



**Submission to the
Australian Government**

Department of Communities

WA Youth Action Plan Consultation Paper

November 2023

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 with disability, mental ill health, long term health conditions (including a chronic condition or terminal illness), have an alcohol or drug dependency, or who are frail aged. The person they care for may be a parent, partner, sibling, child, relative, friend or neighbour.

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.

Some important facts about carers include:

- There are currently 2.65 million unpaid carers in Australia.
- There are more than 320,000 families and friends in a caring role in Western Australia.
- The replacement value of unpaid care, according to a report undertaken by Deloitte, Access Economics, “The economic value of unpaid care in Australia in 2020” is estimated at \$77.9 billion per annum.
- There are approximately 40,000 young carers attending school in WA
This does not include:
 - those young carers not attending school due to their caring role.
 - young carers aged 18 -25yrs

Carers WA acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures; and to Elders both past and present.

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Key Recommendations

1. Include **Young Carers** (8 – 25 years) as a recognised cohort of youth in the WA Youth Action Plan alongside the pre- identified diversity of youth that includes First Nations young people, youth with disability (including mental health), members of the LGBTIQ+ community, and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
2. Adopt a similar model applied by [Positive Partnerships](#) in collaboration with the WA Department of Education by providing compulsory professional development training for school staff and other educators on how to better identify, engage with and support young carers.
3. Broader awareness raising initiatives on recognition, identification and inclusion of young carers.
4. Young carer identification be included within all service delivery intakes, as well as strong referral pathways to young carer supports.
5. Carers WA recommends the adoption of reforms pertaining to young carers which were highlighted within the final report of the Senate Select Committee on Work and Care, including:
 - Better data collection pertaining to young carers.
 - Navigational support and transitioning between school and employment including vocational support and career advice.
 - More flexible scheduling and assessments within the school system.
 - Recognition of caring roles and translation into formal job skills and learning qualifications in particularly for entry into the caring industries.
 - Tiered models of service delivery, improving access and holistic support to young carers.
 - Reliable funding and staffing to services engaged in youth services.
 - Significant investment into public mental health services of young people.¹

¹ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023)

1.0 Introduction

Carers WA appreciates and welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Department of Communities' WA Youth Action Plan Consultation Paper. Young carers are amongst the four most at risk groups of young people in Australia,² yet are often hidden, forgotten, and misunderstood in government policy and procedure development.

This submission advocates for the widespread recognition, inclusion and representation of young carers in legislation, policy and services, including in service delivery intakes.

1.1 Who are young carers?

For the purposes of this submission, a young carer is a person aged 8-25 who provides care and assistance to a person with disability, a chronic illness, mental ill health, or frailty.³ This care may be provided to a friend or family member; may be as a primary or secondary carer; and may be ongoing or intermittent.

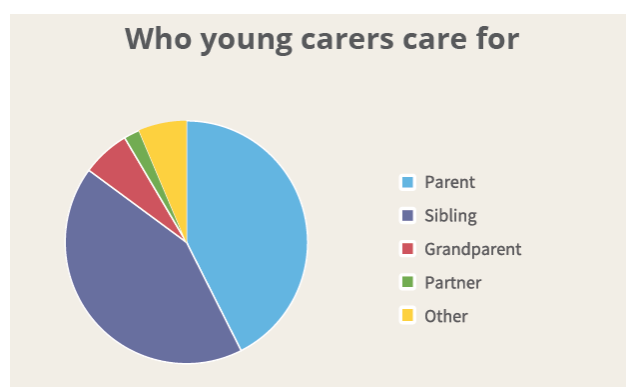


Figure 1 Diversity of the young carer role (Little Dreamers, 2021)

Of all children & young people across Australia, it is estimated that there are between 3 – 4 young carers in every classroom (approximately 32,800 young carers in the Perth metropolitan area under the age of 18).⁴ This estimate excludes young carers who are disengaged from school, aged 18-25 years, or who reside in regional and remote WA.

An estimated 272,000 young people aged 15 – 24yrs provide informal care to someone needing assistance, either due to disability or old age (excluding mental health).⁵ This care includes both practical & emotional support including assisting with medication, supporting with showering, toileting & other personal care tasks, household chores & looking after siblings.⁶ Due to their caring responsibilities young carers are often more mature, independent, compassionate, resilient, and empathetic than their peers.⁷ This lived experience provides them with significant capability to contribute to the development of legislation, policy and services that impact them.

² (Redmond and Skattebol et al, 2016).

