



2023-24





Reaching more carers
across Victoria

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Our Vision

That all unpaid carers are recognised,
valued and supported.

A Message from the Chair and CEO

Carers Victoria's purpose is to advance understanding of Victoria's unpaid carers and improve their access to assistance.



Left: Judith with Tim Richardson, Parliamentary Secretary for Mental Health.
Right: Board Chair Sue Peden AM with Minister Ros Spence.

Reaching Across Victoria

Carers Victoria is committed to extending our support for carers across the state, so we were very pleased to secure Victorian Government funds to deliver additional respite in Bendigo, Geelong, Latrobe, Shepparton and surrounding areas. A combination of group activities, carer short breaks and other activities delivered carers new opportunities for social connection locally and/or a break from their caring role.

This work, alongside continued delivery of carer events, education and grant programs, meant that almost 40% of the carers we reached directly over the year were in rural and regional locations – a substantial shift for our organisation.

The reporting year also saw the establishment of a new role, Carer Advisor to the Board, taken up by Gippsland-based carer Helen Johnson. This appointment provides the Board with even greater insights into the challenges faced by rural and regional carers and assisting to identify where some of the opportunities are. We thank Helen for her enthusiasm and contributions through this role.

Another highlight for us over the reporting year was allocation of 57 Carer Getaways and 144 Young Carer Scholarships – record numbers for each of these programs.

These are targeted initiatives that can have a significant impact on the lives of the carers that receive them – whether it's a young carer who is able to get driving lessons, go on a school camp or take up an opportunity they wouldn't have had otherwise, or another carer who needs some time out from home, they make a big difference. Carers Victoria is so grateful for the combination of private and philanthropic donations that make these possible.

Local Carer Supports

Carers Victoria was also pleased to receive funding from the Victorian Government to run the inaugural round of a new grants program, Connecting Carers in their Community. It was a challenge to select 25 proposals from the 160+ applications we received, with the high level of demand speaking to just how much appetite there is from local groups to create opportunities for carers within their communities.

In a similar vein, we shifted our focus for National Carers Week 2023 to offer Carer Support Groups grants to host their own local activities. Across the reporting year, we were pleased to allocate 209 grants to 168 Carer Support Groups, with some 3,000+ carers participating in funded activities.

Advocating for Meaningful Change

Analysis, policy development and advocacy for Victoria's unpaid carers continued to be another key part of our work.

Late 2023 saw a change in ministerial arrangements, and we farewelled Minister Lizzie Blandthorn and welcomed a new Minister for Carers, Minister Ros Spence. It was remarkable to have the opportunity to meet with her and her staff just weeks after her appointment, and that has set the tone for a positive and productive working relationship with the Minister and her office.

While the tight Victorian State Budget situation is well known, Carers Victoria continues to advocate for impactful changes for carers, with our 2024 State Budget submission laying the foundations for a campaign that will build up to the 2026 State election.

Carers Victoria was also pleased to participate in national advocacy efforts, participating in a roundtable discussion facilitated by Federal Member for Aston Mary Doyle to explore the significant financial challenges unpaid carers face and the case for change.

Thanks to our Members, Directors, Supporters and Staff

The work we do would not be possible without the funding and other support of the Victorian and Australian Governments, donations from individuals and philanthropic organisations, and our corporate partners.

The time our Board Directors and Independent Committee members donate to governing the organisation is another essential ingredient in the 'special sauce' of Carers Victoria. The reporting year saw changes to the Carers Victoria Board, with Gerard Mullins departing and Berin Lautenbach and Karina Posanzini appointed as new directors. We also had two new independent members join our Board Committees, Michael Casha and Jill Gleeson. The insight and wisdom contributed by all has been invaluable.

We also extend our thanks to our supporters, our Carers Victoria staff, and the many carers who took time out from their busy lives to share their stories, insights, and expertise – we could not do it without you all.

Carers Victoria continues to explore enhancing the way we connect to and assist carers. There are some new and exciting things planned for the coming year, and we look forward to sharing them with you as we strive to ensure that carers are seen, heard, and supported to thrive.

Sue Peden AM
Board Chair, Carers Victoria

Judith Abbott
CEO, Carers Victoria

Who is Carers Victoria?

We are an organisation that exists to advance understanding of Victoria's unpaid carers and improve their access to assistance across the state – regardless of who they are, where they live, or who they care for.

