



# Caring for Carers

2026-27 State Budget Submission





# Working together to deliver the refreshed Victorian Carer Strategy

Carers Victoria welcomes the Allan Government’s recent release of the Victorian Carers Strategy 2025-2035 and the opportunities this presents to drive life-changing improvements for Victoria’s carers. For too long, carers have been overlooked and that needs to change.

This budget submission outlines a short, sharp immediate set of funding priorities to start delivery on that strategy.

Carers Victoria notes that these are proposed as first steps in a wider range of policy, program and other activities to deliver on the vision set out in the refreshed strategy.

Carers Victoria is committed to continuing to advance understanding of Victoria’s unpaid carers and improving their access to assistance across the state – regardless of who they are, where they live, or who they care for.

We look forward to working with carers, government, sector partners, employers, schools and the entire Victorian community to achieve a different and better future for Victorian carers where they feel recognised, included and supported.

## About Carers Victoria

Carers Victoria provides a range of assistance to carers, including government funded respite and support, education and training, events and other activities, and ongoing information and advice tailored to carers’ needs and interests.

Alongside this, we generate data and analysis about carers and their needs, advocate for changes that can improve their access to assistance, and work with a diverse mix of partners to raise overall understanding, recognition of, and support for, Victoria’s unpaid carers. At the heart of this is a continued focus on seeking carer views, insights and advice.

This submission is shaped by what we have heard from carers, who need to see real and practical measures that both recognise and support the critical role they play in our State.

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# Caring for Carers – Overview

## Tackle financial hardship

The number of Victorian carers experiencing financial distress has recently doubled. That's why Carers Victoria is calling for an immediate, initial package of financial relief for Victorian Carer Card holders to help defray the costs of caring.

- › A **financial relief package for Carer Card holders** will reduce travel related costs by offering more access to free public transport and reduced vehicle registration costs, and help to reduce other household costs through utility concessions.
- › An additional **financial relief package for young carers** will help cover some of the costs they struggle to meet, by providing access to free public transport until the age of 25, funded support in getting their license and growth in young carer scholarships.

**Budget impact: \$17.3 million over four years assisting up to 50,000 unpaid carers.<sup>1</sup>**

## Intervene earlier

Carers Victoria knows that if we can reach carers early in their caring role, we can better equip them for their role – rather than seeking to act when they are in crisis. We want to scale up the **Step into Care early intervention program**, to equip carers with the practical tips, local connections and other assistance they need to both support the people in their care relationships and maintain their own health, wellbeing and sense of self.

**Budget impact: \$2.75 million over four years, benefiting 2400 carers.**

## More funded assistance and respite for carers

Carers sometimes need a break from their caring role but often struggle to access funded respite. Carers Victoria is calling for 20% growth in state-funded carer respite supports for carers, with a major focus on metropolitan and regional growth areas; First Nations carers; and carers from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

This would result in an **additional 8,000 carers receiving funded assistance each year, at a cost of \$28.8 million over four years.**

## Expand local networks and support

Carers need local solutions that can give them access to wellbeing programs and peer supports, without the time and cost of travel. Carers Victoria is calling for investment in two key initiatives to build that support:

- › A statewide system to build systems and processes that can readily link carers to relevant programs run by councils and neighbourhood houses: \$6.5 million over 4 years.
- › Targeted funding to establish local carer support groups in underserved locations across the state, and for underserved groups in our community through allocation of 90+ small grants: \$4.1million over 4 years.

**Budget impact: \$10.6 million over four years, providing a state-wide reach to carers in all LGAs.**

1. Plus cost of public transport concessions, to be determined in consultation with the Department of Transport and Planning.

# Executive Summary

## More than 750,000 Victorians are unpaid carers, and that number is growing rapidly.

Every year, carers collectively provide over 500 million hours of care with an economic replacement value **over \$18 billion each year<sup>2</sup>** – about the same as what the state spends on health care<sup>3</sup>.

Just imagine for a moment where we would be without all that care.

Our already stretched GPs and hospital emergency departments would be critically impacted. Our paramedics and nurses, who are already in short supply, would be at higher risk of burnout. And our regional areas would feel these impacts even more.

Yet many carers in Victoria also pay a big cost for caring, and recent data tells us loud and clear that they are struggling.

Struggling to make ends meet financially, particularly when their care role means they can't sustain paid employment.