³ (Government of Western Australia, 2004)

⁴ (WA Department of Education, 2021)

⁵ (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019)

⁶ (Little Dreamers, 2021)

⁷ (Little Dreamers, 2021)

In its final report, the federal Senate Select Committee on Work and Care recognised that young carers are under identified, as data only exists for those young people who are claiming some form of social security payment such as carers allowance.⁸ Young carers are at greater risk of high psychological distress, are at higher risk of financial distress,⁹ are more susceptible to social isolation, financial & educational disadvantage, unemployment, and poor physical & mental health.^{10,11} These issues were documented prior to COVID.

Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in higher inequality and poverty than previously.¹² As at September 2021, 1.7 million people were on the lowest income support payment, a figure 25% higher than prior to the pandemic, with these payments sitting below the poverty line.¹³ Prior to the pandemic, 16.6% of WA children were already living in poverty – equating to 105,000 children and young people under the age of 17 years.¹⁴ Over 2022 to 2023, young carers aged 15-24 years also saw a much higher than average decline in wellbeing.¹⁵

⁸ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023)

⁹ (Centre for Change Governange and NATSEM, University of Canberra, 2021)

¹⁰ (Carers Australia, 2021)

¹¹ (Little Dreamers, 2021)

¹² (Davidson, 2022)

¹³ (Davidson, 2022)

¹⁴ (Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia, 2023)

¹⁵ (Myleck & Schirmer, 2023)

2.0 The WA Youth Action Plan

2.1 Reaching Your Potential

The nature of the young carer's role means that it is likely to be a long-term caring role, with concerns for this being empowering and supporting young carers to have the opportunity to access further education and employment opportunities after high school. If not supported to do so, this places young carers in the group of most impacted carers that will lose at least \$940,000 in lifetime income and \$444,500 in retirement savings to age 67,¹⁶ due to the impact of their caring responsibilities on their ability to work or study.

Considering that the average lifetime cost per person for carer concessions is \$553,600, the cost to government of inaction is also significant.¹⁷

A significant issue for young carers is recognition and self-identification. Awareness raising and identification of young carers is a key component of providing a solution to combat this issue, including within service delivery intakes. This also assists to connect young carers early to supports and peer groups of other young carers.

The final report of the Senate Select Committee on Work and Care identified that young carers have lower reading and numeracy NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) scores in Year 9 compared to their peers.¹⁸ Education attainment is a known direct predictor of future health, employment and welfare prospects.

Further, *Skills Road 2021/2022 Employment Survey* (mental health markers and after schools pathway) included young carers in their measurements. Of particular interest, was the measurement of youth "optimism" towards their future. The study found that those youth caring for a family member had the lowest score of optimism (44%) while simultaneously they scored the highest (88%) when it came to willingness to give time to others in need.

Many carers (youth and families) have also spoken about their desire for better information & education across society & within the service system. They suggested embedding carer education within the school curriculum as well as more broad-based awareness raising across the community.

This framework is already in existence for meeting the needs of children with Autism engaged in the school system and is championed by [Positive Partnerships](#). Positive Partnerships provide credentialed professional development training for school staff and other educators to promote awareness and strengths-based approaches to meeting the needs of children with neurodiversity and the impact on their families.

¹⁶ (Furnival & Cullen, 2022)

¹⁷ (Australian Government Actuary, 2020)

¹⁸ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023)

As such, Carers WA recommends the WA Youth Action Plan include:

1. Include **Young Carers** (8 – 25 years) as a recognised cohort of youth in the WA Youth Action Plan alongside the pre- identified diversity of youth that includes First Nations young people, youth with disability (including mental health), members of the LGBTIQ+ community, and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
2. Adopt a similar model applied by [Positive Partnerships](#) in collaboration with the WA Department of Education by providing compulsory professional development training for school staff and other educators on how to better identify, engage with and support young carers.
3. Broader awareness raising initiatives on recognition, identification and inclusion of young carers.
4. Young carer identification be included within all service delivery intakes, as well as strong referral pathways to young carer supports.

2.2 Jobs

The Senate Select Committee on Work and Care outlined in their final report a number of issues relating to workplace access and participation for young carers, including that young carers were of significant disadvantage in comparison to their peers.¹⁹

The report outlined that there is a vital link between school and work, and the disadvantage that young carers experience cause further long term consequences such as limited:

- workplace participation and job security;
- career progression and promotion;
- opportunities for further study or training;
- financial security; and
- a limited sense of belonging and wellbeing.²⁰

Further, the report outlined that there are gaps in data and supports for young carers aged 18 – 25 years, particularly as they transition between high school, tertiary education and employment.²¹

5. Carers WA recommends the adoption of reforms pertaining to young carers which were highlighted within the final report of the Senate Select Committee on Work and Care, including:
 - Better data collection pertaining to young carers.

