add some colour into your clothes and accessories. It's an instant mood-lifter and will add an extra spring to your step.

## 5 Get active

Maximise the extra hours of sunlight by adding light exercise into your day. A daily 20-minute walk can improve cardiovascular health and reduce stress levels.

## 6 Declutter

The age-old tradition of a spring clean is a great excuse to organise and refresh your home. Remember to set aside any pre-loved goods and donate to charity or sell online to earn extra cash.

## 7 Relax alfresco

Top up the vitamin D levels by enjoying a cup of tea or book outdoors – remember your hat and

SPF15+!

## 8 Greet the animals

Plan a day trip to the zoo or wildlife sanctuary to see the animals emerge from their winter hibernation or visit the local pond to visit the ducks and watch colourful birds appear on trees.

## 9 Grow a herb garden

Spring is the best time of year to plant a herb garden. Herbs are one of the easiest plants to grow and are an ideal project for the novice gardener (and a tasty addition to any meal!).

## 10 Beat the summer crowds

Get in early with a day by the sea. Listen to the soothing sound of the waves or treat yourself to fish and chips on the pier.

# Take a Break

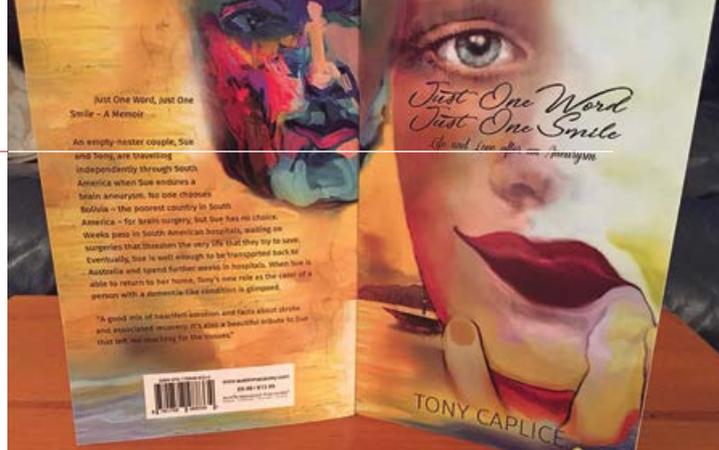
## Sudoku

		9	5			6	4	
1			7					5
			6				9	3
4	9			7	5			
			8	1			7	4
7	8				6			
2					7			9
	6	5			3	7		

Sudoku Answers:

9	6	5	2	4	3	7	8	1
2	4	3	1	8	7	5	6	9
7	8	1	9	5	6	4	3	2
6	5	2	8	1	9	3	7	4
3	1	7	4	6	2	9	5	8
4	9	8	3	7	5	2	1	6
5	7	4	6	2	8	1	9	3
1	3	6	7	9	4	8	2	5
8	2	9	5	3	1	6	4	7

Source: [www.sudokuoftheday.com](http://www.sudokuoftheday.com)



## Book Review

At the recent launch in Hobart of 'Just One Word, Just one Smile, Life and Love after an Aneurysm,' first time author, previous staff member and current board member of Carers Tasmania Tony Caplice had the audience in tears and in fits of laughter. This book is Tony's personal memoir and it recounts with clarity and compassion the story of Sue, his wife of 22 years, and their life together both before and after Sue suffered a massive aneurysm while they were holidaying in Bolivia, South America.

This book is both a celebration of life and love, as well as an examination of the medical system, not just in South America where Sue had to have a series of operations, but also in Tasmania when they returned home. While in Bolivia the surgeon demanded bribes. In Hobart Sue was able to wander out of the Royal Hobart Hospital in the middle of the night when she was not in a fit condition to even leave her bed. It is a homage to the best of medical care, as well as an indictment of their failures. After their return home to Tasmania, Tony was a full-time carer for Sue for five and a half years, and his honest account of their life together after Sue's aneurysm is vulnerable and beautiful.

The book is also the story of their lives together and there are some wonderful anecdotes from the couple's lives before and after they met. These include some very funny stories from Tony's childhood and a sense of some of the hardships they had both endured over their lives.

'Just One Word, Just One Smile' is an honest and heartfelt account of life as a carer for a loved one and well worth a read, especially if you are a carer yourself or if you have experienced love and loss it has a universal appeal.

**Rachel Edwards**  
Editor in Chief

Grab your copy at [angusrobertson.com.au](http://angusrobertson.com.au). Simply enter the ISBN 9781788488334 in the search bar and follow the prompts to complete your order.

Transportation Press — [transportationpress.net](http://transportationpress.net)

# Peer Support Group Leaders

## — Lunch 'n' Learn

Carers Victoria hosted a lunch in Mildura where local peer support group leaders gathered to share their success and challenges in running a support group.

The social event was attended by 22 people representing 15 local peer support groups and forms part of Carers Victoria's overall strategy to develop an extensive facilitator network across Victoria. During the informal lunch, participants were encouraged to connect and exchange information to identify common themes.

The conversations highlighted many facilitators' shared similar successes and challenges in managing their peer support group. A common strength was creating a non-judgemental space where members could support one another, socialise and share information. Mutual challenges included member retention, venue constraints, how to access funding, and promotion. Many facilitators also agreed understanding group focus and succession planning were areas for improvement.

The group brainstormed solutions to the themes discovered in their conversations. Interestingly, they all had different approaches to the same problem. Below are some solutions identified on the day which can apply to any carer support group:

### Member retention

Soft entry for new members (such as a coffee catch up prior to the first meeting) and buddy them with an existing member for support. Ask new members to commit to three sessions before deciding whether to stay or leave. Diversify group activities to maintain interest.

### Venue constraints

Build relationships with councils, libraries, sports clubs, restaurants and other local venues.



Above // Carers share information and ideas in a fun and relaxed setting.

### Funding opportunities

Hold raffles and function fundraisers, seek community grants and engage local philanthropists.

### Promotion

Display flyers at mainstream places and events such as community festivals, medical clinics, libraries, schools and in the local paper. Encourage members to tell their family and friends.

### Succession planning and group direction

Ask members to share the responsibility and develop group guidelines with clearly defined roles. Explore opportunities to partner with likeminded groups.

## If you are an existing peer support group leader or considering taking on the role, there are resources available to assist you.

Carers Victoria offers a one-day Carer Facilitator training course which covers how to establish a carer support group, tips on being an effective facilitator, and how to better understand and work with groups. For more information or to arrange a session in your region visit [carersvictoria.org.au/how-we-help/workshops](http://carersvictoria.org.au/how-we-help/workshops) or email [education@carersvictoria.org.au](mailto:education@carersvictoria.org.au). Minimum participant numbers apply.

Use the Carers Victoria support group directory on the *Everything Carers* website to search for other support groups in your area and upload your group's details at: [everythingcarers.org.au/carer-support-groups](http://everythingcarers.org.au/carer-support-groups)

Peer support group leaders and members can join the Carers Victoria Peer Support Collective group on Facebook to share resources and ideas on running support groups. Send a request to [facebook.com/groups/CarerPeerSupportCollective](https://facebook.com/groups/CarerPeerSupportCollective).



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