Struggling with the health and psychological impacts of their caring role, with rates of reported poor mental health almost 4 times those of the general population.

Struggling to find the information and help they and the people in their care relationships need in systems that are constantly changing and increasingly pushing more of the care back onto them.

And struggling to be included and recognised.

In the lead up to the 2026 State Budget, Carers Victoria is calling for investment in four priority initiatives to address key pressure points experienced by carers to:

- › tackle financial hardship
- › intervene earlier to equip carers early in their role
- › expand access to carer-centred support and respite; and
- › expand local networks.

Some of these initiatives target geographic locations like outer metropolitan growth corridors and rural Victoria, where we know major gaps in service exist and financial pressures on carers are acute.

Carers need help, and they need it now. These initiatives are an important step in easing some pressure on carers and recognising how essential they are to our state.

*The replacement cost of the support Victoria's unpaid carers provides is equivalent to the entire Victorian government health budget and Carers play a big price for providing care – economically, socially, and healthwise.*

2. Deloitte Access Economics (May 2020) The value of informal care in 2020, accessed 15 September 2025:

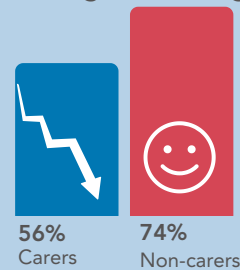
3. The \$18B figure was derived from 2018 data. In 2018-19, the AIHW estimated total Victorian Government on spending at \$13.3B, a figure that increased to \$14.6 B in 2019-20.

# The Caring Costs

## Health and wellbeing

Victorian carers have lower wellbeing compared to Victorians who do not have a care role.

### Average wellbeing



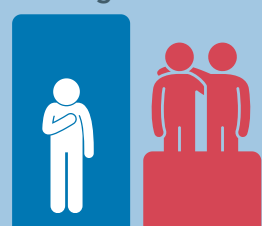
### High stress



1 in 2 carers

Report high to very high levels of psychological distress.

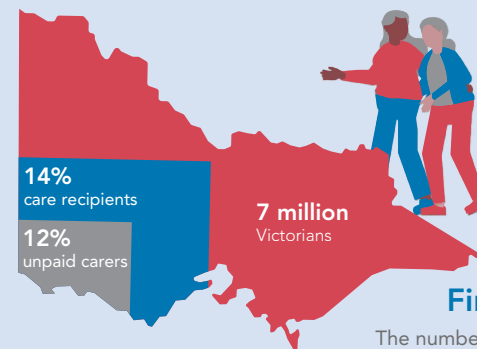
### Feelings of isolation



63% Carers  
19% Non-carers

Time commitments and financial pressures both contribute to carers feeling highly isolated.

**1.75+ million** Victorians are directly impacted by care relationships



## Financial hardship

The number of carers in financial distress has more than doubled over the past three years.

### Financial stress



More carers are going without meals, unable to heat or cool their home or pay utility bills on time.

### Cost of living

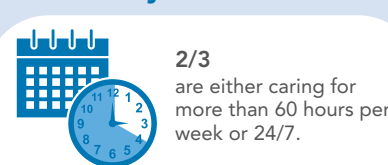


1 in 3 carers have extra expenses related to their care role, in addition to meeting their own needs.

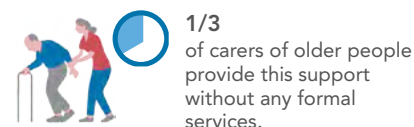


1/3 don't always have access to enough food.

### Intensity of care roles



2/3 are either caring for more than 60 hours per week or 24/7.



1/3 of carers of older people provide this support without any formal services.

**\$18B estimated replacement cost of Victoria's unpaid carers**  
Equivalent to state and local government spend on health care.

### Number of care recipients



1/3 Victorian carers care for more than one person  
(National Carer Survey data)

# Why Carers Count ...and why change is needed

Across Victoria, family members, friends and other people provide care and assistance on an unpaid basis to Victorians living with disability, mental illness, major health challenges and/or aged related conditions. Carers are of all ages and backgrounds and most of us will become one at some point in our lives.

Currently, at least 1 in 8 Victorians are unpaid carers and this number is growing as the population changes.

**The number of carers in Victoria has increased** by almost 25% in the last five years, and it's estimated that there will soon be enough carers to fill more than 10 MCGs.

