

Carers Victoria Election Statement 2022



CARERS COUNT TOO

Imagine if a sudden life event left you unable to care for yourself. Who would care for you?

Carers are part of our community. They are our family, friends, neighbours and colleagues. All Victorians, at some point in their lives, will be a carer, need a carer or know a carer. This is something that touches us all.

In less than three years, it is predicted that the **number of carers in Victoria will rise from over 700,000 currently to at least one million**. With their unpaid work already saving the Victorian economy over \$19 billion a year, the economic benefit in 2025 will be even more significant.

It's safe to say the carer role is one that will touch all of us at some point in our lives. Before too long, 1 in 7 of us will be carers, including young Victorians in many of the state's classrooms.

And yet, the needs of carers are often overlooked.

Carers Victoria wants to ensure that caring is a shared responsibility between us all and to see Victoria's carers both valued and actively supported in their essential work.

Carers often pay a substantial cost for taking on this critical role, including experiencing poorer mental health and wellbeing than the rest of the community. This is in addition to an **accumulated lifetime loss of income and superannuation which can amount to over \$500,000**.

Unfortunately, the pandemic exacerbated many of these disadvantages. Late last year, Carers Victoria conducted a survey to find out the pandemic's impact on carers' lives and what they needed to help the transition to COVID-normal.

It found that **80 percent of carers reported poorer mental health** and higher levels of isolation and loneliness than the general population experienced.

The pandemic also placed an additional economic burden on carers, with 47% of respondents to the survey reporting it forced them to adjust their employment to accommodate their caring role, with a significant number resigning or retiring early.

We know that carers find it really challenging to find what they need for themselves and the people they care for, as each year we talk to thousands of carers and the Carers Victoria website receives more than 300,000 visits.

With hundreds of thousands more Victorians expected to become carers over the next three years, it is critically important that we cement in long term and funded services and support for carers.

As we head to the Victorian election in November, we are calling on political candidates of all persuasions to commit to the practical solutions proposed in this Election Statement.

It is time to care for the carers because they count too.



Judith Abbott
Chief Executive Officer
Carers Victoria



Carers Victoria Election Priorities

Ahead of Victoria's state election in November, Carers Victoria has developed and prioritised five key policy reforms to better support the state's current and future carers.

Each of these election priorities has been developed in response to both in-depth demographic and service program research as well as in direct response to what Victoria's carers have told us they need to continue to be able to perform their vital caring role.

Caring is a shared responsibility for the whole community. Carers Victoria would like to see the next Victorian parliament take up that shared sense of purpose in addressing the following critical areas for reform and funding.

1. Support carer mental health and wellbeing
2. More services and better navigation for carers
3. Support carers in crisis
4. Support more carers into paid employment and study
5. Integrate carer expertise and input into key service systems

Election Priority 1:

Support carer mental health and wellbeing

- › Include funded staff for carers in at least 20 percent of Local Adult & Older Adult Mental Health & Wellbeing Services so that all carers can access timely mental health and wellbeing support.
- › Additional funded programs are required to help carers maintain good mental health.

Cost \$6.7 million over 4 years.

We know that carers experience poor mental health at over twice the rate of the general population. and the pandemic has exacerbated this, with more carers experiencing increased levels of loneliness than the rest of the community.

While carers are at a high risk of experiencing poor mental health, the good news is that a modest investment in preventative measures will have a big impact. Innovative programs such as InTouch have been shown to help carers maintain better mental health and wellbeing.

Election Priority 2:

More services and better navigation for carers

- › Establish a state-wide advisory service that can help carers navigate complex systems.
Cost: \$4.4 million over four years
- › Restore funded carer services in metropolitan Melbourne and then extend total funded carers supports in line with forecast growth.
Cost: \$14.6 million over four years
- › Ensure all existing funding is made recurrent.

Carer numbers are predicted to soar to at least 1 million by 2025, an increase of more than 300,000 carers on today's numbers.

Recent government reforms have resulted in a net loss of funded carer services in

metropolitan Melbourne. These need to be restored, and funded care supports increased across the state to be able to account for the forecast substantial growth in carer numbers.

Funded support services will ensure the wellbeing of carers so they can continue their important carer role. Without them, there will be increased demands on government funded services.

Carers tell us that support systems are complex and confusing to navigate when they are trying to find the help they need. This can be simply fixed through the establishment of a state-wide advisory service which is resourced with expert advice to assist carers to receive all the support and services they need.



Election Priority 3:

Support carers in crisis

- › Establish a carer crisis line to provide advice and support to carers during emergencies.
- › Equip carers with practical resources to plan early for the future.

Cost: \$2.15 million over four years

- › Embed specific consideration of the needs of carers into emergency planning and response activities.
- › Support practical strategies to improve support for carers involved in supporting people through acute health episodes and discharge.

Carers need additional support to protect themselves and the person they support during emergencies such as bushfires, floods and other natural disasters.

Responses to emergencies will improve if carers' requirements are included in emergency services planning.

Carers also require support when the person they are caring for is admitted to hospital so they can assist their care recipient through the hospital stay and discharge, improving the care recipient's recovery.

Empowering individual carers to plan early for their care recipient's long-term future by providing practical resources is important for both their peace of mind and their care recipient's future health and happiness.

Election Priority 4:

Support more carers into paid employment and study

- › Ensure young carers are proactively supported to remain engaged in education and training.
- › Consolidate and recurrently fund local programs to support carers into paid employment and training.

Cost: \$9.2 million over four years

- › Support programs that encourage employers to recruit and retain carers.
- › Establish the Victorian Public Service as a leading carer employer.

One in nine Victorian workers are carers and can often struggle to balance paid work and their carer role.

This means many are forced to retire early, reduce their hours or withdraw entirely from the paid workforce. The pandemic has only exacerbated this struggle.

As a result, carers miss out on average on more than \$500,000 in lost wages and superannuation. Carers require support from employers and services to access and maintain employment or study.

Young carers can also have trouble with maintaining their education and training alongside their caring responsibilities. Research has found that by Year 9 a young carer is usually one year behind their peers.

Young carers need to be proactively supported to remain engaged in their education and training so they too can go on to have greater choices in their future careers.



**Carer numbers are predicted
to soar to at least 1 million by 2025**



Election Priority 5:

Integrate carer expertise and input into key service systems

- › Recognise the role and expertise of carers in legislation governing health care, disability, and other relevant areas.
- › Ensure carers are actively involved in government advisory structures to shape program design, implementation and review.
- › Establish a program to support carers in taking up an active role across key service systems.

It makes sense to ensure that the hard-won expertise of carers is consulted in the development of legislation pertinent to the caring role to make the legislation relevant to carers and the community.

Carers' expertise can also help relevant government departments and services make programs more targeted and effective, ensuring these programs and services achieve the goals they are designed to reach.

Carers will require support and training to make these valuable contributions to legislation and program design and delivery.



For further information,
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Carers Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land
on which we work, the Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nation,
and pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging.
We acknowledge the continuing connection to land and waters.
Sovereignty was never ceded.