

Supporting Carers in Crisis

Key Points

- › People in care relationships are more vulnerable during a crisis because both have higher-level health needs and services often don't recognise care relationships.
- › Care recipients and their carers will experience fewer service barriers during a crisis and receive the help they need sooner if service planning recognises carer relationships.
- › A state-wide crisis line staffed by professionals is required to provide a coordinated response so that people in care relationships are identified and supported.
- › People in care relationships are being failed by the health system which does not have a system to identify and support them. A state-wide system is required to fix these barriers.
- › Carers need a program to prepare for when they can no longer continue the care relationship.

The challenges

For people in a care relationship, responding to natural emergencies can be particularly difficult...

It is not always possible to predict or plan for a crisis, such as a fire, flood or pandemic.

For carers, there are more barriers to plan because of a lack of time and the complexity of addressing the needs of all the people in a care relationship.

Only 50% of carers are highly confident they could manage unexpected events or emergencies involving the person or people for whom they care.

...as can responding to health crises

Other emergencies facing some carers can be a change to the health status of one of the people in the carer relationship, family violence or other issues.

The pandemic caused many more unpaid carers to step into the role of providing more complex care to their care recipient.

More carers will continue to be required to cover service gaps in this way for some time to come as Victoria's health system continues to struggle with the impact of the pandemic. This can benefit both the care recipients and the broader health system.

Yet carers tell us that they often receive little or no support, particularly when dealing with more complex health situations which require hospital admission and they report feeling excluded from receiving key information or planning discussions.

...and planning for the future can be confronting and hard to start

Carers have also raised concerns about what might happen if they are no longer able to continue in their current caring role due to ageing, changes in their health or other circumstances. Carers Victoria has received requests for tailored information to help carers plan for the future and begin those conversations before a crisis occurs.

The solutions

Carer Crisis Coordination Support Line

A 24-hour, 7-day-a-week phone service that can direct carers to available supports in their area as well as other practical advice. This will help minimise the impact of the crisis and can be leveraged when broader emergency management systems are activated.

Carers need to speak to one service who understands care relationships and the interconnections between a range of complex systems to ensure people receiving care are well-supported when a crisis occurs.

This initiative will cost \$1.91 million over four years.

Better integrating the needs of carers into state-wide planning

The Department of Family, Fairness and Housing must update its 'Vulnerable People in Emergencies' policy to recognise carers and carer relationships. The needs of both carer and care recipient must be considered and accommodated during natural disasters because there are unique dynamics that must be factored into the planning processes.

Practical strategies to better recognise care relationships and support carers during health crises

We need to build the systems and supports required to accommodate the growing number of Victorians in unpaid caring roles. Such an investment will also reduce the demand on specialist services.

The Victorian government must commit to work with Safer Care Victoria and other relevant parties to develop practical strategies to better recognise care relationships and support carers during health crises.

Equip carers with practical resources to plan for the future

A tailored program combining resources and web-based training for carers will equip them to plan for a change in circumstances which means they may no longer be able to continue their current care relationship. This program will cost \$240,000

What will these deliver?

The Carer Crisis Coordination Support Line will support more than 6,000 carers over four years.

Emergency responses will improve and ultimately save lives through understanding the supports carers will need in natural disasters and embedding this in state-wide planning.

A health system which recognises and supports carers will make care relationships more sustainable. This will lead to better outcomes for carers and people receiving care.

By supporting carers to proactively plan and prepare for potential trigger events, significantly better outcomes can be achieved for the care recipient, the carer and the health provider.