We provide a wide range of assistance to carers, including provision of government funded respite and support, education and training, events and other activities, and ongoing information and advice tailored to their needs and interests.

Alongside this, we generate data and analysis about carers and their needs, advocate for changes that can improve carer access to assistance, and work with a diverse mix of partners to raise overall understanding, recognition of, and support for Victoria's unpaid carers.

The Victorian Carers Recognition Act 2012 sets out care relationship principles that shape the work of Carers Victoria and over the reporting year, we continued to deliver a diverse mix of assistance for carers in line with these principles.

Importantly, we've expanded our efforts to seek carer views, insights and advice. This commitment to carer voice, and our staff's deep commitment to meeting the needs of carers is a hallmark of Carers Victoria and shapes everything we do.





Delivering Practical Information and Assistance to a Diverse Mix of Carers



55,000+ hours

of respite, education,
events and other assistance
delivered to carers



**37% of carer
assistance**

delivered to **rural
and regional carers**



46% of carers

participating in additional
respite activities from
**culturally and linguistically
diverse communities**

Building Local Networks and Supports



**209 grants
allocated**

to 168 Carer Support
Groups, reaching
over 3000 carers



38% increase

in the number of
Carer Support Groups
on Carers Victoria's
statewide directory



**New Connecting
Carers**

in their Community grants
program established
with funding allocated to
25 community groups

Helping Carers Navigate Complex Systems



7,175 calls answered

by our statewide Carer Advisory Service

THE VOICE

18% growth

in The Voice newsletter subscribers

Advocating for Meaningful Change for Carers



Submissions made

to national reviews, including the federal inquiry into recognition of unpaid carers and the NDIS Review



National advocacy efforts

to tackle financial disadvantage experienced by unpaid carers



Regular meetings held with key MPs and their offices

Assistance and Connection for Carers

Carers Victoria is committed to providing timely, expert advice, information and assistance for carers across the state.

For many carers, **funded respite** is an important component of this, and we were pleased to continue offering a diverse mix of respite opportunities via both the Victorian Government's Support for Carers Program and Additional Respite for Carers funding, as well as programs funded under the Australian Government's Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP).

Over the reporting period, carers benefited from more than 55,000 hours of respite, assistance and access to events, activities and support groups across the state.

In programs like additional respite, we had a strong focus on reaching carers that may not have previously accessed carer support services, and 48% of the carers supported through that program were new to Carers Victoria. We also had a strong focus on reaching carers from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, with 46% of carers participating in additional respite activities from those communities.

At the same time, carers tell us that **navigating complex service systems** – to get what they need and meet the needs of the people in their care relationships – is one of the hardest aspects of being a carer. That's why our Carers Victoria Statewide Carer Advisory Service continues to be an important source of timely and expert information and advice, with 7175 calls to that service over the reporting period.

We are also proud of our continuing partnership with cohealth, which enables carer focussed support to be provided at the Brimbank Mental Health and Wellbeing

Local – an important example of creating connections to a mix of both mental health and carer-specific assistance for those people who need both.

Evidence tells us that social connectedness is one of the most significant contributors to carer health and wellbeing, so Carers Victoria continued to deliver a diverse program of funded **events and education activities**, bringing carers across Victoria together in many locations for connection, conversation, respite and fun!

Highlights included:

- Four Mingle events hosted in Bairnsdale, Dandenong, Knox, and Shepparton.
- Road trips to visit carers in Bendigo, Caroline Springs, Preston and Warrnambool.
- A family fun day at the Royal Melbourne Zoo in March 2024 attended by over 300 carers, family members and friends.
- A Young Carer Picnic in Ballarat co-hosted with Little Dreamers and attended by 80 people.
- Over 100 education sessions, including 89 for groups of carers, and 13 for Carer Support Group leaders. Over 50% were delivered online, providing opportunities for carers across the state to participate without the time and cost of travel.

Scholarships, Grants and Getaways

We continued to offer an expanding mix of **scholarships and getaways to carers, alongside small grants to local carer support groups**.

Over the reporting period, we allocated a record:

- 144 Young Carer Scholarships to carers in secondary school
- 50 Carer Getaways to carers who needed a break across the state
- 209 Carer Support Grants to 168 Carer Support Groups (supporting National Carers Week events and other group activities) which provided opportunities for local connection to over 3000 carers across the state.



