

QUESTIONS FROM CARERS

NATIONAL CARERS WEEK 2021 LAUNCH EVENT

We asked carers to submit questions for Parliamentary Secretary for Carers Mr Anthony Carbines for our National Carers Week launch event 2021.

Below in [blue](#) are the responses from the launch event. On page 4, you can read further questions and responses made by Carers Victoria in [red](#).

QUESTION 1

Can you please give us an update on how the Victorian Government is implementing the measures contained within the Victorian Carer Strategy? What additional measures will the government implement to support carers?

Some examples of how the Government has enacted the Strategy include:

- Allocating \$49.5 million over four years to carers in the Budget process.
- Supporting carers' financial position by requesting superannuation payments be made at the rate of 12% (see question 5 - page 3);
- Investing \$4.6 million to support education and employment opportunities (see question 6 - page 3);
- Spending another \$54 million to establish Family and Carer Centres (see question 2 - page 2);
- Changes to the way in which we count and identify young carers in the school setting;
- Providing \$10 million for respite to support carers, that's 5000 additional carers a year supported with approximately 100,000 hours of respite.

During COVID-19, we have reconsidered how we define respite so we can give carers access to more flexible respite opportunities that they can undertake from home, such as online cooking classes and online Zumba. Some of

these opportunities will be retained as we open, while others will move back to face-to-face opportunities. It's recognised that we need to do better in smaller remote communities to make sure those respite opportunities are getting to people in the corners of the State, and also how that cascades back to the Carers card and transport concessions and making sure there are more people in the carer community who are making use of the services available.

QUESTION 2

Why is their little respect given to carer's voice? I have especially noticed this in the medical setting.

We recognise that carers are often excluded in medical settings and have heard many stories through our Victorian Carers Advisory Group which is made up of 20 carers with lived experience, as well as representatives from peak organisations.

This lack of respect causes great stress for carers who want to ensure the person receiving care gets the healthcare they need. Having carers involved makes life easier for everyone as they have so much to contribute from their caring role.

The Andrews Labor Government accepted all of the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. This includes having carers involved in every single aspect of the new Mental Health System. Particularly for carers, we are spending over \$54 million to establish eight Family and Carer Centres. These centres will support carers

in their caring role as well as recognize the mental health impacts of being a carer.

The Victorian Carers Recognition Act 2012 states that carers' views must be sought in care planning. Hospital and mental health services need to meet certain requirements involving carers. The Victorian Government as part of the Victorian Carer Strategy has funded programs involving Carers Victoria and the North West Melbourne Primary Health Network to help GPs identify and support carers, and their needs to be involved in patient care. The Royal Australian College of General Practice and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine are conducting professional development which has been tailored from the direct feedback and experiences of carers. Some of these values we might need to better embed in the workforce so staff in medical settings have got a greater empathy of what carers' rights and obligations are. There's some really defined work that's happening right now in this space that's been informed by the carer experience.

QUESTION 3

Given that most carers are unpaid, yet usually work 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, has the government considered superannuation contributions for unpaid carers?

While this is a Federal issue, it is good to get a Victorian perspective and we will continue to raise this with our colleagues at the Federal level. We know superannuation is a moving beast around regulation and legislation, but it is also good to raise the carers' view at a sector level to the professional peak bodies in superannuation around what carers' perspectives are.

QUESTION 4

How has the Victorian Government specifically supported carers during the pandemic?

Following feedback from carers via Carers Victoria, MPs and other organisations, the Victorian Government:

- Kept Special schools open after the first lockdown;
- Ensured Carers Victoria CEO was a member of the State Government COVID group;
- Provided exemptions to carers for visiting hospitals and medical appointments;
- Advocated for carers to be included in 1b stage of the vaccine rollout;
- Provided funding to Carers Victoria and other community organisations to provide communications support and answer questions about the vaccine rollout;
- Gave carers access to computers and laptops;
- Provided training for carers to use technology to allow them to stay in touch via online catch-ups, training and recreational activities;
- Delivered packages to support carers' needs from shopping to meals and medication;
- Assisted carers with lost employment to pay bills and offered access to financial counselling;
- Offered access to affordable accommodation;
- Supported carers and their children in domestic violence situations;
- Made provision for providers receiving our Support for Carers Program funding to use their funding more flexibly so they could adapt their services to meet new and additional carer needs. An example of this includes replacing group programs with individual wellbeing check-ins.