And when you consider that those people provide care to over 1 million people, that's a lot of Victorians directly impacted.

Carers help make the lives of people in their care relationships better, and that delivers social benefits. It also delivers **economic benefits, estimated to exceed \$18 billion each year.**<sup>4</sup> That's almost as much as the Victorian Government spends on health care<sup>5</sup>.

Not only is the number of people needing care and assistance to remain independent at home growing — **the complexity and intensity of care roles is also increasing.** Victorian Carer Survey data indicates that over 30% are now providing care to two or more people, and around 66% are caring for more than 60 hours in a week.

But carers are paying a high cost to deliver that care.

Recent research paints an alarming picture of the **negative impacts that a caring role can have on carers:**

- › participation in paid employment - the workforce participation rate of primary carers is 51% (compared to 68% for the Victorian population),
- › financial security, with the proportion of Victorian carers experiencing financial distress has more than doubled over the past 3 years; and
- › health and wellbeing, in particular their mental health, with 1 in 2 carers reporting high to very high levels of psychological distress.

The longer a person is in a caring role, the more pronounced these impacts become.

And despite the contribution they make, **carers frequently feel unrecognised and at times, forgotten.** More than half (63%) of carers report experiencing social isolation, while data suggests that just 12% of Victorian carers feel that the government recognised or valued their care role in 2024.

Carers Victoria, 2020 – 2024 National Carer Survey  
Carers NSW, 2024: 2024 National Carer Survey, Summary tables for Victoria  
Seven charts that tell the story of the Victorian Budget - ABC News  
Mylek, M. and Schirmer, J. 2024. Caring for others and yourself: Carer Wellbeing Survey 2024 report  
Australian Bureau of Statistics, Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2021, Victorian Tables  
Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics, accessed 23 September 2025  
Victorian Economic Snapshot | dtf.vic.gov.au, accessed 23 September 2025  
Productivity Commission 2023, A case for an extended unpaid carer leave entitlement?, Position Paper, Canberra, February  
Deloitte Access Economics (2020) The value of informal care in 2020 Report prepared for Carers Australia

4. Deloitte Access Economics (May 2020) The value of informal care in 2020, accessed 15 September 2025.

5. The \$18B figure was derived from 2018 data. In 2018-19, the AIHW estimated total Victorian Government on spending at \$13.3B, a figure that increased to \$14.6 B in 2019-20.



# Tackle financial hardship

With the proportion of Victorian carers experiencing financial distress more than doubling over the past 3 years, it's time to reduce the financial cost of caring.

- › The number of carers reporting financial distress has doubled since 2020.
- › 62% of unpaid carers in Victoria experience financial stress compared to 49% of the population who don't have care roles.
- › The number of carers reporting they are going without meals, are unable to heat or cool their home or pay utility bills on time has doubled since 2020.
- › On average, by age 67 a primary carer has foregone \$392,500 in lifetime savings and \$170,000 in superannuation to age 67.

## Budget Proposal 1: Tackle financial hardship

### What do we want?

Carers Victoria is calling for an immediate, initial package of financial relief for Victorian Carer Card holders to help defray the costs of caring.

- › A **financial relief package for Carer Card holders** will reduce travel related costs by offering more access to free public transport, and reduced vehicle registration costs, as well as help to reduce other household costs through utility concessions (total package **\$13.5 million** over four years, plus public transport related costs).
- › An additional **financial relief package for young carers** will help cover some of the costs that they can struggle to meet, by providing young carer card holders with access to
  - Free public transport until the age of 25
  - access to funded driving lessons and initial license costs through a tailored extension of the successful L2P Program, and
  - an expanded young carer scholarships program to allow more young carers to pursue activities that they would otherwise miss out on (**\$3.8 million** over four years, plus public transport related costs).

### Why act now?

The current cost-of-living crisis in Australia is only exacerbating the financial precarity many carers face and rates of financial stress and distress have risen rapidly amongst Victorian carers over recent years.

With 1 in 3 carers spending more money than they receive, many don't have the financial resources to manage unexpected bills or costs. These pressures are particularly acute for carers who have had to reduce their hours or withdraw entirely from paid employment due to their caring role.

For young carers, the cost to caring across the household can significantly impact on the household's financial security and home learning environment, significantly impacting their educational and wellbeing outcomes.

