

# 2023-24 State Budget Submission

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## Overview

The 2022-23 State Budget is an opportunity to reset the system for over 700,000 unpaid Victorian carers.

Despite their invaluable role in Victorian society, carers experience many stressors that go beyond the everyday responsibilities of caregiving. Providing unpaid or informal care is strongly linked to negative impacts on financial, emotional and physical wellbeing.

The critical task for our State is to relieve the demands and increase the joys of caring.

A new Victorian Carer Strategy will deliver the Labor Government's central election commitment for carers. Victoria is nation-leading in its commitment to placing citizens at the heart of policy design and Carers Victoria looks forward to playing a central role in supporting a carer-centred design approach to its development so the strategy reflects the things that are most important to carers themselves.

While the new Strategy will shape long term policy and funding priorities, the State Budget should also see investment in the services we know make a difference for carers.

With the carer population growing rapidly and forecast to exceed 1 million Victorians by 2026, commencing expansion of Victorian Government funded supports for carers is essential to meet growing need.

It is now timely to start extending these services and a contribution from the Victorian Government is sought to assist with this.

Research tells us that primary carers experience significant financial disadvantage, and the current cost-of-living crisis is hitting Victorian carers particularly hard. More than half of all carers are having difficulty covering one or more of their essential expenses, and nearly a third are financially distressed.

A one-off cost of living voucher linked to the Victorian Carer Card will provide immediate relief to carers who are struggling to make ends meet. Promoting the eligibility of the second carer to receive a Carers Card will ensure that the financial benefits of that Card, and the caring role, can be more effectively shared between a person's carers.

Providing sustainable, timely health services is a particular challenge. Actively engaging with carers in the health system is an opportunity to improve the quality of care after discharge, reduce patient readmissions, and improve carer wellbeing. Carers Victoria is proposing investment in a two-year pilot program to equip hospital staff to better engage and support carers in critical areas like discharge planning. The program, if adopted, would leverage a model already implemented in Western Australia.

Supporting carers to maintain good mental health and wellbeing is another critical component of ensuring they can sustain their caring role. The InTouch group therapy program has been proven to reduce psychological distress and increase social connection and it is now ready for state-wide roll out. At the same time, placing dedicated carer mental health and wellbeing staff in at least 20% of all Local Adult and Older Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Services will ensure all Victorian carers have tailored mental health support.

Victorians have been hard-hit by crises, with floods compounding the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. Carers may also experience crisis within the home due to family violence or sudden changes in the health of the person they care for. A dedicated carer crisis line will provide rapid support to carers in emergencies, while a tailored 'future planning' program will equip carers to prepare for scenarios where they may no longer be able to continue their care relationship.

Every year thousands of carers exit or choose not to re-enter the workforce due to the difficulty of balancing their caring role with paid employment. A tailored education program to help small to medium employers become 'carer friendly' will connect carers with employment, and will help solve the jobs crisis confronting the Victorian economy. Continued funding for the Carer Employment Support Program will mean more carers can receive active support into employment or further education.

This budget submission seeks to harness the opportunity to reshape services through a new Victorian Carer Strategy, while presenting practical ideas to address the immediate challenges carers face.

Investment in our proposals will help the re-elected Labor Government continue its commitment to equity and ensure no Victorian carer is left behind.

### For more information

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# Summary of recommendations

NO.	RECOMMENDATION	BENEFIT	BUDGET IMPACT
<b>RESHAPE THE SYSTEM FOR CARERS</b>			
1	Leverage a carer-centred approach to designing the new Victorian Carer Strategy	Reshape the carer system and better target services	\$0.2 million over one year
2	Attach substantial and sustained funding to the Victorian Carer Strategy	Allow services to be provided at scale and in line with forecast growth in the carer population	Not costed
<b>SIMPLE AND FLEXIBLE SUPPORT FOR CARERS</b>			
3	Renew the Additional Carer Respite Funding on a recurrent basis and ensure respite is a key consideration for the new Victorian Carer Strategy	Carers across Victoria can continue to access respite	\$42 million over four years
4	Restore metropolitan supports for carers	More than 20,000 additional hours of flexible carer services in metropolitan Melbourne	\$8.13 million over four years
<b>COST OF LIVING RELIEF FOR CARERS</b>			
5	Link one-off cost of living voucher to the Victorian Carer Card	Card holders have short term relief for energy, groceries and/or vehicle registration	\$2 million. Up to \$100 per eligible Victorian Carer Card holder
6	Promote eligibility for the Victorian Carer Card to secondary carers	Improve equity and relieve the burden on primary carers	Minimal - requires active awareness raising program
<b>INVOLVE AND SUPPORT CARERS IN THE HEALTH SYSTEM</b>			
7	Establish a pilot intervention involve carers in admission and discharge planning and provide follow up support	Better equip hospital staff to proactively support carers	\$0.5 million over two years





