



Carers WA
Conference 2026

Thurs 8 Oct • Optus Stadium



**Navigating
Care Together:**

Connection, Collaboration and Growth

Program Handbook

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Welcome to the Carers WA Conference 2026

On behalf of Carers WA, I have great pleasure in welcoming all those attending in-person at Optus Stadium, and online across the state, to the Carers WA 2026 Conference.

2026 is an especially poignant year for Carers WA, as we proudly celebrate 30 years of supporting carers across Western Australia. This significant milestone anniversary provides an important opportunity to reflect on our journey, acknowledge the impact of our work and reaffirm our commitment to supporting carers now and into the future.

This one day conference is WA's premier event, leading into National Carers Week 2026, Sunday 11th – Saturday 17th October. It's a time to recognise and celebrate the 3 million Australians, including the estimated 320,000 in WA, who provide unpaid care and support to someone with disability, mental health challenges, chronic condition, terminal illness, an alcohol or other drug issue, or who is frail aged.

Aligning with this year's conference theme of "Navigating Care Together; Connection, Collaboration and Growth", our program has been developed to explore what matters most to carers in the ever-changing landscape of caring across WA.

The conference, emceed by broadcaster and discussion facilitator, Tim McMillan, comprises a diverse range of content, including from our keynote speaker, Ros Thomas, and Fireside Chat special guests, Professor David Blacker and his wife Kirsten. Plus, sessions from sector professionals and panel conversations with carers and sector leaders. We warmly acknowledge the carers attending today and reaffirm our ongoing commitment to supporting them. We have a wealth of great experience and knowledge amongst our carers, and we welcome delegates to share their own unique wisdom and inspiration for others by contributing to our Wisdom Wall. Carers WA hopes delegates leave the conference feeling inspired, informed and connected.

Carers WA acknowledges and sincerely thanks our major supporter, Lotterywest, and other sponsors, who have helped us make this event possible with free registration for all. Find out more about our sponsors by visiting our conference webpage. Welcome and thank you for attending the Carers WA Conference 2026 and for being a special part of our 30th anniversary celebration.



A stylized blue ink signature of Richard Newman.

■ **RICHARD NEWMAN**

Chief Executive Officer - Carers WA





Government of Western Australia
Department of Health

Supporting carers, improving care

The Department of Health is proud to be a sponsor for the Carers WA Conference 2026.

We're joining carers, families, and communities in celebrating 30 years of Carers WA and recognising the incredible contribution carers make every day.

Carers have an essential role in supporting the health, wellbeing, and quality of life of the people they care for. We're committed to ensuring carers and those they care for can access the health care, services, and information they need, when they need it.

The Department of Health proudly supports these Carer WA programs:

Prepare to Care Hospital Program

Carer Representation

health.wa.gov.au

15234 AU/26

Diversity & Inclusion

Carers WA is committed to understanding, embracing and celebrating the rich and multi-dimensional experiences that shape our lives and aim to ensure that everyone who engages with the organisation feels welcome and included. Carers WA welcomes all people of every nationality, race, culture, gender, sexual orientations, religious belief, social background, ability, family status, marital status, age or political opinion.



Acknowledgement of Country

Carers WA acknowledges and honours the Whadjuk Noongar Nation's lands, water, customs and culture of which the Carers WA Head Office and our conference venue is located.

Carers WA recognises our services reach beyond the Perth (Boorloo) region, and so we also acknowledge the cultural diversity of First Nations Peoples across our state and throughout Australia. Artwork credit to Rohin Kickett.



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Carers WA Conference 2026 Speakers

Carers WA is pleased to present our conference speakers including:

Ros Thomas: Keynote Speaker

In her 35 years of journalism across radio, television, print and publishing, Ros Thomas has reported from newsrooms, bureaus and international crisis zones around the world.

She is currently the features writer for The Weekend Australian Magazine specialising in social affairs. For her work in the Magazine last year, she was named the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance's Freelance Journalist of the Year.

Ros was made a Winston Churchill Fellow in 2024 for her global research into the emerging epidemic of loneliness, and is a novelist with two West Australian best-sellers under her belt.

This year, The Weekend Australian Magazine has published her explosive investigation into the AI cheating crisis at universities, and seminal essays on Autism and Dementia.

For eight years, Ros was the deputy chair of the WA Government's Carers Advisory Council. She is the sole carer for her mother, diagnosed with Dementia sixteen years ago.

When not furiously writing, she is a mother of three, none of whom read anything she writes!



Clinical Professor David Blacker AM, MB BS, FRACP: Fireside Chat Guest Speaker

David Blacker is currently the honorary medical director, and board member of Parkinson's WA, research advisor to the Perron Institute for neurological and translation science, clinical professor of Neurology at the University of Western Australia, and a board member of Parkinson's Australia.

