



Pre-election Policy Platform 2026



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.

Our pre-election policy platform outlines policy, program and funding priorities 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 platform 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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Carers Count – Overview

PILLAR	PRIORITIES FOR ACTION	WHO BENEFITS
Reduce the cost of caring	<p>Deliver targeted discounts and concessions to Carers Card holders, including energy concessions, discounted road tolls, and assistance with hospital parking costs.</p> <p>Deliver additional financial relief for young carers, by extending free public transport to young Carer Card holders aged 18-25; by expanding the L2P program to young Carer Card holders; and by matching funding for the Young Carer Awards program.</p> <p>Support recommendations of the Victorian Public Transport Assistance Scheme (VPTAS) alliance to adjust funding rates and complete a review of the broader scheme.</p> <p>Advocate for updates to Carer Payment and Carer Allowance rates, and eligibility as well as superannuation to be paid on Carers Payment.</p>	<p>Approx 30,000 carers</p> <p>Approx 15,000 young carers</p> <p>Approx 170,000 Victorian carers</p>
More funded assistance and respite	<p>Expand funded carer respite targeted to growth corridors and rural Victoria, alongside targeted programs for multicultural and First Nations carers.</p> <p>Expand the Gather My Crew-led Kind Crew initiative in partnership with Carers Victoria to connect carers with neighbourhood-based volunteer support, including social connection, gardening and assistance with meals.</p>	<p>Approximately 8,000 carers per year, with a focus on carers in growth corridors and rural Victoria</p> <p>Over 8,000 carers</p>
Intervene earlier	<p>Invest in the expansion of the Step into Caring early intervention program so more carers are connected to support early in their caring role.</p> <p>Partner with Victorian health services to routinely identify and include carers in key planning processes and connect them to support.</p>	2,400 extra carers
Expand local networks and supports	<p>Fund a collaborative project with councils and neighbourhood houses to automatically link carers in their local areas to their wellbeing programs.</p> <p>Make it easier for carers to find what they need by contributing information to a statewide, online service and information portal and providing data to support catchment based service planning.</p> <p>Create local connections for carers in underserviced areas by allocating one-off grants to establish new carer support groups.</p>	Over 100,000 carers each year, with a focus on carers in growth corridors and rural Victoria
Recognise and include carers	<p>Actively involve carers in service planning, advisory and policy processes by creating designated positions for people with lived experience of caring and support their skills development.</p> <p>Commit to making Victorian Government departments and agencies carer friendly.</p> <p>Enhance arrangements in schools, TAFEs and universities so that the needs of young carers are understood and routinely accommodated.</p>	<p>Statewide benefits</p> <p>Approx 70,000 young carers</p>

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**¹ – about the same as what the state spends on health care². 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 Election, Carers Victoria is calling for action that recognises that Carers Count.

Our Carers Count Platform sets out a five point plan to address key pressure points experienced by carers:

- 1 Reduce the cost of caring
- 2 More funded assistance and respite
- 3 Intervene earlier
- 4 Expand local supports and connections
- 5 Recognise and include carers

Carers in **growth corridors and rural Victoria** are a particular focus of our asks, as are **multicultural and First Nations** carers.

Our platform is a combination of funding, policy and program asks that will deliver practical benefits for Victoria's carers. It recognises that carers count, as a mission critical part of our community.

We are not asking parliamentarians to do this alone – our platform sets out initiatives that will leverage and engage a wide range of partners alongside Carers Victoria's resources, so that together, we can recognise, include and support carers – wherever they live, whoever they are, and whoever they care for.



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

2. 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



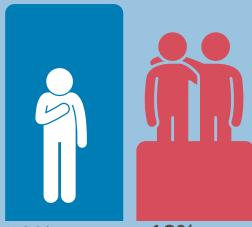
High stress



1 in 2 carers

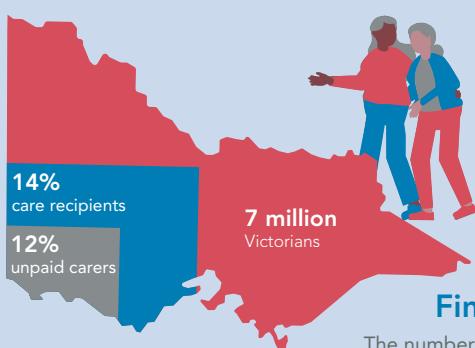
Report high to very high levels of psychological distress.

Feelings of isolation



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.



\$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)



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.

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 | dft.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

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.

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 year¹**.

That's almost as much as the Victorian Government spends on health care².

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.



Increasing numbers of unpaid carers

The number of Victorians identifying as carers increased by almost 25% in the last census. It's estimated there'll soon be enough to fill more than ten MCGs.

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 broader Victorian population),
- › financial security, with the proportion of Victorian carers experiencing financial distress increasing 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.