NO.	RECOMMENDATION	BENEFIT	BUDGET IMPACT
<b>BETTER CARER MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING</b>			
8	Fund the state-wide expansion of the InTouch program	Carers can access group therapy proven to reduce psychological distress	\$6.7 million over four years
9	Fund carer mental health and wellbeing staff in at least 20% of Local Adult and Older Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Services	All carers can access tailored mental health and wellbeing support	\$7.2 million over four years
<b>SUPPORT CARERS IN CRISIS</b>			
10	Establish a dedicated carer crisis line to assist carers during emergencies	Carers have active support during a crisis	\$1.91 million over four years
11	Equip carers with practical resources and training to plan early for the future	Carers are prepared for changes in their caring relationship	\$2.15 million over four years
<b>SUPPORT CARERS INTO EMPLOYMENT</b>			
12	Pilot a carer friendly workplace education scheme for small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in Victoria	SME employers are incentivised to hire, support and retain carers in the workplace	\$1 million over two years
13	Recurrently fund the Carers Employment Support Program	More carers are supported into employment or further education	\$2.3 million per year

# Reshaping the system for carers

## RECOMMENDATION 1

Leverage a carer-centred approach to designing the new Victorian Carer Strategy to identify opportunities for intervention, strengthened support, and more flexible services.

**Budget impact: \$0.20 million over one year**

## RECOMMENDATION 2

Attach substantial and sustained funding to the Victorian Carer Strategy to allow services to be provided at scale and in line with forecast growth in the carer population.

**Budget impact: Not costed – policy commitment sought at this point**

The Victorian Government's forthcoming Victorian Carer Strategy is a fundamental opportunity to reshape the system, guide investment, and prioritise the services that most benefit carers. To unlock this opportunity, Carers Victoria asks the Victorian Government to invest in a human-centred design approach to develop the Strategy and inform its priorities.

Carer outcomes improve where systems are carer-centred, responsive, personalised and flexible.<sup>1</sup> A human-centred design approach to develop the Victorian Carer Strategy will allow the Victorian Government to identify:

- › points where a carer typically requires intervention;
- › the type of intervention required;

- › barriers to accessing services or support in current systems; and
- › opportunities for system reform or redesign.

The Victorian Government (via the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing) has partnered with Carers Victoria on an initial round of consultation to inform the Strategy. Carers Victoria proposes building on this initial work with a more extensive human-centred design approach to designing the new Victorian Carer Strategy.

Carers Victoria is ideally placed to continue to partner with the Victorian Government on a carer-centred approach to the Strategy. Our organisation has a deep understanding of the day-to-day concerns, challenges, and long-term aspirations of Victorian carers. We have gained this understanding through our unique position as the peak body representing Victorian carers, and as a direct provider of services to carers.

The Strategy, once designed, should also have substantial and sustained funding attached, aligned to forecast growth in the carer population and to service delivery needs. A central component of this investment should be additional funding for improved service navigation for Victorian carers: the key concern for more than a third (35%) of carer respondents to the *National Carer Survey*, and of carers involved in preliminary consultation for the Strategy.

1. Hill, T. and Broadby, T. (2019). Understanding the social and emotional needs of carers: Final Report, University of New South Wales: Sydney.

# Simple, flexible services for carers

## RECOMMENDATION 3

Renew the Additional Carer Respite Funding on a recurrent basis and ensure respite is a key consideration for the new Victorian Carer Strategy.

**Budget impact: \$42 million over four years**

## RECOMMENDATION 4

Restore metropolitan carer services to previous levels, equating to 20,000 additional hours of flexible carer services.

**Budget impact: \$8.13 million over four years**

Providing direct support to carers is critical to sustaining them in their caring role. With substantial increases in the number of unpaid carers forecast across Victoria, growth in funded supports at least at a level commensurate to that growth will be essential.