**Total budget impact: \$17.3 million over four years for up to 50,000 unpaid carers each year, plus the cost of public transport concessions.**

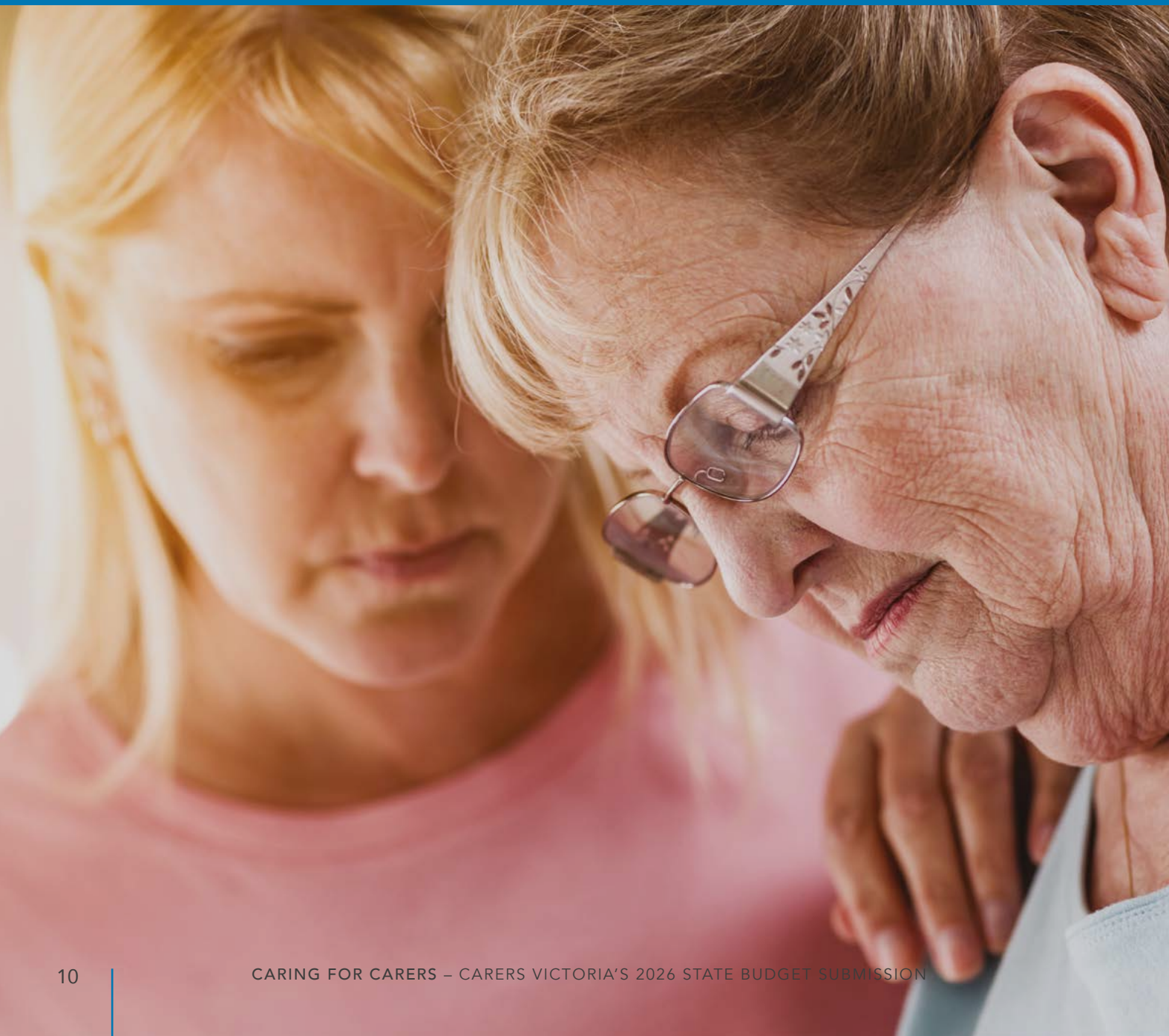
(to be agreed with the Department of Transport and Planning.)



## Intervene earlier

Often carers don't seek help until things are in crisis and their health and wellbeing is in the balance.

We want to change that, by equipping people early in their care relationship with helpful tools that better equip them to undertake the caring role and manage its impacts on their wellbeing.



