

27/04/2022

The Honourable Mark McGowan MLA
Premier; Treasurer; Minister for Public Sector Management;
Federal-State Relations
13th Floor, Dumas House
2 Havelock Street
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Sent via email: wa-government@dpc.wa.gov.au

Dear Premier

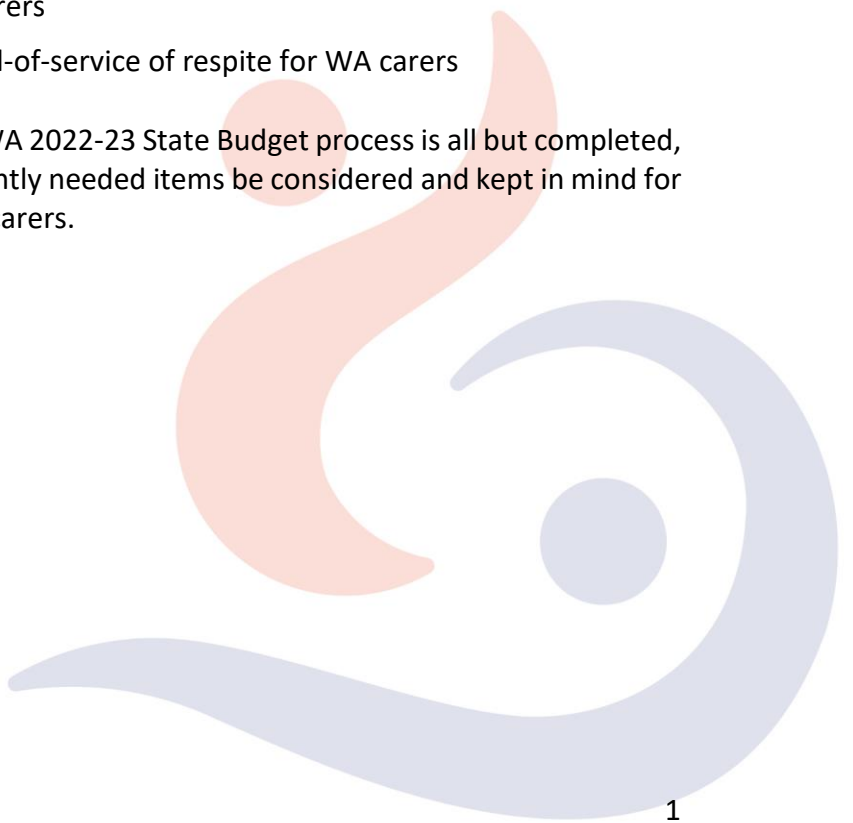
RE: CARERS WA 2022-23 & 2023-24 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

On behalf of Carers WA and the Carers WA Board, we would like to provide the Association's pre-budget submission for your consideration in State Government policy and budget priorities over the coming financial year.

Carers WA is calling for:

1. Establishment of a WA Carer Card Program
2. Cost-of-living relief for WA carers
3. Investment in a holistic model-of-service of respite for WA carers

While cognisant that the upcoming WA 2022-23 State Budget process is all but completed, we would appreciate that these urgently needed items be considered and kept in mind for initiatives in the near future for WA carers.



1.0 Establishment of a WA Carer Card Program

Carers WA is calling for the establishment of a Carer Card Program in Western Australia.

Why we need this:

A WA Carer Card Program (the Program) would assist in providing increased recognition, support and understanding for unpaid carers in WA. The Program would also give some cost-of-living relief to carers, an important consideration given recent price increases in the cost of many goods and services - on top of the already existing financial and economic challenges which carers face. Further, the card provided under the Program would also serve for identification purposes for situations when a care recipient has need of their carer, such as to health appointments or a hospital stay.

The critical and significant work that unpaid carers provide across the country is vital to supporting Australia's strained health system. In fact, the total replacement cost of this informal care provided nationally was estimated in 2020 to be \$77.9 billion per year – 1% of Australia's GDP (Deloitte Access Economics, 2020).