There are, however, two immediate priorities that require action in advance of the Carer Strategy being finalised.

### Funding for carer respite

Funding for carer respite should be made recurrent to support an additional 100,000 hours of respite each year. This would be achieved by continuing the Victorian Government's "Additional Respite" stream.

Respite care allows carers to have a break from the everyday demands of their role. Carers who access respite say their stress levels are reduced, experience greater social connection, and engage more with the activities they enjoy. In recognition of this need, in the 2019-20 State Budget the Victorian Government committed

to supporting unpaid carers by providing \$42 million over four years for additional carer respite, supplementing the respite available through the Support for Carers Program.<sup>2</sup>

Additional Carer Respite funding increased the reach and equity of carer respite support across Victoria, supporting more than 100,000 additional hours of respite across home, community and facility-based options. While respite care remains a critical need for carers, however, the scheme is due to conclude on 30th June 2023. Support for additional respite should continue on an ongoing basis.

### Restoring carer services to metropolitan Melbourne

While we await the new Strategy, urgent investment is needed now in the services we know make a difference for carers. The carer population is growing rapidly and forecasts suggest 112,000 additional Victorians aged 75+ by 2026, with other vulnerable cohorts also expected to grow.

The Support for Carers Program delivers a suite of supports that meet carers' short-term, high-level support needs.

Funding for the program must restore, at minimum, the flexible supports provided to carers in metropolitan Melbourne. Restoring Support for Carers Program funding to pre-FY2021-2022 levels for metropolitan Melbourne carers will deliver 20,000 additional hours of flexible carer services.

The funding expansion should also consider support for longer-term case management for carers with complex life circumstances that place them at higher risk of crisis.

2. Victorian Government. (2022). Additional respite funding, online article, available at [www.vic.gov.au/additional-respite-funding](https://www.vic.gov.au/additional-respite-funding).

# Cost of living relief for carers

## RECOMMENDATION 5

Link one-off cost of living relief for energy, groceries and/or vehicle registration to the Victorian Carer Card.

**Budget impact: Un-costed. Up to \$100 per eligible Victorian Carer Card holder**

## RECOMMENDATION 6

Promote eligibility for the Victorian Carer Card to secondary carers.

**Budget impact: Un-costed. Current estimates suggest more than 480,000 secondary carers in Victoria**

The cost-of-living crisis is affecting all Victorians, with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rising by 7.4% in 2022. Energy, groceries and fuel prices continue to increase, in addition to discretionary costs.<sup>3</sup>

While the cost-of-living crisis is impacting all Victorians, carers are affected more than most. More than half (50.2%) of carers live in a household in the lowest two income groups, compared with only a quarter (25.6%) of non-carers. As with other cohorts in low-income groups, the pre-existing disadvantage compounds the impacts of cost-of-living increases on carers.

In 2022, more than half (51%) of carers reported financial stress: that is, difficulty covering one or more of their essential expenses or seeking help to meet their basic expenses. Compared with 2020, more carers have had difficulty paying their rent, mortgage, or energy bills on time, have sold their personal

goods to fund expenses, or, concerningly, have gone without meals to save money.<sup>4</sup>

While the Victorian Government has invested in measures to relieve financial pressures on the broader Victorian population, Victorian carers urgently require targeted cost of living support. The simplest, most effective method for providing this support is via the Victorian Carer Card, which already provides carers with relief for public transport costs.

Carers Victoria proposes the Victorian Government expand the benefits linked to the Carer Card by investing in additional targeted relief for energy relief, groceries, and/or vehicle registration. This additional targeted cost of living support will add to the public transport discounts and privately funded benefits already available to card holders.

Many people who share care of a family member or other person do not realise that they may each be eligible for a Victorian Carer Card. This means that sometimes one family member takes on the lions share of care responsibilities when there is the option to share this.

Carers Victoria is keen to see more 'secondary' carers actively encouraged to access the Carers Card to support equity, encourage shared caring, and broaden carer access to cost of living relief.

3. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). Consumer Price Index, Australia, October release, available at [www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/consumer-price-index-australia/latest-release](http://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/consumer-price-index-australia/latest-release).