QUESTION 5

As we open up after lockdown, hydrotherapy pools will be available to use again, which is fantastic. However, the change rooms and showers, are not to be used. Carers and clients need to dress and undress, before and after using the pool. Can this be altered, to allow us to leave the pool showered and dry?

We recognise the challenges that people have had to contend with during the pandemic in order to keep themselves, the people they care for and others safe. Changes to restrictions now allow people access to change rooms and showers at hydrotherapy pools.

We are keen to keep hearing from carers and organisations like Carers Victoria about the lifting of restrictions, and anything specific that we can do to make carers' lives easier as we come out of lockdown.

QUESTION 6

I have been caring for my disabled daughter for the past 28 years and since my husband had a stroke 12 years ago have also been his primary carer. Prior to my husband's stroke he worked and supported the family. Since his stroke we have been reliant on both the disability pension and the carers pension. If my husband were to pass away, I will be left at 64, needing a job with no current skills and only a few working years left. There is not time for me to reskill. Is there provision for people in my position to transition onto the aged pension?

The Victorian Government made submissions into the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety and the Disability Royal Commission and provided information about carers' needs and experiences. Some of what we put forward was direct commentary from carers and carer advocates to the Commonwealth about the programs such as the Carer Gateway and the NDIS.

We've also had an opportunity for carers to consider employment, re-employment or training regardless of age. Not everyone is interested in this training, but we do know many carers would like these opportunities. The Victorian Government has invested \$4.6 million to support unpaid carers to pursue education and employment opportunities. As part of this initiative, unpaid carers will receive increased access to respite and better support to pursue their employment and vocational training goals and support carers who wish to enter or re-enter the workforce.

Mr Anthony Carbines stated he is interested in having a further conversation about how we can advocate for these individual circumstances and finding an approach to determine what happens when people fall between the arbitrary systems and timelines. This is a good example of the challenges we face everyday in advocating for carers and their individual circumstances, and we want to be able to assist people to work through these situations.

QUESTION 7

Is there a plan for ongoing respite (not just emergency) to be more accessible for carers without having to jump through the hoops of NDIS or Aged Care systems?

Carer Gateway, NDIS and My Aged Care are Commonwealth systems. However, alongside Carers Victoria and Carers Australia, the Victorian Government continues to advocate for improvements to these systems. Our Victorian Support for Carers Program is designed to be easily accessible and fill some of the gaps in carer services. However, there is always room for improvement. We're excited to support Carers Victoria's launch later this month of a state-wide network of providers who will be working together to identify and fill gaps in services and advise the Victorian Government of possible improvements to funding programs.

Some questions carers asked were related to Federal programs such as Carer Gateway, My Aged Care, NDIS, Medicare, HealthRecords and Centrelink payments which are not in the portfolio of the State Minister for Carers. Carers Victoria have responded below and will continue to address these issues in our Sector Leadership Work.

QUESTION 1

Is there a plan in the next Victorian Carer Strategy to extend financial support to carers, particularly around when the person you care for no longer needs care i.e. dies or moves into a residential home?

Financial supports of this type are delivered at a Federal level. However, as we develop the next Victorian Carer Strategy, we'll be seeking input from carers on issues that are important to them, of which financial support will be a key component (as it has been for the current Victorian Carer Strategy).

QUESTION 2

What supports are available for carers in local government areas that take a holistic approach? For example, a sanctuary that meets the mental, physical, social, emotional and spiritual needs of carers.