## Budget Proposal 2: Intervene earlier

### What do we want?

Funding for 2400 Victorian carers to participate in the **Step into Care early intervention program**, a tailored program designed to equip carers with the practical tips, local connections and other assistance they need to both support the people in their care relationships and maintain their own health, wellbeing and sense of self.

### Why act now?

Carers pay a high cost for caring, experiencing significantly higher rates of poor mental health and financial stress than Victorians who are not in care relationships.

The time and stress associated with providing often intensive support and the complexity of the systems they need to navigate are key challenges carers face, and the time required of their caring role often means they are socially isolated.

Carers Victoria wants to change that.

Its Step into Care early intervention program works in partnership with health services to identify and connect people early in their care relationship into a tailored program of information, advice and connections.

By having access to tailored, easy to digest practical information and being connected into local supports, the program helps equip carers to manage some of the pressures of the role and reduce its impacts on their wellbeing leading to better outcomes for carers and for people receiving care.

Step into Care will be ready to scale up from FY27, with the goal of reaching 2400 carers over four years.

**Budget impact: \$2.75 million over four years, benefiting 2400 carers.**



# More funded assistance and respite for carers

Carers sometimes need a break from their caring role but often struggle to access funded respite. With the number of carers in Victoria growing rapidly, targeted growth in this assistance is mission-critical.

## Why respite is so important

- › The number of carers in Victoria has increased by 23% between 2016 and 2020.
- › Over one third of carers now care for 2 or more people.
- › Two thirds of carers are caring for more than 60 hours per week and half are providing 24/7 care.
- › 42% care for a person who can only be left alone for less than one hour.
- › The 2024 Carer Wellbeing Survey found 74% of Victorian carers had no access to respite services in the previous 12 months.

## Budget Proposal 3: More funded assistance and respite for carers

### What do we want?

Carers Victoria is calling for 20% growth in state-funded carer respite supports for carers, with a major focus on metropolitan and regional growth areas; First Nations carers, and carers from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

This would result in an **additional 8,000 carers receiving funded assistance each year, at a cost of \$28.8 million over 4 years.**

### Why act now?

Access to funded respite can be the difference between being able to sustain a caring role or needing to revert to funded government support or health services.

The cost of state-funded respite (\$2K per person is modest, yet offers huge benefits to carers. In a recent survey of over 500 carers who had received that kind of support, 88% reported that they felt better able to continue their caring role as a result of participating in state-funded respite activities.

This funding will be targeted to underserved areas and carer groups, including:

- › growth corridors,
- › rural Victoria,
- › First Nations carers and
- › multicultural carers.