4. Comparison between respondents to the 2022 and 2020 iterations of the *National Carer Survey*.

5. Carers NSW (2022), '2022 National Carer Survey: Quotes from Victorian Respondents', n.p.





### What carers say...

"The caring role does financially affect my life - as a full-time worker I am not eligible for any caring payments, but still using my own money (earned from work after tax) to aid the two people I care for. Transport requires petrol and car, taking the members out in the community requires personal time and money for food. I was not able to get Carer Allowance to subsidise for these costs either."<sup>5</sup>

# Involving and considering carers in the health system

## RECOMMENDATION 7

Establish a pilot intervention to involve carers in admission and discharge planning and provide follow up support.

**Budget impact: \$0.5 million over two years**

Victoria's health system should involve and consider the needs of carers. Carers tell us being recognised and supported within hospital settings can be challenging. Often, ongoing support after the person they care for is discharged is not offered or unavailable.

Victoria requires a targeted intervention to address these needs. Carers Victoria suggests funding a two-year pilot of a model similar to the Prepare to Care Hospital Program successfully implemented in Western Australia. The pilot could be initially trialled in at least two metropolitan areas, and one regional area.

Closely involving carers in hospital admission and discharge planning may reduce the chance the person they care for will be readmitted; allows hospital staff to proactively direct carers to support services; and may support improved carer wellbeing, especially for carers of older people.<sup>6</sup>

Reducing the chance of readmission will also relieve the pressure on Victoria's health system, which is under strain due to ongoing COVID-19-related staff shortages and related pressures.

## Case study

**Involving and supporting carers through "Prepare to Care"**

The Western Australian Government has partnered with Carers WA on the "Prepare to Care" Hospital Program.<sup>7</sup> The Program equips hospital staff to proactively provide information and support to carers at the point of admission, in discharge planning, and following discharge. Participating staff receive training in:

- › Identifying and engaging with carers in the health system; and
- › Their responsibilities under the Carers Recognition Act 2004 (WA).

Participating hospitals also receive resources to share with carers, information to assist with warm referrals to support services, and support to comply with NSQHS standards.

6. Slatyer S, Toye C, Popescu A, Young J, Matthews A, Hill A, Williamson DJ. Early re-presentation to hospital after discharge from an acute medical unit: perspectives of older patients, their family caregivers and health professionals. J Clin Nurs. 2013 Feb;22(3-4):445-55. doi: 10.1111/jocn.12029. PMID: 23301580.

7. Carers WA. Prepare to care hospital program, website, available at [www.carerswa.asn.au/our-services/prepare-to-care-hospital-program](http://www.carerswa.asn.au/our-services/prepare-to-care-hospital-program).



# Better carer mental health and wellbeing

## RECOMMENDATION 8

Fund the state-wide expansion of the InTouch carer group therapy program to allow carers across Victoria to benefit.

**Budget impact: \$6.7 million over 4 years**

## RECOMMENDATION 9

Fund dedicated carer mental health and wellbeing staff in at least 20% of Local Adult and Older Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Services so all carers can access timely mental health and wellbeing support.

**Budget impact: \$7.2 million over 4 years**

Unpaid caring has well-established impacts on quality of life and wellbeing.

Recent analysis of the experience of more than 130,000 unpaid carers across thirteen OECD countries, including Australia, found unpaid caregiving is negatively associated with mental health.<sup>8</sup> Australia-specific studies reveal similar findings, with both full and part time Australian carers reporting elevated levels of psychological distress.<sup>9</sup>

Pandemic-related social restrictions may also have exacerbated the social isolation, and poorer health and wellbeing many carers experience. In the most recent *National Carer Survey*, more than one in two carers told us they experience high or very high psychological distress. Carers reported low wellbeing at 2.5 times the rate of people not in caring roles.<sup>10</sup> The mental health and wellbeing of these carers requires urgent, targeted support.

While Carers Victoria strongly supports the outcomes of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, all Victorian carers require access to tailored mental health interventions and not only carers of people with mental health conditions. The unmet needs of the broader carer population are a critical gap in the system: only 13% of Victoria's unpaid carers say their mental health needs are being met.<sup>11</sup>

There are steps Government can take to improve the mental health and wellbeing of all carers. Access to counselling, case management and other support services can play a key role in helping many carers maintain good mental health, well-being, and resilience.<sup>12</sup>

8. Ervin, J. Taouk, Y. Fleitas, A. Peasgood, T. King, T. (2022). 'Longitudinal association between informal unpaid caregiving and mental health amongst working age adults in high-income OECD countries: A systematic review', *eClinicalMedicine*, 53.

