



2027-2028 WA State Budget Submission

Carers Across System Reforms

Executive Summary

Western Australia is experiencing significant reform across the disability, aged care and early intervention systems. While these reforms are intended to improve service sustainability, they are increasingly transferring costs, risks and responsibilities onto unpaid carers. Across NDIS reforms, aged care reforms and the rollout of foundational supports such as Thriving Kids, carers are being expected to absorb service gaps, coordinate fragmented systems and provide increasing levels of care without corresponding investment in their wellbeing, capacity or sustainability.

This transfer of responsibility is occurring at a time when the unpaid care system is already under strain. More than **320,000¹** Western Australians provide unpaid care valued at approximately **\$6.6 billion** annually. **Demand for care is expected to increase by 23% by 2030**, while the number of carers is projected to increase by only 16%², resulting in a projected shortfall of 22,400 carers and more than \$600 million in replacement costs³. The NDIS changes alone are expected to remove **94 million hours** of paid care across Australia⁴, meaning carers and family members will pick up these extra support requirements.

Without targeted action, Western Australia risks replacing one sustainability challenge with another. Cost shifting onto carers may reduce expenditure in one part of the system but ultimately creates increased pressure across health, mental health, aged care, education and community services. Strategic investment in carers represents an investment in system sustainability, workforce participation, community resilience and preventative service delivery.

Carers WA is seeking investment in three priority areas:

1. A Carer Hardship and Short Break Grants Program.
2. Dedicated investment in young carers.
3. Formal inclusion of carers in reform implementation.



320,000
carers in WA



Care valued at
\$6.6 billion
annually

Recommended WA Government Budget Response



1.0 Establish a Carer Hardship and Short Break Grants Program

Budget Ask

Allocate \$800,000 per annum to establish a dedicated WA Carer Grants Program comprising:

- \$350,000 for Carer Hardship Grants.
- \$450,000 for Carer Short Break Grants.

Financial stress and social isolation are significant contributors to carer burnout. Even relatively small financial shocks can undermine a carer's ability to continue providing care.

A dedicated grants program would provide targeted assistance where it can have the greatest impact. Hardship grants would assist carers experiencing acute financial pressure, including costs associated with housing, utilities, food and transport. Short Break Grants would enable carers to access respite opportunities, reconnect with informal support networks and maintain wellbeing.

The program is designed as both a crisis response and an early intervention measure. By providing support before problems escalate, the program would reduce pressure on health, housing, welfare and crisis services while helping carers remain in their caring roles for longer and reducing burnout risk.

The program would be governed under the Carers WA Board and Chief Executive Officer, building on the organisations strong reputation for management of programs, including a previous highly successful carer short-breaks program.

Call to Action

Carers WA calls on the WA Government to establish a dedicated Carer Hardship and Short Break Grants Program to provide practical support for carers experiencing financial hardship, strengthen resilience and help sustain Western Australia's unpaid care workforce.



Respite is the highest unmet need for WA carers⁵



Carers who access respite have a level of wellbeing higher than other carers⁷



55% of WA carers experience financial distress⁶



51% of WA carers experience high or very high levels of psychological distress

An average of

63%

of WA carers said that aged care, NDIS and mental health services did not allow them to properly rest and recharge⁸

'More respite/support and acknowledgement of carers because we are so undervalued for the workload we have.'

- Feedback from a WA Carer

2.0 Invest in Young Carers

Budget Ask \$600,000

Invest in statewide young carer identification, peer support and school engagement initiatives to improve recognition and support for young carers across Western Australia⁹.

Investment should focus on:

- Expansion of Young Carer Peer Support Programs.
- School-based implementation and workforce support.
- Development of a statewide identification framework.
- Regional and remote service delivery.
- Family-centred referral and support pathways.

UWA's evaluation of the Carers WA Young Carers Peer Support Group Toolkit found that school-based identification and support programs improve educational engagement, confidence, social connection and access to support for young carers. The findings demonstrate that schools are a critical early-intervention setting for identifying young carers and reducing the risk of poor educational and wellbeing outcomes.

The evaluation also found that workforce capacity, staff training and implementation support are essential for successful statewide rollout. Investment in these enablers would help schools identify and support young carers earlier, improving long-term educational and workforce outcomes while reducing the social and economic costs of unmet need. Without targeted action, many young carers will remain unrecognised within the education system, increasing the risk of lifelong disadvantage.

Call to Action

Carers WA calls on the WA Government to make young carers visible within education and community systems through sustained investment in evidence-based programs that improve outcomes and prevent long-term disadvantage.