Data also shows the longer a person is in a caring role, the more pronounced these impacts become.

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.

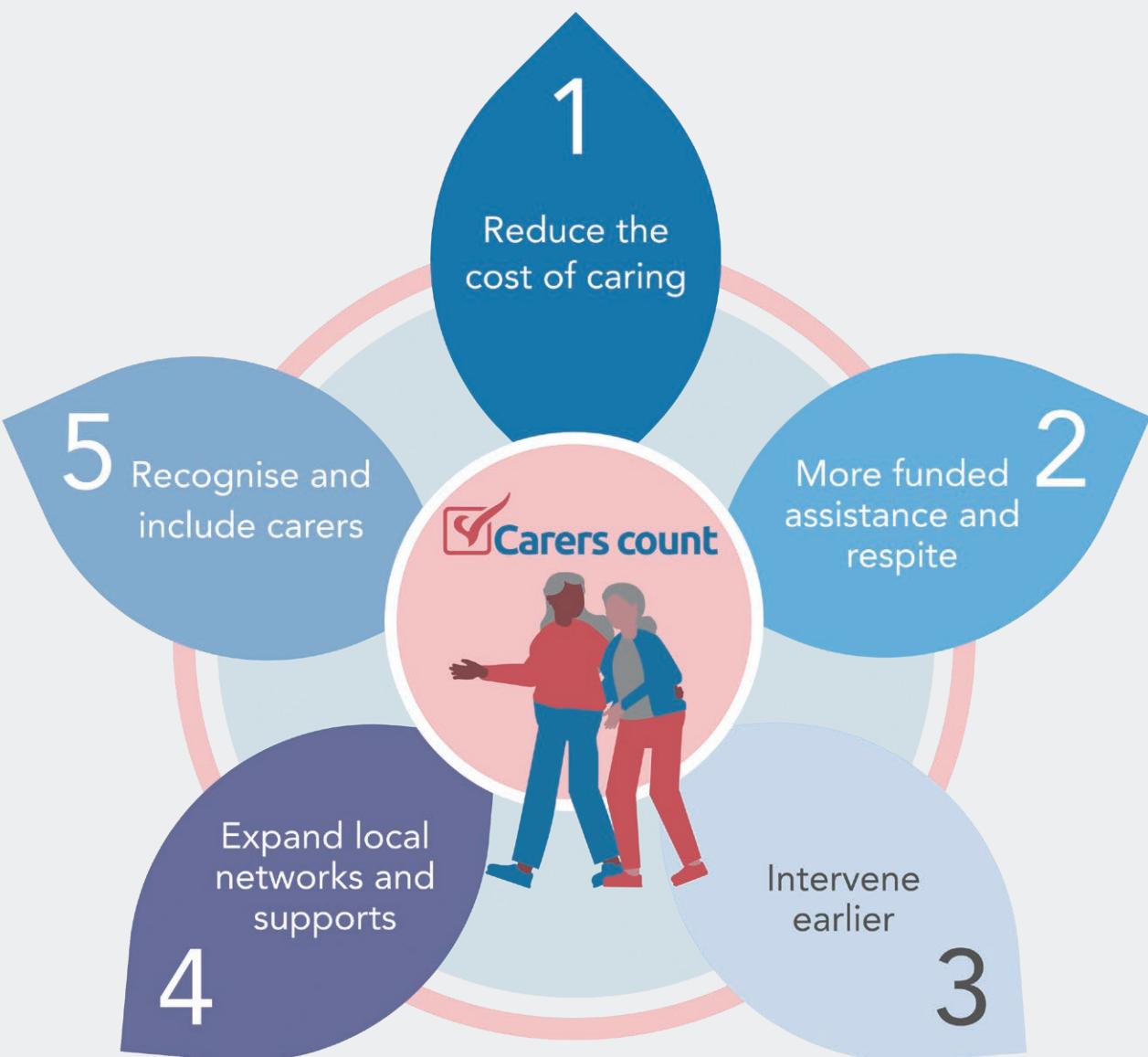


1. Deloitte Access Economics (May 2020) The value of informal care in 2020, accessed 15 September 2025
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Carers Count

a 5 point plan



ONE Reduce the cost of caring

What we are seeking:

- › Implement a package of targeted discounts and concessions to Victorian Carers Card holders, including energy concessions, discounted road tolls, and assistance with hospital parking costs.
- › Deliver additional financial relief for young carers, by extending free public transport to young Carer Card holders aged 18-25; by expanding the L2P program to young Carer Card holders; and by matching funding for the Young Carer Awards program.
- › Support recommendations of the Victorian Public Transport Assistance Scheme (VPTAS) alliance to adjust funding rates and complete a review of the broader scheme.
- › Advocate for updates to the Carer Payment and Carer Allowance rates and eligibility.