For most of his career he was a stroke neurologist and researcher. In 2018, he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease (PD), which contributed to him retiring from clinical practice in 2023. He writes and speaks widely about his personal experience with PD and hopes to assist others by sharing this. He aims to help his medical colleagues gain a greater insight into living with PD and to improve their communication and interactions with people with PD. His book "My FIGHT with PD, a neurologist with Parkinson's disease" which covers these issues has been short listed for the WA Premier's Book Awards 2026.

He continues to play an active role in several PD related fields such as a support clinic for newly diagnosed PD, Fazio's Fighters boxing training, a weekly yoga programme for people with PD along with his wife Kirsten and a support group who have PD themselves.

Our MC will facilitate the Fireside Chat with David and his wife Kirsten.

During the day, Kirsten, a qualified yoga instructor and medical professional, will instruct a short gentle seated yoga session for the wellbeing and relaxation of all delegates.



Official Opening

The official opening of Carers WA Conference 2026 will take place at 8:50am in the River View Room.

Tim McMillan Master of Ceremonies (MC)

Tim McMillan is an award-winning media professional with extensive experience in national TV, radio, and digital platforms. He is a first-class master of ceremonies and facilitator, currently working in media and other fields, including as a presenter on Channel 7 News Perth.

When he's not working, Tim is a family man and spends as much time as possible at the beach with his young son. He's also a massive sports fan and loves cooking and reading.

Tim is delighted to join the Carers WA Conference 2026 as emcee and facilitator.



Aunty Brenda Larsen Welcome to Country

Aunty Brenda Larsen is a respected Whadjuk Ballardong Elder and an appointed Elder on the Carers WA Community Cultural Advisory Group.

In this role, she shares cultural knowledge and guidance to support Carers WA in becoming more culturally safe, respectful, and inclusive of First Nations carers.

Aunty Brenda is a Noongar language expert who coordinates the free online MOOC, Noongar Language and Culture, at Curtin University.

She also works for the City of Swan and works with youth in custody. As a mother and carer, Aunty Brenda has lived experience of supporting her adult son, who has an acquired brain injury.

She is a strong and dedicated advocate for his rights, wellbeing, and quality of life.



Hon Matthew Swinbourn BA LLB MLC

Minister for the Environment; Climate Resilience; Community Services; Homelessness

Matthew first joined the Labor Party while at UWA. Admitted as a lawyer in 2014, Matthew worked extensively for trade unions as a senior lawyer and industrial officer. He also lectured in industrial relations at the University of Notre Dame.

In 2017, he was elected to the Western Australian Legislative Council, representing the East Metropolitan Region. Re-elected in 2021, he held various Parliamentary Secretary roles, including to the Attorney General, as well as Mines and Petroleum, Energy, Industrial Relations, and Training and Workforce Development.

He is a strong advocate for rare diseases, founding the Parliamentary Friends of People with Rare and Undiagnosed Diseases in 2021.

Matthew lives in Perth with his wife, Glenda, and their three adult children. He is an avid West Coast Eagles supporter.



Linda Wayman

Carers WA Board Chair

Linda Wayman is a Non-Executive Director with more than 25 years' experience. She is currently the chair of Carers WA, and on the Tourism Australia board, and most recently was the chair of Australia's North West and served on the board of Carers Australia.

Linda is a former WA Telstra Businesswoman of the Year and Advertising Person of the Year. She is a graduate of the Australia Institute of Company Directors and has a Masters of Communications..



All Sessions

All in-person sessions are in the *River View Room*. Delegates are requested to be seated in readiness for each session to commence.

Carers WA acknowledges all online delegates across WA, including those at regional hubs in Albany, Broome, Wongan Hills, and Manjimup.

Panel 1: In Conversation with Carers with Lived Experience

The panel introduces four carers, each with a unique lived experience. Each carer will share and discuss their caring journey. Their personal stories and circumstances may resonate with carers, or with those who support carers.

Panel 2: Ask WA's Sector Leaders

As the care landscape across WA continues to evolve, this panel brings together Carers WA CEO Richard Newman and three other leaders from the community sector. In conversation, each leader will share professional perspectives and respond to a range of general questions from delegates.

The Wisdom Wall

Every carer brings immense knowledge and wisdom shaped by their unique lived experience. Carers WA invites delegates to share their wisdom and inspire other conference attendees.

In-person delegates: **At the Wisdom Wall**

Online delegates: **At the Wisdom Wall tab**

Contribute by leaving a brief (up to 15 words) positive tip or words of wisdom or advice to help support and inspire other carers.

For example:

“Self-care is vital—look after yourself to stay strong

“Your strength and love as a carer are remarkable

Contributions shared via the Wisdom Wall will be collated and summarised by Carers WA in conclusion to the conference.