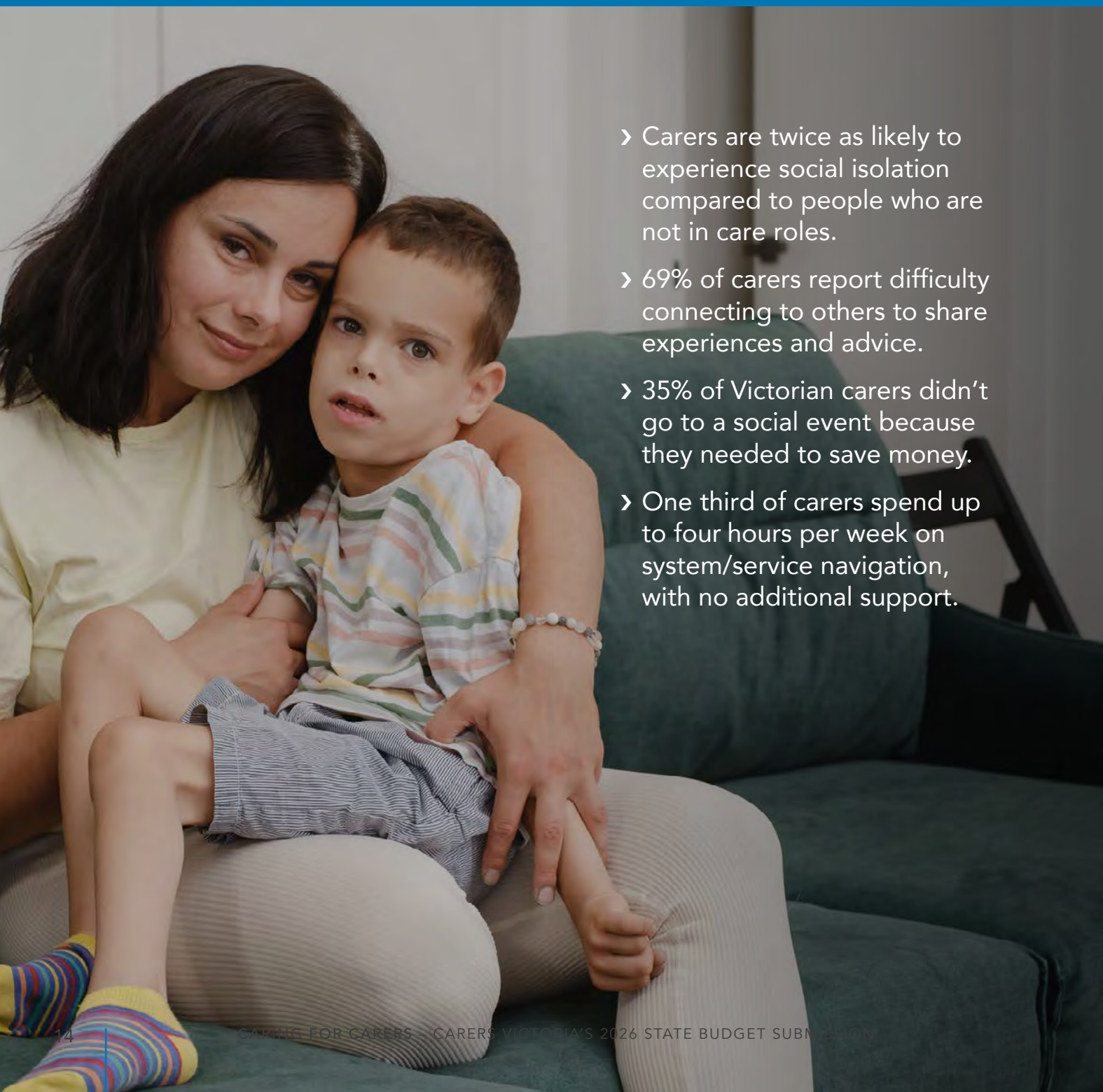
In metropolitan growth corridors, a focus on growing respite services in partnership with neighbourhood houses and local councils will maximise local access, leveraging local infrastructure. Mitchell Shire, Hume, Cardinia, Casey, Wyndham and Melton are areas where the need is particularly acute.

**Budget impact: \$28.8 million over four years, benefiting 8,000 carers over four years.**



# Expand local networks and support

Carers need access to local programs and local networks – particularly in rural and regional areas, where the time and cost associated with travel is a significant barrier to access.



- › Carers are twice as likely to experience social isolation compared to people who are not in care roles.
- › 69% of carers report difficulty connecting to others to share experiences and advice.
- › 35% of Victorian carers didn't go to a social event because they needed to save money.
- › One third of carers spend up to four hours per week on system/service navigation, with no additional support.

## Budget Proposal 4: Expand local networks and support

### What do we want?

Carers Victoria is calling for investment in two key initiatives to **build local support systems and connections for carers**, with a particular focus on underserved local government areas to develop:

- › A statewide system for readily connecting carers to local programs run by councils and neighbourhood houses, with funding for councils to implement systematic changes that make it easy for carers to know what's available locally: **\$6.5 million** over 4 years.
- › Develop local carer support groups/networks in underserved locations by allocating a total of 90+ small grants over 4 years to community organisations in those areas: **\$4.1million** over 4 years.

### Why act now?

Carers report poor to very poor mental wellbeing at almost 4 times the rate of other community members.

Data tells us that social connectedness is the biggest single contributing factor to carer health and wellbeing.

For many carers, connecting with other people – including those who need disability, mental health, aged care and/or health services for themselves or others they care for – can provide both social connection and access to local advice.

But they do not always have the capacity, the time, or the financial means, to travel to participate in programs that are further away from home. And many of them currently expend substantial time trying to find suitable support for themselves or the people they care for.

Many councils and neighbourhood houses already have programs that would benefit carers, but a systematic way of connecting carers to those opportunities is needed.

Alongside this, a community grants program is needed to establish local carer support groups in locations, and for underserved carer cohorts, across the state. These are self-organising groups that provide informal opportunities for carers to meet with other carers locally, expanding opportunities for peer support and information sharing.