9. George, E.S., Kecmanovic, M., Meade, T. et al. (2020). 'Psychological distress among carers and the moderating effects of social support'. *BMC Psychiatry* 20:154.

10. Carers Victoria. (2022). 2022 National Carer Survey Victoria Results Raw Data, unpublished.

11. Carers Victoria. (2022). 2022 National Carer Survey Victoria Results Raw Data, unpublished.

12. Hill, T. Broadby, T. (2019). Understanding the social and emotional needs of carers: Final Report, University of NSW: Sydney.

InTouch has proven to be highly effective intervention for carers. Over 400 carers will have been supported through 60 groups in the initial three-year phase of the Program from 2020-2023. Independent evaluation found participants experienced increased social support and significantly decreased experiences of psychological distress and loneliness. More than 18% of participants self-reported improved mental health and an 11% of participants reported a decline in their experience of a severe mental health concern.<sup>13</sup>

With only one year of funding remaining, ongoing support is needed for this vital initiative to continue. The initial rollout of the Program has been piloted through North-Western Melbourne Primary Health Network, with the first three years of funding due to conclude in June 2023. Demand for the Program has far outstripped funded capacity, with Victorians outside the North-Western Melbourne catchment requesting but unable to access the service.

Carers Victoria is proposing to expand the InTouch group therapy program statewide as a targeted mental health and peer support intervention for carers. In-Touch is an innovative group therapy program piloted by Carers Victoria to equip carers to manage the impacts of their caring role on their own wellbeing, and to combat the social isolation that often accompanies caring. It is the only program of its kind in Victoria.

The Victorian Government is best placed to partner with Carers Victoria on the state-wide expansion of InTouch. A modest investment will assist over 5,400 carers across Victoria while addressing a critical gap in current mental health reforms.

The Local Adult and Older Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Services ('Locals') are also an ideal setting for facilitating interventions for carers. The adequacy of the mental health support available for carers seeking support at Locals, however, will depend on the availability of staff who understand their needs. Services for carers should be provided by practitioners with an understanding of the complexity of caring roles, the impacts caring can have on mental health and wellbeing, and with the capacity to provide episodic or ongoing support as needed.

Given the criticality of carer mental health, Carers Victoria proposes that dedicated carer mental health and wellbeing staff are located in at least one in five Locals.

### What carers say about InTouch

"I think [the In-Touch program gives] a voice... You know people are feeling that they can't talk - or particularly in the first meeting and between that and the second one, one of them just blossomed. I just wanted to send them a hug because it's so good. That's what we do in a in a group, you know, we help one another and they share the stories and I guess because of my age, you know, I was able to tell stories and stories that could help someone else who needs to know."

"Knowing that you're not alone and everybody is going through something the same, similar or, something that you can relate to, and also, that everybody was from different backgrounds as well as ages as well."

13. Victoria J Palmer, Jennifer Bibb, Roxanne Kritharidis, Konstancja Densley, Amy Coe. 2022, 'A Clinical Evaluation of the Online Carer Wellbeing & Connection Program (Pilot Trial): A part of the In-Touch Initiative Final Report, Primary Care Mental Health Research Program, The University of Melbourne, Victoria: Australia, p. 41.



# Support carers in crisis

## RECOMMENDATION 10

Establish a dedicated carer crisis line to support to carers during emergencies.

**Budget impact: \$1.91 million over four years**

Every year, some of Victoria's carers will experience a crisis in their care relationship. These may range from the impacts of natural disasters or public health crises through to sudden changes to circumstances within the home.

While the Victorian Government has established dedicated hotlines for anyone affected by a major disaster event (for example, the Flood Recovery Hotline), carers in crisis need tailored support. A carer presented with a crisis may need to rapidly engage with multiple service systems and, often, make immediate changes to their living or care arrangements. Only just over half of all carers (52.5%) feel confident they could manage an unexpected event or emergency.<sup>14</sup>

A 24-hour, 7 day a week phone-based service providing carers with practical advice and rapid linkage to local support services could play a critical role in helping carers manage crises. The crisis support line could be leveraged when broader emergency management systems are activated.

## RECOMMENDATION 11

Equip carers with practical resources and training to plan early for the future.

**Budget impact: \$2.15 million over four years**

Carers Victoria receives frequent requests from carers for streamlined, accessible information and training on planning for the future.