The challenge

The number of Victorian carers experiencing financial stress has recently doubled.

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.

The opportunity

Financial relief for carers that are struggling now, while also acting to support their longer-term financial security (including by supporting those able to work or engage in study), will help sustain care relationships and prevent future welfare costs.

Carers have asked for a package of measures to address financial inequity including expanded discounts through the Carers Card program, one-off financial hardship relief, and eligibility for concessions. To address longer term impacts, carers have requested federal advocacy for increased Commonwealth income assistance, and top ups to their superannuation.

Impact and cost

\$29.3 million over 4 years, supporting more than 30,000 carers each year and 15,000 young carers through specific targeted initiatives for them.

"Being awarded this [young carer] scholarship would make me feel really good as it would make a big difference to my life. It would support me to pay for some important expenses at school and in my personal life that are really important for me and my mum's health, wellbeing and education. I spend a lot of time supporting mum, and this scholarship would provide me important recognition and financial support to keep caring for her while supporting my own needs."

– Young Carer Scholarship recipient

TWO

More funded assistance and respite for carers

What we are seeking:

- › A 20% expansion in funded carer respite, targeted to growth corridors and rural Victoria, alongside targeted programs for multicultural and First Nations carers.
- › Expand the innovative Kind Crew initiative, to connect carers to local volunteers in their area who can provide social connection, gardening and/or assistance with meals.

The challenge

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.

While all care roles are unique, multiple surveys over the last four years have previously found carers more likely to report low levels of personal wellbeing, high rates of psychological distress, social isolation and poor physical health compared to the Australian population who are not in care roles.

- › Carers living in suburbs identified as growth corridors report higher levels of financial stress and social isolation and lower levels of social connection compared to their counterparts in established areas of Melbourne.
- › First Nations carers are more likely than other carers to report having difficulty accessing services, with one in four First Nations carers reporting that services were not meeting cultural needs.
- › 55% of regional carers reported high levels of financial stress. This compares with 48% of carers in established areas of Melbourne.

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.

The opportunity

Funding to support more carers receive respite assistance will be targeted to underserviced 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.

Connecting carers to local volunteers will also expand the support available. Kind Crew is a Gather My Crew-led initiative, delivered in partnership with Carers Victoria to connect carers with coordinated, neighbourhood-based informal support.

Building on proven HelpTech and a successful pilot delivery, the initiative mobilises local networks to provide practical and social support (such as meals, gardening and social connection), strengthening outcomes for carers while reducing pressure on formal services. The initiative will work across 24 LGAs over 4 years.

Impact and cost

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

An investment of \$2.7m over 4 years in the Kind Crew initiative would see over 8,000 carers connected to local volunteers.

THREE

Intervene earlier

What we are seeking:

- › Investment in the expansion of the Step into Caring early intervention program so more carers are connected to support early in their caring role.
- › Support a partnership between Carers Victoria and Victorian health services to routinely identify and include carers in key planning processes and connect them to advice and assistance.

The challenge

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 their level of social isolation is at more than double the rate of Victorians without care roles.

The opportunities

Carers Victoria has been piloting a new, early intervention program for carers, Step into Caring.

Working in partnership with health services, the program identifies and connects 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. Funding is sought to expand and embed this program into 12 health services, via a phased approach.

Carers often describe being invisible in the health system, under-valued and not adequately engaged and assisted to support the person they are caring for, as well as not having their own needs as a carer recognized. Routine identification of carers supports safer care for patients as well as facilitating better information, referral to advice and assistance for carers, particularly valuable for those carers who are new carers.

Impacts and costs

An additional 2,400 carers over 4 years will benefit from the Step into Caring program, at a cost of \$2.75m.

One off project funding of \$2.2m over 4 years is sought to fund a joint project with health services to develop and implement an effective model.

FOUR

Expand local networks and supports

What we are seeking:

- › Fund a collaborative project with councils and neighbourhood houses to automatically link carers in their local areas to their wellbeing programs.
- › Make it easier for carers to find what they need by contributing information to a statewide, online service and information portal and providing data to support catchment based service planning.
- › Create local connections for carers in underserviced areas by allocating one-off grants to establish new carer support groups.

The challenge

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.

Carers, even those who have been caring for many years, are finding it challenging to access and navigate across multiple government service systems to find the supports they need for the person they care for and themselves, and the situation is getting worse not better.

The opportunity

We need to make it quicker and easier for carers to find what they need, when they need it. Carers have asked for more accessible and useful information about what supports are available across all levels of government, so they don't have to search for it across different service systems. They also want more investment in programs that enhance carers' navigation and advocacy skills. A one stop shop hosted on Carers Victoria's website would be a game changer in enabling carers to access the info they need quickly and easily. 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 for underserviced carer cohorts, and locations 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.