Influence

Carers Victoria works with a wide range of individuals and organisations to raise awareness and understanding of carers, to build the capacity of organisations across the state to identify and support carers, and to advocate for much needed changes to policy, programs and funding.

Over the reporting year, this included:

- Engaging with over 300 Carer Support Groups, providing them with training, resources and small grants to support their continued operation. These groups provide an important point of local connection for many carers, and over the period, we were thrilled to see the total number of these groups on our statewide directory increase by almost 60% to 344 groups.
- Political engagement, including meetings with the State Minister for Carers, the Parliamentary Secretary for Disability and Carers, the Shadow Minister for Carers, and representatives from both the Greens and the Legalise Cannabis parties. Our CEO also participated in federal advocacy efforts, including a roundtable on financial matters for carers held in Canberra and participation in other meetings and national efforts.
- Designing and delivering the Connecting Carers in their Community small grants program, a Department of Families Fairness and Housing (DFFH) funded program that drew together a cross-sector assessment panel to select 25 grant recipients from across the state and providing support to the various projects from their establishment through to evaluation.

Carers Victoria staff also participated in a diverse range of steering groups, committees and forums from state and national advisory committees through to local groups developed to support area-based carer initiatives and research.

Through our continuing and diverse partnerships, and our delivery of education, resources and information to partner organisations, we strengthen the carer ecosystem and ensure that carer perspectives are considered and that issues important to carers are understood.



Innovation

In 2023-24, some of our innovation came through changing how we support social connectedness for carers and/or provide them with the opportunity to take a break.

For National Carers Week 2023, for example, we allocated 82 grants to Carer Support Groups across the state, enabling over 2100 carers to participate in a local, funded activity.

We also stood up a new Carer Short Breaks program with Additional Respite funding, leveraging our partnership with Accor to provide a break in an Accor venue of their choice to 263 carers.

Another major part of our innovation agenda focussed on how we could make it faster for carers who called us to be connected to the information, advice or assistance they needed. We know it can be really frustrating to make a call then have to wait for someone to call back, so we have tackled that by moving to a model where our expert Carer Service Advisors are directly responding to calls.

Innovation projects commenced in previous years also continued during the reporting year:

- The Carer Employment Support Program (CESP) wrapped up in late 2023, having supported 75 carers and supporting the development of online resources and linkages that can be utilised into the future.
- The Online Carer Connection and wellbeing program funded by the North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network delivered a combination of general groups and some targeted to specific cohorts, the latter including Vietnamese carers, male carers, aged carers, mental health carers, LGBTIQ+ carers, bereaved carers and carers of children with Autism.





Intelligence

Carers Victoria continues to shape policy at national and local levels, ensuring that carers voices are captured through consultations, and by sharing high quality analysis of data and insights.

Over the reporting period, this included making submissions to:

- The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Review, in which we advocated for the critical role of carers to be recognised and for some of the key scheme limitations identified by carers to be addressed.
- The Federal Inquiry into the Recognition of Unpaid Carers, where we outlined opportunities to enhance current national arrangements, including a core role for unpaid carers in policy, program and service design, strengthened public accountability, and a range of other improvements to better reflect the diversity of care relationships. We also presented evidence at a public hearing of that inquiry.
- The Victorian 2024 State Budget process, where we advocated for targeted investment in areas that would tackle some of the financial, health and wellbeing pressures being experienced by carers.

Data released over the reporting period shows that the number of carers continues to grow, as does the diversity of the carer population. At the same time,

data tells us that for a growing number of carers, the financial impacts of caring are becoming more acute, and more carers are reporting poorer mental health and wellbeing.

Findings from national surveys are reinforced by what carers themselves are telling us, and we have heavily focussed our advocacy and communication efforts on tackling these challenges and improving the health and wellbeing of carers.

This requires a combination of state and national action and over the reporting period, Carers Victoria continued to be an active contributor to national submissions and advocacy through the National Carers Network, with a particular focus on advocating for changes to address the financial disadvantage experienced by many long-term carers.

We also continued to participate in a range of research-based partnerships to strengthen the research and evidence that underpins our work, including engagement with the Deakin University Cancer Carer Hub, the Latrobe University Care Economy Research Institute and the Melbourne Ageing Research Collaboration, as well as partnering with or supporting various research grant proposals.