The Victorian Government has been supporting Carers Victoria to work with Neighbourhood Houses and Local Councils to develop Carer Friendly Hubs. This project includes funding a dedicated worker within the Municipal Association of Victoria.

We're also providing funds to Carers Victoria for a new Sector Advisory Service which will be supporting Councils and other providers to increase their capacity to support carers.

QUESTION 3

How much advocacy can you provide for carers who are faced with the challenges of navigating the federal system? For example, I am a carer for my 39-year-old son with an intellectual disability and as his carer and mother I cannot access his My Health Records through Medicare to attain his vaccination records.

Carers Victoria has been advised that this issue can be resolved by contacting Services Australia. The carer will need to show that they have the legal rights to access the health records of the person receiving care.

QUESTION 4

How will we address the need to present vaccination certificates for people with disabilities? Taking into consideration many won't have smart phones and may forget to take their printed certificate?

This question was raised with the DFFH Vaccine Ambassador program members on 15 October. At this stage the priority for the Department was to support people and carers to get vaccinated. By offering additional supports with the Disability Liaison Officer program (DLO), the aim is to increase the vaccination rates of people with a disability. The challenge of proving vaccination and presenting certificates to avoid discrimination is something that we'll work through as a community as easing of restrictions begins to roll back.

QUESTION 5

In September 2019 an additional \$1.25 million was announced by you towards the expansion of the support for carers program for western carers. This builds on the \$1.2 million annual recurrent funding that Carers Victoria receive. Why are carers led to believe that there is insufficient funding to provide ongoing support for carers to look after their own health and wellbeing? As caring is of an ongoing nature wouldn't it make sense for carers to receive an individual package tailored to suit their needs, as their capacity diminishes with age and also for young carers who work and still in school?

In September 2019 Carers Victoria was provided with funding to support additional carers in the Western Metro region of Melbourne. This funding provided by the Victorian government allowed Carers Victoria to support an additional 1200 carers access flexible support services particularly through the COVID-19 pandemic, with all the challenges this has meant for carers and the people they care for. This funding is not ongoing.

The Carers Victoria team provide assessment and planning services to allow us to tailor specific supports for carers in the West. The program is not set up to provide on-going packages of funded services to carers but rather provide short term or one-off supports. Our work aims to support carers in their role through a range of ways including information and guidance on navigating the service system, information, and advice about, emotional support and connection to others in similar caring roles.

Carers Victoria acknowledges that caring is often ongoing in nature and exists to help make life better for carers. We have a range of programs available to all carers in Victoria including education and events, and programs that advocate for better systemic support and acknowledgement of carers and the important role they play.

Navigating carer support systems can be a challenge. Carers Victoria provides an overview of all relevant programs through our workshop Support Services for Carers. Please see a link to our next online workshop on 27 October [here](#).

You can find out more on our website [here](#).

QUESTION 6

I am a carer for my father-in-law who has memory issues and is a Falls risk. My father-in-law refuses to go into residential care for respite (the cost of which isn't in his My Aged Care package). My family can't go away as he has fallen over or had a medical issue each attempt. We can't afford to personally pay for someone to stay with him and the cost is too high and does not have the capacity to come out of his package. Is there funding somewhere for someone to stay with him or what options do we have?

One option could be to register as your fathers-in-law carer through the Carer Gateway by calling **1800 422 737**. Another option is to contact Carers Victoria to ask about eligibility for supports through the Victorian Government 'Support for Carers' program on 1800 514 845, alternatively you can contact your local Support for Carers provider, which are listed [here](#).

Navigating these systems and funded programs can be a challenge, Carers Victoria provides an overview of all relevant programs through our educational workshop. You may wish to enrol in one of these workshops to gain more insight and support to do this. To find out when they're being held, visit our [website](#).

Thank you to our carer community for taking the time to ask their questions. These questions offer us valuable insights and offer an opportunity to do more for carers.