



Pre-Budget Submission 2019/20

December 2018

AN AUSTRALIA THAT VALUES AND SUPPORTS ALL CARERS

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ABOUT CARERS WA

Carers WA is the peak body representing the needs and interests of carers in Western Australia and is part of a national network of Carers Associations. Carers provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who have disability, mental illness, a chronic condition, terminal illness, an alcohol or other drug issue or who are frail aged. The person they care for may be a parent, partner, sibling, child, relative, friend or neighbour. Illness and disability are non-discriminatory and the caring role can be borne by any individual at any given time, regardless of socio-economic status, age or location. Caring is a significant form of unpaid work in the community and is integral to the maintenance of our aged, disability, health, mental health, and palliative care systems. A report undertaken by Deloitte, Access Economics, 'The economic value of unpaid care in Australia in 2015', determined the replacement value of the care undertaken by carers in Australia to cost \$60.3 billion per annum.

Some important facts about carers include:

- There are 2.7 million unpaid carers in Australia. More than 856,000 carers are primary carers.
- There are more than 320,000 family and friends in a caring role in Western Australia or approximately 1 in 8 in the community.

ENQUIRIES

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Introduction

Caring is a significant form of unpaid work in the community and is integral to the maintenance of our disability, health, mental health, aged and palliative care systems. Therefore, it is vital that the resilience of those in a caring role is maintained through appropriate supports.

Carer Support Funding is declining

In a time of significant policy change in the disability and aged care sectors, funding for carer support is declining. Major reforms are changing the way health, disability and aged care services are provided and include:

- The current transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) – a once in a generation change to the system providing choice and control to people with disability.
- The My Aged Care system – giving older people greater control over the services provided to them.
- The development of the Integrated Carer Support Services (ICSS) – providing nationally consistent support services to unpaid carers.

Carers are impacted by these changes in many ways:

- Both the NDIS and My Aged Care bring a greater focus on the individual increasing their involvement in planning their lives and services. This focus does not always include the support for the carers and families around the person.
- The new systems involve changed procedures, planning and paperwork. The extra work and the added responsibility in navigating these systems often falls to carers.
- Carers are often the point of contact between care recipients and service providers. Carers need to advocate on behalf of the person they care for. In new and complex systems this can be stressful and difficult.

Funding for the following carer-specific programs has been earmarked to transition to the NDIS and My Aged Care and will be terminated by the end of 2019:

- Respite support for carers of young people with severe or profound disability;
- Young carers respite and information service;
- Mental health respite: carer support; and
- Home and Community Care services.

This pre-budget submission seeks to highlight the need to support carers through the transition to these new systems through specific care support programs.

Priority programs

The Western Australian government is committed to supporting carers through the WA Carers Strategy, launched in 2016. This strategy was developed in partnership with the Carers Advisory Council and Carers WA. It outlines a vision and outcomes for carers in WA and a series of strategies to achieve these.

In the current climate of transition to new disability and aged care systems, Carers WA have identified three key priority programs that would significantly support carers in Western Australia. These priority areas are also linked to the implementation of the WA Carers Strategy.

The three key priority programs identified are:

1. Individual advocacy for carers – additional support will assist to address strategy 3.1
2. Development of a Carers Retreat – this development will address strategy 3.2.
3. Expansion of the Carers in Employment – Be Job Ready program - this program addresses Strategies 4.2.

Priority 1 Increased individual advocacy for carers

Strategy 3.1 in the WA Carers Strategy aims to “Ensure carers can easily access information, advice and support”.

Carers WA provides a limited individual advocacy service to unpaid carers in crisis or complex situations. This one-to-one, face-to-face advocacy service is limited to internal referral and the advocate works with the carer on a maximum of two issues. The advocate provides encouragement and support by walking alongside the carer during the process of gaining resolutions to these key issues.

Advocacy for carers in the period of transition to the NDIS and My Aged Care is crucial. Over the past six months there has been a marked increase in carers seeking individual advocacy for issues around the transition to NDIS and My Aged Care. Up to five agencies providing NDIS support have been approached to provide individual advocacy to carers, but none have been able to assist. Some agencies are limited to working with the person with disability or aged care issues rather than their carer. Others are at capacity, leaving carers in crisis with little or no support.

Recommendation 1: THAT funding is provided to employ an additional advocate to provide individual support and advocacy for carers and their families in crisis. It is estimated this program would require \$170,000.

Priority 2 A Carers Retreat

Strategy 3.2 in the WA Carers Strategy aims to “Support carers to remain physically and mentally well”.

Carers WA together with Downs Syndrome Australia and Helping Minds, has proposed the development of a community retreat/respice centre for carers and other consumers/clients.

Carers WA currently has two options in terms of location, including an in principle offer of free land. The developments envisage a retreat will be built consisting of around 20 chalets along with a small education and healing centre. The centre will offer a respice centre and retreat for carers and their families. Activities to improve mental and physical wellbeing will be offered, including counselling, alternative healing, arts and sport, as well as a much needed break away. In addition, the retreat will deliver education and support to provide carers with the tools to sustain their caring role.

Given the discontinuation of a number of respice programs in the transition to the NDIS and My Aged Care, the provision of new kinds of respice will be vital to carers in maintaining their caring role.

Recommendation 2: THAT funding is provided to plan and build the carers retreat. It is estimated this development would require \$12 million in capital funding. Operating revenue would be at \$1.2 million per annum in operating funding for an initial period of three years. For the operational funding this can become self-sustainable through revenue from a variety of existing programs including the NDIS, mental health and aged care funding streams which provide for respice and education. Limited fee for service and philanthropic donations will bolster the sustainability of this venture.

Priority 3 Expansion of the Carers in Employment – Be Job Ready Program

Strategy 4.2 in the WA Carers Strategy aims to “Support carers to return to or remain in employment”.

Only 53.6 per cent of primary carers aged 15–64 years in Australia are employed, compared to 80.3 per cent of non-carers.¹ Data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey shows that approximately 3–4 per cent of Australian employees become carers each year,² and that the probability of a new carer leaving the labour force is

¹ 4430.0 Survey of Ageing Disability and Carers 2015, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, 2016.

² Hill, T Thomson, C Bittman, M & Griffiths, M 2008, *What kinds of jobs help carers combine care and employment? Australian Institute of Family Studies, Family Matters*, No.80, p.27

8 per cent. In addition, 26.7 per cent of primary carers have had to reduce work hours since becoming a carer.

It can be difficult to combine work and the caring role but many carers would like to maintain both. Returning to the workforce and gaining the flexible arrangements needed to combine work and care are challenging. Carers are often isolated, unsure of their own abilities after a break from the workforce and experience difficulties in finding work which fits with their caring role.

To address these barriers, the Carers in Employment - Be Job Ready Program was implemented by Carers WA from April 2017 to support carers to return to work. The 12-week course is held for 2 hours each week to support carers in becoming job ready. The aim is to build confidence and skills to enable participants to be ready to apply for work. This program is proving to be successful and Carers WA has received considerable interest from carers wishing to participate. The program is funded by the Department of Communities. The current funding allows for two courses to be delivered per year, delivering the program to 20 participants. There is an unmet need for the program going forward.

An extension of the program to cater for 100 participants per year would meet this unmet need. The savings to the government in welfare payments, and the additional tax contribution made by employed carers are considerable. The cost of this program is easily outweighed by the financial benefit even if only a modest number of carers find employment.

Recommendation 3: THAT the Department of Communities fund the expansion of the Carers in Employment - Be Job Ready Program. It is estimated this program would require between \$150,000 and \$200,000.