Given WA contains 8.7% of Australia's carers – the cost to WA to replace this informal care would be approximately \$6.8 billion per year.

All Western Australians deserve to be recognised for the work they do. However, despite their value, WA carers face considerable challenges being recognised for the work they do.

The existing Companion Card Program allows individuals with a significant and permanent disability, who may require the assistance of a companion (which may be a carer), to have the companion with them at particular events and activities. While this is an excellent initiative and of great benefit to the 18,800 eligible cardholders (National Disability Services, 2021) and their companions, this program is very much targeted to the needs of the care recipient, with use of the card contingent on the card holder being present. The program also has limited scope and eligibility which does not adequately provide for the 231,400 carers who live in Western Australia (ABS, 2019), who may have need of the Program's benefits when attending activities and venues with their care recipient, with no widespread viable alternative available for WA carers.

The establishment of such a program would be recommended to be modelled on the existing Victorian Carer Card Program, which offers carers the same benefits and concessions as with the Victoria Seniors Card Program, but adapted to suit WA carer requirements within our State.

A general indication of what the management cost to government may be for such a Program can be gleaned from applying the average management cost per Seniors Card, as reported in the WA 2021-22 State Budget (Budget Paper No. 1, Volume 2, pg 522), and applying it to a conservatively estimated 231,400 informal carers in WA (ABS, 2019).

	2020-21 Estimated Actual	2021-22 Budget Target
Average management cost per WA Seniors Card	\$6.13	\$6.56
Estimated management cost of a WA Carer Card Program	\$1.418 million	\$1.518 million
<i>Disclaimer: estimated figures of an approximate and general nature only, with further modelling recommended.</i>		



2.0 Cost-of-living relief for WA carers

Carers WA is calling for cost-of-living relief measures for WA carers, inclusive of support from the State Government for a suite of Federal initiatives to address the barriers and long-term impacts of the caring role on carers' financial and economic security.

Why we need this:

Australia's 2.65 million carers are put at a significant financial disadvantage when they take on a caring role, which often happens very suddenly and not by choice.

On average, this amounts to more than \$567,000 in lost earnings and superannuation to age 67 – consisting of \$392,500 foregone in lost wages to age 67 and a further \$175,000 in superannuation.

Australians who are informal, unpaid carers for extended periods will forego substantially more, with the most affected 10 per cent going without at least \$940,000 in lifetime income, and \$444,500 in superannuation. These financial disadvantages carers face are further outlined in recently released report *Caring costs us: The economic impact on lifetime income and retirement savings of informal carers* ([here](#)).

The need for superannuation for carers, and other initiatives to improve carers' economic and financial security, is further intensified by current cost of living pressures – carers especially face an increased risk of falling through the cracks and getting lost in the system in the midst of the resulting higher numbers of people experiencing socio-economic challenges.

As part of our Federal Election Platform ([here](#)), Carers WA and Carers Associations around the country are calling for a suite of Federal initiatives to address the barriers and long-term impacts of the caring role on carers' financial and economic security. Carers WA is calling for the State Government to support and drive these initiatives at a Federal level, inclusive of spreading awareness of the need for these urgent reforms for carers.

Cost-of-living relief measures at a State level

While cost-of-living pressures have been felt right across Australia, WA has particularly been hit hard, seeing the second highest annual growth in prices in the country at 5.7% (ABS CPI, 2022) as well as the lowest annual wage growth in the country at 2.0% (ABS WPI, 2022). By comparison, Australia saw a 3.5% annual growth in prices and 2.3% annual wage growth (ABS, 2022).

These cost-of-living pressures have only worsened in recently released data for March 2022, with the ongoing impact of the emergence of war in the Ukraine and other variables seen in the 7.6% annual growth in prices in WA.

Vulnerable people such as carers, who are already experiencing significant financial disadvantages, are of real risk of becoming further overwhelmed and disadvantaged by these additional cost pressures.

