



carerswa.asn.au
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Speaking up for carers

Priorities for the WA State Election 2021

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www.carerswa.asn.au/speakingupforcarers



About carers

Carers provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who are living with disability, mental health challenges, long term health conditions, an alcohol or other drug dependency, or who are frail aged.

About Carers WA

Carers WA is the peak body representing the needs and interests of carers in WA and is part of a national network of Carers Associations.

Carers WA is the lead service provider of Carer Gateway Services in Western Australia.

The need for change

There are more than 230,000 family and friends in a caring role in Western Australia. This represents approximately 1 in 9 people in the community. 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.

Carers WA, in consultation with our membership, has identified two specific priorities to improve the lives of carers in Western Australia in the lead up to the State election.

PRIORITY AREA 1: Promotion of carer recognition

PRIORITY AREA 2: Provision of respite



PRIORITY AREA 1: Promotion of carer recognition

Promotion of carer recognition - complete the review of the Carers Recognition Act 2004

The Carers Recognition Act 2004 (the Act) was introduced in Western Australia to recognise the role of carers in the community. The Act includes the Carers Charter which outlines how carers should be treated and empowers carers to be involved in decision making.

Despite the introduction of the Act, WA carers feel that they are not well recognised by the community or the government. Only 18.1% of carers agreed or strongly agreed that the government recognised their caring role and 20.2% of carers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I feel my caring role is recognised and valued by my community.”¹

Carers WA lobbied the government to review the Act at the last state election. Subsequently, the McGowan government made a commitment to review the Act within their first term. This review is incomplete.

The review began in 2018 with carers and the community consulted about the impact of the Act and changes required to improve carer recognition. Through an online survey and several workshops, carers and organisations provided feedback to the Act review but are yet to see the results of this feedback.

A report to the Minister was originally due by the end of 2018. This report is yet to be completed. Carers are disappointed in the progress made by the current government on this review.

We call on candidates to commit to promptly completing the review of the Carers Recognition Act 2004 and to support changes which enhance the rights and recognition of carers.

¹ Briefing paper: A summary of findings from the 2020 National Carer Survey, Carers WA, November 2020. Available online at https://www.carerswa.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Summary-of-findings-2020-National-Carers-Survey_November2020.pdf

Provision of respite – commit to the provision of adequate social connection, resilience building and respite facilities to allow carers to maintain their important role.

In the recent 2020 National Carer Survey, WA carers reported higher levels of social isolation (39.7%) and psychological distress (53.1%) than their national counterparts. In addition, one in three respondents never get time out from their caring responsibilities and half of respondents reported not having enough time to keep on top of other responsibilities.

The lack of time out from the caring role has been exacerbated for carers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many services have been disrupted and the requirement for vulnerable people to isolate has resulted in increased caring duties and further isolation.

Over many years the issue of carer respite has been the most significant issue raised by carers.

Carers WA is currently aware of:

- long waitlists for carer respite;
- lack of facilities in WA providing respite services; and
- unmet demand for respite opportunities for carers.

Carers experiences of social isolation, low levels of wellbeing and lack of time away from the caring role can result in:

- carer burnout;
- increased burden on all levels of the health and mental health systems with carers and care recipients becoming unwell; and
- increased costs to government in disability and aged care services; and
- increased likelihood of care recipients being placed in full-time care.

Therefore, it is vital that the state government support the resilience of those in an unpaid caring role by funding appropriate facilities.

Carers WA proposes that the State Government provides capital and recurrent revenue funding for carer facilities in selected regional centres, to provide a base for respite, social connection, education and wellbeing activities. The proposed facilities are aimed at building the resilience of carers, minimising carer-fatigue and supporting quality informal care in the community.

Carer respite facilities should be carer directed and flexible to meet the needs of a wide range of groups. Given the great need in regional areas, it is proposed that partnerships be developed with organisations in regional locations to acquire carer respite facilities.

We call on candidates to commit to funding carer respite facilities in WA to allow carers to continue in their important roles.

PRIORITY AREA 2: Provision of respite