Carers worry about what will happen to the health and wellbeing of the person they care for if their own health or circumstances change. This is especially the case for carers of adult children, although other carers (such as carers with disabilities) also lack confidence about their future capacity to continue caring for their family, kin or loved ones.<sup>15</sup>

A tailored program combining toolkits, resources and web-based training will equip carers to pre-plan for scenarios where they may no longer be able to continue their care relationship. This will provide carers with peace of mind about the future, support carer wellbeing, and secure the health and wellbeing of the people they care for.

14. Lindahl, J, Stollon, N, Wu, K, et al. (2019). 'Domains of planning for future long-term care of adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities: Parent and sibling perspectives', *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 32:5, pp. 1103-1115.

15. Lindahl, J, Stollon, N, Wu, K, et al. (2019). 'Domains of planning for future long-term care of adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities: Parent and sibling perspectives', *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 32:5, pp. 1103-1115.

# Support carers into employment

## RECOMMENDATION 12

Pilot a carer friendly workplace education scheme for small to medium enterprises in Victoria.

**Budget impact: \$1 million over two years**

One in nine Victorian workers are carers, and we know they sometimes struggle to balance paid work and their caring role.<sup>16</sup> Many carers retire early, reduce their hours, or withdraw entirely from the paid workforce. As a result, carers miss out on average on more than \$500,000 in lost wages and superannuation over their lifetimes.<sup>17</sup>

Supporting more carers back into employment will help their future financial security. Lifting carer employment will benefit the broader Victorian economy, especially at a time when our state is experiencing a shortfall of workers and skills.

Helping employers become more carer friendly is a key way of encouraging more carers into work. Victorians of all ages who completed the 2022 *National Carer Survey* indicated they 'self-selected' job opportunities based on whether a potential employer was flexible enough to accommodate their care role.<sup>18</sup>

Carers Victoria proposes an education scheme to help Victoria's small to medium enterprises become carer friendly, support worker retention, and boost carer workforce participation. The scheme would ideally be delivered in partnership with one or more

Victoria-based industry associations, who would leverage their membership base of small to medium businesses.

## Case study

### Carers + Employers

Carers NSW and the NSW Government have partnered on initiative to help employers become more carer friendly and create a network of employers interested in employing carers.

The scheme formally accredits employers who actively support carers into paid employment. Employers move through three levels of accreditation linked to the depth of their carer friendly policies and commitment.

In its three years since its rollout, participating employers have reported improved staff retention, reduced absenteeism, and better staff engagement. Large Australian employers such as Suncorp have publicised their involvement as key to their corporate social responsibility outcomes.

16. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018, 'Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Australia, Victoria', Table 32.1.

17. Furnival, A and Cullen, D, 2022, 'Caring Costs Us: The economic impact on lifetime income and retirement savings of informal carers. A report for Carers Australia', Sydney NSW, [www.carersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Final-Economic-impact-income-and-retirement-Evaluate-Report-March-2022.pdf](http://www.carersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Final-Economic-impact-income-and-retirement-Evaluate-Report-March-2022.pdf), accessed 22.11.2022.

18. Carers Victoria. (2022). 2022 *National Carer Survey*, Victorian results, unpublished data.



### **RECOMMENDATION 13**

Continue funding for the Carer Employment Support Program so more carers can receive active support into employment or further education.

**Budget impact: \$2.3 million in recurrent funding**

The Victorian Government, via the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, has funded the pilot Carers Employment Support program. The program aims to prepare and transition carers to re-enter the workforce or further education by providing a comprehensive program of pre-employment preparation and post transition support.

The second year of the Carers Employment Support Program pilot will conclude in December 2023. The Program provides active support to prepare, mentor, and support carers into employment or further education.

Carers Victoria proposes recurrent funding for the Carers Employment Support Program. This will allow participants to build on the initial two-year pilot projects led by Neighbourhood Houses Victoria and Carers Victoria, and recognises that many carers who participate in early pre-employment training need time to feel fully prepared to re-enter the workforce.

Ongoing investment in the Carers Employment Support Program or a like initiative should take place now, and should also be a key consideration for the forthcoming Victorian Carer Strategy. Long term implementation of program will provide a sustainable, known support pathway to employment for carers, with the capacity to achieve sustainable employment outcomes for more carers.



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