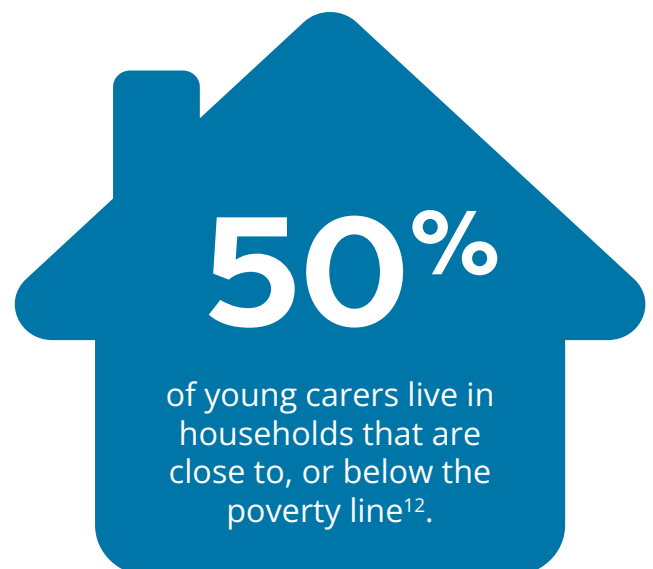
1 in 6 young people undertake caring responsibilities¹⁰.



Young carers are among the four most at-risk groups of young Australians¹³.



2:1 young people are likely not be engaged in work or study, than other young people without a caring role¹¹.



3.0 Embed Carers in Reform Implementation

Budget Ask

Ensure carers are formally included in the implementation of disability, aged care and early intervention reforms.

Carers are essential partners in care and should be recognised as key stakeholders in reform design, implementation and evaluation. This includes:

- Formal consultation with carers.
- Carer-specific roles and representation on advisory and governance groups.
- Assessment of reform impacts on carers.
- Monitoring of unintended consequences for carers and families.

Embedding carers in reform processes will improve implementation outcomes while helping government identify emerging risks and service gaps earlier.

Practical recognition for carers has a significant direct impact on their wellbeing¹⁴. The more recognised and valued a carer feels – the higher their wellbeing becomes¹⁵.

Call to Action

Carers WA calls on the WA Government to ensure carers are recognised as partners in reform and that the impacts of major policy changes on carers are actively monitored and addressed.

Who recognises carers?

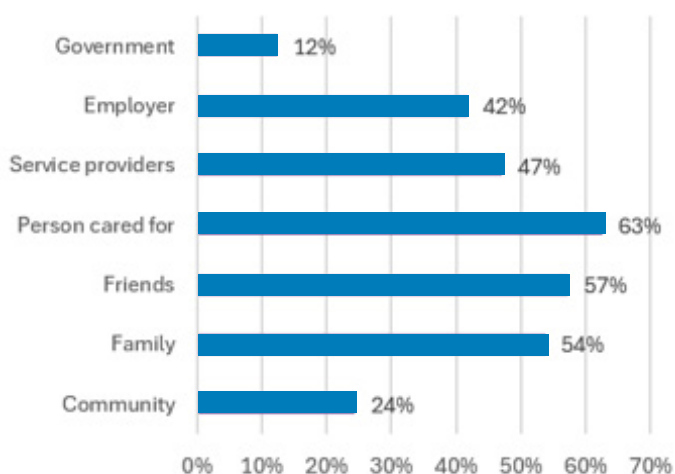


Figure 1 How recognised do WA carers feel by these groups (Carers NSW, 2024)

Conclusion

Western Australia's unpaid carers are absorbing an increasing share of the responsibilities created by major reforms across disability, aged care and early intervention systems. While unpaid care remains one of the State's most valuable assets, continued reliance on carers without corresponding investment risks undermining the sustainability of the very systems reform is intended to strengthen.

Investment in carer recognition, young carers, hardship support and reform safeguards represents a practical response to the growing transfer of costs onto carers.

Supporting carers today will reduce future expenditure, strengthen communities and help ensure Western Australia's health and care systems remain sustainable into the future.

Carers WA urges the WA Government to invest in carers as an essential workforce and recognise that sustainable reform requires sustainable caring.



Voices of WA Carers

'Most carers I know have lost fulfilling careers, have limited superannuation, and quite simply cannot afford many of the things that non-carers can. My future and the futures of my carer friends quite frankly look very bleak. I'm fearful for my future and future security. I certainly won't have children who have any capacity to look after me if I become ill or when I'm old.'

'There needs to be more recognition of carers outside of capital cities. Country families don't have access to the same services, respite, care and facilities that city families do. It makes a stressful situation even more difficult. There needs to be more conversation about the financial burden this places on families. Many carers are forced to leave the workforce to care.'

- Feedback from WA Carers



1. (Government of Western Australia, Department of Communities, 2021)
2. (Deloitte Access Economics, 2020)
3. Derived figure from (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022); (Deloitte Access Economics, 2020).
4. (Jericho & Slawomirski, 2026)
5. (Carers NSW, 2024)
6. (Carers NSW, 2024)
7. (Carers NSW, 2024)
8. (Carers NSW, 2024)
9. (UWA, 2025)
10. (Doery, Arnup, & Edwards, 2024)
11. (ABS, 2018)
12. (Little Dreamers, 2024)
13. (UWA, 2025)
14. (SAGE Design & Advisory, 2023)
15. (SAGE Design & Advisory, 2023)