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- Support for Adults with Mental Health Challenges
- Mental Health Education





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General Access

Delegate name lanyards are sponsored by **Halo Care and Support**. Please wear it at all times to access conference areas.

Our *Coffee Cart*, sponsored by **HaDSCO**, is offering delegates barista made coffee and other hot beverages during arrivals and breaks.

Our *Morning Tea* and *Lunch Break* is sponsored by **Ishar**. Enjoy delicious catering while networking with other delegates.

Please allow time to visit our *Exhibition Tables*, contribute to the *Wisdom Wall* and register a question for our *Sector Leader Panel*. Please be seated in the River View Room in readiness for the start of each session.



The Lookout Lounge

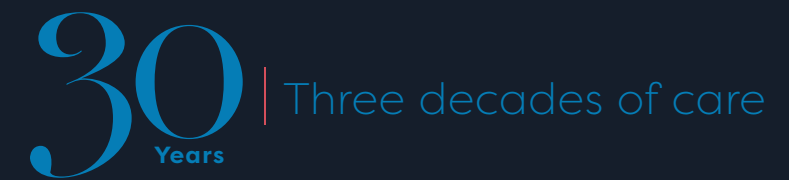
The Lookout Lounge is sponsored by **YACWA**. It is on *Champions Terrace*, open at all times during the conference. It is a calming space for quiet relaxation and general wellbeing, overlooking the stadium ground. This relaxing space offers delegates a break from conference sessions at their own leisure.



Carers WA 30th Anniversary Sundowner

For those delegates who have pre-registered to attend, join us between 4.00pm and 6.00pm in celebration of *Carers WA 30th Anniversary*.

Mingle and connect with other delegates whilst enjoying refreshments and delicious cocktail food. Hosted on *Champions Terrace* with a breathtaking view of the Stadium, this is the perfect opportunity to unwind, network and celebrate with fellow conference attendees and the *Carers WA team*.



Sponsor Exhibitor Tables

Carers WA welcomes the organisations hosting Exhibitor Tables on *Champions Terrace*. During arrival and conference breaks, delegates are encouraged to visit the tables and speak with the friendly hosts, who can provide valuable information about the supports and services available to carers in WA.

- Carers WA
- Government of Western Australia – Department of Health
- Ability WA
- Umbrella
- Alike WA
- Life Ready Mobile
- Companion Home Care
- Nurse Next Door
- Identity WA
- PHASE
- Avivo: Live Life
- Services Australia
- Helping Minds
- Simply Helping
- Dementia Australia



Session Descriptions

Finding Your Way: Caring, Connecting and Navigating Disability

Presented by Renay Eade, Ability WA

Renay is a lifelong carer of a family member living with disability and holds a Masters degree in Disability. She has worked in the WA Disability Sector for over 25 years and is currently the Chief Quality and Governance Officer at Ability WA, one of WA's leading disability service providers. This session will recognise the challenges posed by disability sector reforms and provide insights into navigating complex support systems. Connecting with others is the key to finding the support, expertise, network and roadmap needed when caring for a loved one or friend living with disability.



Embracing Support and Care for the Older Person: Knowledge is Power

Presented by David Thompson, Advocare

David is a Specialist Financial Advocate at Advocare, supporting older adults, their families and representatives to navigate and resolve issues with aged care services. He has over 15 years' experience across residential and home care. David advocates for older people's aged care rights, supports people experiencing elder abuse, and assists those, with their carers, to navigate the complexities of the aged care system. This session will acknowledge that the journey of engaging with aged care services can be overwhelming and worrying, filled with uncertainty. By assisting the carer to understand what protections are in place for their loved one will equip them with the knowledge to have faith in the system to ensure quality care. Plus empower them to be able to continue to be a voice for what their loved one deserves and has the right to.



Wellbeing and Wisdom Shared for Carers

Presented by Adam Birch, Carers WA

Adam is an accredited Clinical Member and Supervisor of the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia. He is currently the Manager of the Counselling Team at Carers WA. For over 9 years, Adam has supported the caring community with therapeutic workshops, support groups and counselling. Adam advocates for carers to receive acknowledgement and recognition for their sacrifices from the community and from themselves. This session summarises the collective wisdom and positivity shared on our Wisdom Wall. Carers can reflect on their identities and be encouraged to make changes in their life if wishing to feel more empowered, more connected and true to themselves, even when things may be changing around them.