From a policy and future planning perspective, there are opportunities to use existing demographic and carers' service utilisation data to work with funded providers to better understand and ensure more effective, integrated catchment-based planning.

Impacts and cost

- › Connecting carers to council and neighbourhood programs: \$6.5 million over 4 years, benefiting up to 100,000 carers.
- › An additional 1,700 carers connected to local carer support groups, \$4.1million over 4 years.

FIVE

Recognise and include carers

What we are seeking:

Actively involve carers in service planning, advisory and policy processes by creating designated positions for people with lived experience of caring and support their skill development.

Commit to making Victorian Government departments and agencies carer friendly.

Enhance arrangements in schools, TAFEs and universities so that the needs of young carers are understood and routinely accommodated.

The challenge

Carers are everywhere. The things they do every day are not only essential to the effective operation of our health and social care services, but many of them juggle their role with paid employment, school and higher education, volunteering, and other contributions to our community.

Carers Victoria recognises that the perspectives of both carers and the people they care for are essential to help ensure well-designed, responsive and inclusive policies, practices and services. However carer voice is often not elevated or heard.

Data from the 2024 National Carer Survey shows just 12% carers reporting they feel recognised by the Government.

Caring roles can make it extremely challenging to engage in and complete education and training, with available data suggesting that young carers are significantly more likely to disengage from and/or drop out of school than their peers.

These impacts on participation in both training and employment has major impacts for the lives of carers, their future employment opportunities, and their overall financial status.

The opportunities

For unpaid carers, a seat at the table alongside technical experts, policy makers and elected officials is essential as the unique nature of their role gives them invaluable insight into policy development and service delivery. Their input can also ensure policies better respond to the needs of carers as unique service users.

Carers have also asked for support to advocate for the things that would make a tangible difference to assist them in their caring roles and look after their own health and wellbeing. Investment in an advocacy and mentorship program that would build carers' skills to engage confidently with health and other service providers as well as participate as a member of consultative and governance committees would be a critical enabler to building carer self-advocacy.

An active strategy that assists carers to enter or remain in employment and for young carers to thrive in education settings offers significant social and economic benefits not just to carers but also to employers, and others in the Victorian community.

As the state's largest employer, the Victorian Public Service is ideally positioned to lead the way in modelling a carer friendly workplace by committing to accreditation as a carer friendly workplace through its policies and practice.

Summary of costings

PILLAR	PRIORITIES FOR ACTION	WHO BENEFITS	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	TOTAL OVER 4 YEARS
Reduce the cost of caring \$29.3 million	Access to utility discounts funded by the Victorian government.	18,000	1.98m	1.98m	1.98m	1.98m	7.9m
	Discount on hospital parking fees.	60,000	1.98m	1.98m	1.98m	1.98m	7.9m
	Discount on road tolls.	Seeking advice from Transurban					
	Discount on car registration.	11,250 carers	1.12m	1.5m	1.5m	1.5m	5.6m
	Additional young carer initiatives.	15,000 young carers	1.12m	1.5m	1.5m	1.5m	5.6m
More funded assistance and respite for carers \$31.5 million	Expand funded carer respite targeted to growth corridors and rural Victoria, alongside targeted programs for multicultural and First Nations carers.	8,000	6.7m	7.0m	7.4m	7.7m	28.8m
	Invest in the Kind Crew initiative to connect carers to local volunteers for support.	Over 8,000 carers	0.86m	0.37m	0.56m	0.90m	2.7m
Intervene earlier \$4.95 million	Invest in the expansion of the Step into Caring early intervention program so more carers are connected to support early in their caring role.	2,400 extra carers	0.675m	0.67m	0.71m	0.7m	2.75m
	Fund a joint project with health services to identify and connect carers with advice and support.	Statewide benefits	0.19m	0.2m	0.9m	0.9m	2.2m

PILLAR	PRIORITIES FOR ACTION	WHO BENEFITS	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	TOTAL OVER 4 YEARS
Expand local networks & supports \$10.6 million	Fund a collaborative project with councils and neighbourhood houses to automatically link carers in their local areas to their wellbeing programs.	Over 100,000 carers each year, with a focus on carers in growth corridors and rural Victoria	0.155m	2.1m	4.09m	0.18m	6.5m
	Create local connections for carers in underserviced areas by allocating one-off grants to establish new carer support groups.	1,700 extra carers	1.0m	1.9m	1.0m	0.18m	4.1m
Recognise and include carers	Actively involve carers in service planning, advisory and policy processes by creating designated positions for people with lived experience of caring and support their skills development.	Statewide benefits					
	Enhance arrangements in schools, TAFEs and universities so that the needs of young carers are understood and routinely accommodated.	Approximately 70,000 young carers					
Totals			\$16.63m	\$19.67m	\$22.1m	\$18m	\$76.35m



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.

