



Carers Victoria submission
Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy
Response to Issues Paper
June 2020

AN AUSTRALIA THAT VALUES AND SUPPORTS ALL CARERS

ABOUT CARERS VICTORIA

Carers Victoria is the state-wide peak organisation representing people who provide care. We represent more than 700,600 family carers across Victoria – people caring for someone with a disability, mental illness, chronic health issue or an age-related condition.

People receiving care could be a parent, child, spouse/partner, grandparent, other relative or friend. Carers Victoria is a member of the National Network of Carers Associations, and the Victorian Carer Services Network. Carers Victoria is a non-profit association which relies on public and private sector support to fulfil its mission with and on behalf of carers.

Carers Victoria is a membership-based organisation. Our members are primarily family carers, who play an important role in informing our work, contributing to advocacy and strategic aims, and distributing information more widely to other carers.

This policy paper was prepared by Carers Victoria's Policy and Research Team.

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Introduction

Carers Victoria values the opportunity to contribute to the review of Victoria's post-secondary education and training system.

It is very challenging for carers to balance their caring responsibilities with work and study. To succeed in their studies, carers require educational institutions to have a greater understanding of their experiences resulting in increased support and flexibility. Carers Victoria has chosen to focus its submission around the questions posed in the 'Lifelong Learning' section of the Issues Paper.

- Completing: Why do students leave courses before completing? Have you (or someone you know) ever left a course before completing it?
- Decision-making: How did you decide what to study? Who influenced your decision? What additional information would have helped?
- Additional support: Have you, or someone you know, ever needed extra support during your study? What helped, or what might have helped?

Recommendations

1. Create a TAFE accreditation program for Victorian carers which formally recognises prior learning and provides further education opportunities.
2. Students are asked their carer status on enrolment and reenrolment so that support requirements can be identified and addressed early. This can be achieved through updating the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard to include carer status.
3. Students who identify as carers are proactively offered a meeting with a wellbeing officer to identify support required to succeed in studies. This should include flexibility for assessment timelines and course completion dates.
4. As each class will contain 2-3 carers, all academic and key support staff need to receive training on the needs of carers and the support they provide.

Completing: Why do students leave courses before completing? Have you (or someone you know) ever left a course before completing it?

Carers leave courses before completing because of the stress experienced in juggling school, paid work and their caring responsibilities. Forty-eight per cent of Victoria's primary carers are working over 20 hours each week.¹

However, this data isn't captured by TAFEs because the prevalence and impact of caring isn't recognised. Whilst all TAFE's collect data using the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard², carer status isn't listed as a mandatory reporting item, it should be added.

Decision-making: How did you decide what to study? Who influenced your decision? What additional information would have helped

From our consultations with carers, deciding what to study was largely influenced by the courses offered close to their home. Carers are time poor; reducing travel time assists in fulfilling their caring responsibilities. Many carers also pursue further studies based on what they have learned from their caring role.

Whilst this is likely to be a factor for many students, carers face additional time pressures due to their caring responsibilities. They are also less able to move out of home in order to study at an institution that is not within commuting distance. The nature of TAFE institutions having multiple campuses reduces the travel time or need to relocate for carers, assisting them with the juggle of both studying and providing care.

Carers Victoria welcomed the Victorian Government's Free TAFE initiative and believes a specific TAFE accreditation program for Victorian carers is complementary to this program.

Creating a TAFE accreditation program for Victorian carers which formally recognises prior learning and provides further education opportunities will dismantle barriers, enabling carers to get back into or find work once they are no longer in an unpaid caring role.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, Table 37.1, 2018.

² National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Data element definitions, https://www.ncver.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0022/62383/AVETMISS-Data-element-definitions-2_3-PORTAL-VERSION.pdf, accessed 29.05.2020.

TAFE can also provide a pathway to higher education for those young carers with further educational goals. Research by La Trobe University, in collaboration with Carers Victoria, and funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, found evidence of carers transitioning from vocational education and training to higher education. The national survey found that approximately one third of carers who had studied at university had previously studied at TAFE.

Unpaid carers are disadvantaged in the Australian labour market. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics the workforce participation rate in 2018 was 58.8 per cent for primary carers and 76.6 per cent for other carers aged 15 to 64. The participation rate for non-carers was 81.5 per cent.

Unpaid carers have developed valuable skills and experience in their caring role which can be transferred to paid professional caring roles, including aged care, disability support, mental health support and personal care workers. Unfortunately, many unpaid carers experience difficulties finding work once their caring role has ceased. This often occurs because many employers do not take unpaid carers' skills and experiences into account.

While we aspire for a Victorian program to become the model of best practice nationally, this program could initially be modelled on similar initiatives. For example, Carers Queensland is a nationally recognised Registered Training Organisation (RTO) which offers a Certificate III in Individual Support (Disability) which recognises a carer's prior learning.

The VCOSS Future Social Services Institute (FSSI) at RMIT University also provides a model for engaging with students who have experienced educational barriers to succeed in courses developed to meet the needs of those who are working, or want to work, in the aged and disability sectors.

This initiative aligns with an action point published in the Victorian Carer Strategy 2018-22. Under priority two the Victorian Government has stated it will "continue to implement and promote 'Keeping our sector strong: Victoria's workforce plan for the NDIS' which promotes working in the disability sector, to provide new employment opportunities for people in care relationships."³

³ Victorian Carer Strategy 2018-22, 2018, p.25.

Additional Support: Have you, or someone you know, ever needed extra support during your study? What helped, or what might have helped?

One out of every nine people in Victoria is a carer. Yet carers are often 'hidden'. Educational institutions can address this through measures to identify carers and supporting carers to succeed in their studies.

To identify carers, institutions should include carers as a cohort with likely support needs on intake documentation. Many carers wouldn't consider this without such a prompt.

All academic and key support staff need to receive training on the needs of carers and the support they provide. There are likely to be 2 or 3 carers in every class. Carers have told us that having supportive teachers makes a significant difference. Carers may require extensions to assignments to balance study and caring responsibilities. Having a teacher who understands and grants this extension prevents additional stress compared with others who flatly deny any extensions.

In addition to onsite support, carers indicated that having a support person focused on their caring role was the biggest indicator as to whether they could complete their studies. One young carer told us that the support they received from Carers Victoria helped significantly.

This young carer received tailored support which involved access to a laptop and assistance to access dental care. Supporting the health of young carers directly benefits their ability to undertake and complete courses and to become job ready. The support provided also included support to the person receiving care. This included assisting their parent to access the NDIS. Whilst the young carer still supports their parents, having access to the NDIS has made a big difference. When the person receiving care has the right level of support it relieves the stress of the carer.

This young carer initially received weekly one on one meetings with a carer advisory worker. After three months, the support provided became a monthly 'check-in' which allowed the young carer to feel supported and the carer advisory worker to identify early on if additional support was needed.

Conclusion

We believe that if these recommendations are agreed upon and implemented, completion rates will increase for carers enrolled in TAFE courses. Furthermore, carers will be able to confidently enrol knowing that their caring responsibilities are recognised and will be supported throughout their studies.