Independence and Partnerships

Our work is underpinned by the generous support of government funders, private donors, corporate partners and sponsors.

This is critical to extend understanding and recognition of carers more broadly across our community, while the additional revenue generated through these efforts supported a range of assistance for carers across the state.

Carers Victoria gratefully acknowledges:

- the significant funding support of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing Victoria, the Department of Health Victoria, and the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing
- the support for the InTouch program provided by the North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network
- our partnership with cohealth, which supports delivery of carer focused services at the Brimbank Mental Health and Wellbeing Local.

We also recognise with thanks:

- the support of organisations providing pro bono or in-kind support over the reporting period, in particular the pro bono assistance provided by MinterEllison Lawyers
- the support of Melbourne Zoo, who provided a generous discount in support of our 2024 Family Day
- individual donors (many of whom choose to remain anonymous), whose generous support enabled important initiatives to continue, such as our Carer Getaways program
- The Collie Foundation for its support of the Young Carer Scholarships program, Clark Rubber for its donation in support of Carer Support Group Grants and the Tarax Foundation for its donation in support of carer activities with a particular focus on Bendigo and surrounding areas.



Carers Victoria also recognises with thanks the wide range of organisations who contributed to our carer activities, as exhibitors and/or through the provision of other financial and/or in-kind support:

- Accor
- Alfred Health Carer Services, Caulfield
- Arcare Aged Care
- Ariel Care
- Australian Multicultural Community Services
- Bendigo Health – Community Mental Health Services
- Better Place Australia
- CareAbout
- Care with Quality
- Connecting2Australia
- EACH – Family Relationship Support for Carers
- East Gippsland Shire Council
- Estia Health
- FamilyCare
- Fiona Hanbury, Photographer – The Garage Studio
- Gippsland PHN
- ILA Australia – LiveUp
- Knox City Council
- Latrobe Community Health Service
- Joanne Copeland, Author
- Latrobe Community Health Service
- Mealcare (formerly Live Life Foods)
- Medline Australia
- Melbourne All Abilities Lions Club
- Merri Health – Carer Services / Carer Gateway
- Rights Information and Advocacy Centre (RIAC)
- Shepparton Mental Health and Wellbeing Connect
- Silverchain Private Care
- Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre
- Uniting Vic Tas
- Wellways Mental Health and Wellbeing Local



Supporting Diversity and Inclusion

We are strongly committed to supporting diversity and inclusion across everything we do, with this commitment forming a core part of our organisational values.

Our staff-led Equity and Inclusion Committee helps guide the organisation in maintaining inclusive practices for carers and staff who identify as LGBTIQ+, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, and/or living with disability.

With input from that committee, our organisation recognised key events such as NAIDOC Week, and participated in the Midsumma Festival where we had a fabulous time engaging with LGBTIQ+ carers.

We also continued to advance a range of other work to progress our commitments in this area, including:

- receiving Rainbow Tick Accreditation for a further three years, reflecting our commitment to providing an inclusive workplace, along with welcoming and accessible support to LGBTIQ+ carers
- supporting a range of groups working with diverse communities across the state through the Connecting Carers in their Community Grant program and Carer Support Group Grants program
- delivering tailored activities for multicultural communities, with a range of community partners. This resulted in Carers Victoria connecting with hundreds of people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, many of whom had not been aware of the assistance and advice available for people in caring roles. This included tailored events for members of the Burmese, Filipino, African, Spanish and Polish communities
- commencing development of our next Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan, which will take us from a focus on building strong foundations to creating and implementing a practical vision of reconciliation for Carers Victoria.



Financial Report

As per previous years, operating income for 2023–24 primarily comprised Victorian and Australian Government funding, in addition to funding sourced through project grants, donations and sponsorships.

The income and expense figures below do not include unrealised gains of \$304,000 from investment activities and the return of unspent funds of \$82,000.

The breakdown of operating income and expenses below reflects the figures confirmed via external audit following the close of the financial year on 30 June 2024.



Income Statement FY24

Income

- 5.9m — State Government Grants
- 2.7m — Federal Government Grants
- 693k — Other Grants
- 168k — Donations/Sponsorships
- 460k — Other Income



Expenses

- 5.6m — Staffing Costs
- 1.4m — Brokerage
- 2.9m — Other Costs



Operating Surplus / (excluding unrealised gains & return of unspent funds)





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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.