¹⁹ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023)

²⁰ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023)

²¹ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023)

- Navigational support and transitioning between school and employment including vocational support and career advice.
- More flexible scheduling and assessments within the school system.
- Recognition of caring roles and translation into formal job skills and learning qualifications in particularly for entry into the caring industries.
- Tiered models of service delivery, improving access and holistic support to young carers.
- Reliable funding and staffing to services engaged in youth services.
- Significant investment into public mental health services of young people.²²

2.4 Mental Health

The levels of care which young carers provide vary widely,²³ as demonstrated in Figure 2. However, regardless of the level of care provided, the unpaid informal caring role is associated with adverse impacts on mental health. This is true of any caring role, regardless of age, but young people who carried out any caring at the age of 14/15 years had poorer mental health compared to those with no caring role.²⁴

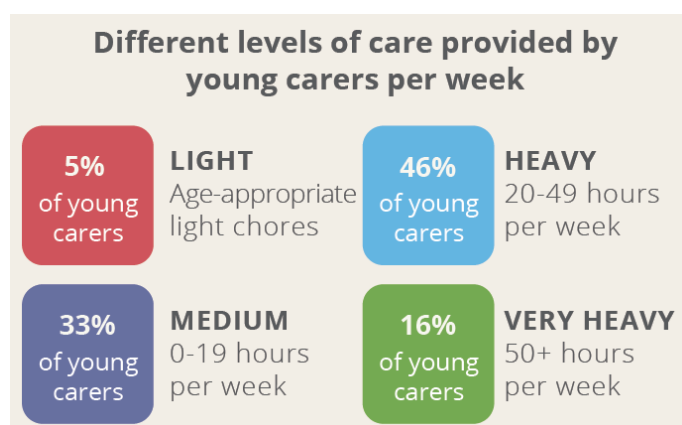


Figure 2 Different levels of care provided by young carers (Little Dreamers, 2021)

Martinez et al state that siblings of children with a chronic health condition may be at increased risk of depression. Findings of their study indicated the need for *'targeted interventions to support the psychological well-being of siblings of children with chronic health conditions.'*²⁵

Further, the final report of the Senate Select Committee into Work and Care outlined that many young carers struggle with their own mental health challenges. Complex family situations whereby the adults in the family are experiencing substance dependency, and where family domestic violence is evident, can result in young people assuming the parenting responsibility for their siblings – as well as for the adults in the family.²⁶

²² (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023)

²³ (Little Dreamers, 2021)

²⁴ (King, Singh, & Disney, 2021)

²⁵ (Martinez, et al., 2022)

²⁶ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023)

Recent independent analysis of the WA responses to the 2022 National Carer Survey also found that recognition has a significant direct effect on a carer's wellbeing²⁷. Further, the more recognised and valued a carer felt by their community, service providers, family and friends – the higher their wellbeing became.²⁸ In connection to this finding, social supports were also determined to have the greatest direct impact on carer wellbeing, and had a mediatory effect on the relationship between recognition and wellbeing – meaning that improvements in a carer's social supports and levels of recognition could in turn reduce the impact of their caring role on their wellbeing.²⁹

This reinforces the need for significant investment into public mental health services of young people, as called for by the Senate Select Committee into Work and Care, as well as increased recognition and awareness of young carers – including accompanying strengthened referral pathways to young carer supports and peer networks.

2.5 Help When Its Needed Most

The final report from the Senate Select Committee into Work and Care recognised that young carers are under identified. Under identification was particularly pinpointed as a reason why so many young carers have difficulty accessing services and receiving wrap around holistic supports. This is part, was attributed to stigma about their caring role, and the potential judgements around their family circumstances.³⁰

The committee also heard evidence that young carers living in rural and remote areas often travelled to different towns in order to protect their own identity or for fear of repercussions.³¹

This concept was further discussed by Addo et al, with the main three implications being that:

- 'Failure to provide sufficient professional support to young carers can aggravate the negative consequences associated with their caring roles.
- Social workers and other professional can strengthen their collaboration with educators, work supervisors, and other support agencies to address the challenges of providing care at a young age.
- Given that caring roles often influence early maturity and self-sufficiency for young carers, social workers and other professionals can consider using strength-based approaches in addressing challenges associated with providing care, including those related to support-seeking behaviour.³²

²⁷ (SAGE Design & Advisory, 2023)

²⁸ (SAGE Design & Advisory, 2023)

²⁹ (SAGE Design & Advisory, 2023)

³⁰ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023)

³¹ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023)

³²

Increased awareness of the barriers faced by young carers can help to counteract these issues, and help young carers to connect early with supports and other young carer peer networks. This needs to be reflected accordingly within the WA Youth Action Plan.

3.0 Conclusion

Should the Department require any further information regarding the comments included within this submission, or assistance from the perspective of WA carers, Carers WA would be delighted to assist. Please contact the Carers WA Policy Team at policy@carerswa.asn.au.

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