**Budget impact: \$10.6 million over four years, benefiting all Victorian carers.**



# Summary of costings

THEME	ELEMENTS OF ASK	NUMBER OF CARERS SUPPORTED (Over 4 years)	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	TOTAL (Over 4 years)
<b>Tackle Financial Hardship</b>  <i>\$17.3 million</i>	Free weekend public transport	<b>60,000</b>	Delivered				
	Access to utility discounts funded by the Victorian government	<b>18,000</b>	1.98m	1.98m	1.98m	1.98m	7.9m
	Discount on car registration	<b>11,250</b>	1.12m	1.5m	1.5m	1.5m	5.6m
	Additional young carer initiatives	<b>15,000</b>	0.95m	0.95m	0.95m	0.95m	3.8m
<b>Intervene earlier</b>  <i>\$2.75 million</i>	Step into Care-early intervention program	<b>2,400</b>	675K	668k	706k	706k	2.75m
<b>More funded assistance and respite for carers</b>  <i>\$28.8 million</i>	Grow funded carer respite supports	<b>8,000</b>	6.7m	7.0m	7.4m	7.7m	28.8m
<b>Expand local networks and support</b>  <i>\$10.6 million</i>	Connecting carers to local programs in councils and neighbourhood houses	<b>Statewide – 79 councils</b>	155k	2.1m	4.09m	180k	6.5m
	Develop local carer support groups/networks	<b>Carers in under-served areas</b>	1.0m	1.9m	1.0m	180k	4.1m
<b>Totals</b>			<b>\$12.6m</b>	<b>\$16.1m</b>	<b>\$17.6m</b>	<b>\$13.2m</b>	<b>\$59.5m</b>

## Case study of a better future

# A difference for Victorians new to the caring role

Mrs P lives with her family in a new housing estate in the City of Whittlesea. Following her husband's stroke in February 2025, she has become his primary carer. She is struggling to adjust to her new role as a carer and feels isolated and overwhelmed. Having felt compelled to give up the job she loved, she feels ill-equipped to support her husband and the loss of his income is biting now, too.

Mrs P attends a follow-up appointment for her husband and is referred to the Step into Care program, accessing online information tailored for carers like her, including information about the financial assistance and funded supports available for carers like her.

She also participates in online sessions with other new carers in her area and ends up joining a local carer support group.

The combination of information and local connections doesn't make everything perfect, but it means she's been able to ease a bit of the financial pressure and being able to connect with other folks who '*just know what it's like*' has been a game changer, giving her social connection, local knowledge and peer support when she needs it.





## Case study of a better future

# A different future for young carers

**Amy is 17 and the primary carer for her grandmother, who has serious mobility issues.** With no contact with her mother and only limited help from an aunt who lives two hours away, Amy takes on almost all of the caring responsibility. She often missed school to take her grandmother to medical appointments or care for her at home. When her grandmother was hospitalised, Amy would miss weeks of classes, falling behind in school leaving her feeling stressed, isolated and worried about her future.

She lives in the City of Wyndham, so it takes time and money to get her grandmother to appointments, something that's getting really hard to cover. She's had to cut back on spending time with friends as a result.

When the additional supports for young carers were introduced, things began to change. Free public transport meant Amy could take her grandmother to appointments without worrying about fares and still afford to see her friends.

Free driving lessons and waived licence fees (through a young carer version of the L2P program) are helping her work towards getting her licence, which will give her independence and more reliable transport options.

Access to utility and other new financial concessions have eased a bit of pressure on household expenses, leaving more money for essentials.

A Young Carer Scholarship gave Amy the chance to buy a laptop and get tutoring so she could catch up on schoolwork and feel confident about finishing Year 12. It also helped Amy to feel her role as a young carer was valued and recognised by others outside her family.

Amy still cares for her grandmother every day, but with these supports she has more independence, less financial stress and a clearer path to her future.



[www.carersvictoria.org.au](http://www.carersvictoria.org.au)

Social Media @CarersVictoria

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Carers Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and future

We further acknowledge Traditional Custodians of Country where carer services are delivered throughout Victoria.

A greater proportion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population are carers compared with the rest of the Victorian population (16% and 13%).

We acknowledge both the cultural contexts in which caring may occur in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and the history of (intergenerational and individual) trauma and impact this legacy still has upon the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities today.