This is in addition to other challenges carers face in being 2.5 times more likely to suffer low wellbeing than the average Australian; have significantly higher levels of psychological distress; be twice as likely to have poor health; be three times as likely to regularly experience loneliness; have poorer financial wellbeing; and be less likely to be employed (Centre for Change Governance and NATSEM, University of Canberra, 2021).

Given the scale of significant and ongoing financial, economic and other challenges which are faced by carers, Carers WA recommends a suite of ongoing cost-of-living measures be implemented. A range of potential ongoing measures has been prepared below, based on existing measures provided to seniors and other concession card holders and reported on in the 2021-22 WA State Budget. These may also form part of considerations as part of establishing the proposed WA Carer Card Program.

Examples of options for ongoing cost-of living relief measures
Utilities rebates/concessions, including (but not limited to): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bunbury Water Corporation • Water Corporation Service Charge Rebate • Busselton Water Corporation • Synergy
Local Government Rates Rebates
Emergency Services Levy Rebates
Transport Concessions (Transperth, Regional Town Bus Services, Regional School Bus Services, Transwa)
Transport Concessions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light Vehicle Licence Fee Concessions • Inclusion in Travel Subsidy Schemes • Drivers Licence Fee Concessions

3.0 Investment in a holistic model-of-service of respite for WA carers

Carers WA calls for State Government investment in a holistic model-of-service for carer respite in WA, inclusive of:

- a) Funding for establishment and ongoing management of respite centres in regional centres modelled on Carers WA's existing self-funded respite centre, Pembroke Court Carers Retreat; and**
- b) Investment in additional respite funding, to be made available to carers who have completed specified preventative capacity-building programs.**

Why we need this:

Respite is the most significant issue raised by carers, both now and historically, and is needed now more than ever due to the lack of time out from the caring role being exacerbated for carers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many services, particularly in regional areas, have been disrupted over the pandemic with pre-existing issues being intensified with service provision and access to services. Over the past 12 months Carers WA has received increasing feedback from carers, service providers and health professionals regarding gaps in carer supports, inclusive of respite. These gaps and the subsequent increased pressure on carers may result in carer strain and burnout, impacting on the health, wellbeing, and safety of carers and their loved ones.

While Carers WA is further investigating these broader gaps in carer supports, access to sufficient respite remains a significant and continuing concern.

While Carers WA has established a self-funded respite centre in the Perth Metropolitan Region in response to this issue, use of the centre by carers is still limited to the comparatively restricted funding package they are able to access through Carer Gateway, or self-fund themselves. However, self-funding is often not an option for many carers already experiencing financial difficulties.

To assist in alleviating this issue, Carers WA is calling for the State Government to invest in a holistic model-of-service for carer respite in WA. This investment would be envisioned to increase the number of carer respite centres around the State, and incentivise carer participation in preventative capacity-building training programs such as those offered by Carers WA, including (but not limited to) our In-Person Peer Support Program, Carer Coaching Program and other structured social support options. On completion of a program such as these, the carer would 'unlock' additional State Government funding for respite, both incentivising participation in these programs and building the carer's capacity and resilience at the same time.

Such a model would be anticipated to offer benefits to the State Government in the form of savings on mental health services and other health services, through offering preventative measures to carers with the aim of helping them thrive in their caring roles and improve their quality of life, and so work to address stress-related health concerns before they emerge.

As previously stated, WA carers selflessly provide \$6.8 billion worth of work for comparatively little return. Helping carers maintain their health, some quality of life and easing their significant financial disadvantages, seems the least we can do in return.

We thank you for your consideration of these matters and look forward to hearing from you soon. Should you require any further information, please contact Carers WA at policy@carerswa.asn.au.

Yours faithfully



Paul Coates
Chief Executive Officer
Carers WA

Cc: The Honourable Simone Frances McGurk MLA
Minister for Child Protection; Women's Interests;
Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence; Community Services