Optus Stadium, River View Room

8:00am – 8:40am	Registrations Open at Welcome Desk Exhibition Tables and Wisdom Wall Please be seated by 8:45am
8:50am – 9:45am	Welcome and Introductions: MC, Tim McMillan Welcome to Country: Aunty Brenda Larsen Ministerial Address: Hon Matthew Swinbourn BA LLB MLC; Minister for the Environment; Climate Resilience; Community Services; Homelessness Official Opening: Linda Wayman, Carers WA Board Chair
9:45am – 10:25am	Keynote Speaker: Ros Thomas
10:25am – 10:55am	Morning Tea Exhibition Tables and Wisdom Wall
11:00am – 11:40pm	Panel 1 The diversity of carers with lived experience Four carers share and discuss their own carer journey
11:40am – 12:15pm	Finding Your Way: Caring, Connecting and Navigating Disability Renay Eade Chief Quality and Governance Officer, Ability WA
12:15pm – 12:30pm	Gentle, Seated Chair Yoga Wellbeing and relaxation with Kirsten Blacker
12:30pm – 1:15pm	Lunch Exhibition Tables and Wisdom Wall
1:20pm – 2:00pm	Fireside Chat with Professor David Blacker and his wife, Kirsten
2:00pm – 2:35pm	Embracing Support and Care for the Older Person – Knowledge is Power David Thompson Specialist Financial Advocate, Advocare

2:50pm – 3:35pm	Panel 2 Ask our 4 x Sector Leaders Richard Newman – CEO, Carers WA Monique Williamson – CEO, MIFWA - Mental Illness Fellowship Of WA Etta Palumbo – CEO, Neurological Council of WA Ricki Smith – CEO, Access Care Network Australia
3:35pm – 3:55pm	Wellbeing and Wisdom For Carers Adam Birch Manager - Counselling Team, Carers WA
3:55pm – 4:00pm	Official Closing Richard Newman CEO, Carers WA
4:00pm – 6:00pm	Carers WA 30th Anniversary Sundowner For those who have pre-registered to attend, please join us on Champions Terrace for refreshments in a relaxed and informal setting.



Janelyn – Carer Profile

I am a mother and carer for my eldest son, Rudy, who is 27 years old and lives with Right Hemiplegia Cerebral Palsy. I also have a 15-year-old son and have been married to my husband for 32 years.

We live in Albany, Western Australia.

I was first introduced to Carers WA by Rudy's Disability Support Coordinator, who recognised I needed support. For years, I focused solely on Rudy's needs and wellbeing, neglecting my own. Connecting with Carers WA marked a turning point. Their recognition of carers' challenges gave me comfort and confidence. I learned that asking for help and prioritising my own health is not only okay, but necessary for me to continue caring for Rudy.

I grew up in a remote village in the Southern Philippines, where poverty shaped daily life and healthcare was scarce. Medical services were a luxury our community couldn't afford. Illnesses were treated with home remedies or traditional healers.

When Rudy was very young, we realised he had special needs. He didn't speak as a toddler or walk until he was five. Determined to provide him with specialist care, we saved what we could from my husband's modest wage as a town hall messenger. Rudy attended physio, occupational and speech therapy whenever possible, along with occasional visits to a paediatric specialist.

To reach appointments, I carried Rudy for kilometres along gravel roads to the highway, where we caught a bus to the city. As he grew older and heavier, the journey became increasingly difficult, but giving up was never an option.

Our difficult circumstances led my husband to seek work in Australia, where he found employment as an abattoir worker in Albany. Rudy and I remained in the Philippines, enduring a painful family separation in the hope of creating a brighter future for our son.

Three years later, when I joined my husband, I worked multiple jobs, including as a kitchen hand, aged care support worker and cleaner, whilst also volunteering at a local op shop. We missed Rudy deeply, who remained in the care of my mother and sister.

Two years later, we brought Rudy to Australia on a visitor visa. Our application for permanent residency was denied twice as immigration authorities believed his disability would burden the Australian healthcare system.

In our final appeal, we emphasised Rudy's ability to thrive in mainstream education, his unmedicated status and our own contributions to the community. We offered to sign a waiver stating Rudy's care would remain our sole responsibility. Our appeal succeeded and, with our immense gratitude, Rudy was granted permanent residency.

Today, Rudy is non-verbal and communicates using a text-to-speech AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) app. He experiences challenges with mobility, balance, swallowing and social



“ ***My care journey has been marked by sacrifice, uncertainty, and challenges, but it has also been defined by resilience, hope, and unconditional love.*** ”

interactions. Despite these obstacles, Rudy has achieved a significant milestone in securing local employment in a role he enjoys.

My family's priority continues to be to ensure Rudy feels safe, valued, and loved.

Moving from the Philippines to regional WA was a big, and often difficult, transition. Over time, I've embraced Australia's great way of life, while holding on to my Filipino cultural heritage. Albany has given my family peace, safety and opportunities we once only dreamed about. We now live in a comfortable brick home with soft beds, food in our fridge and even a rusty car luxuries I never had growing up.

Like many carers, I have difficult days, but I also experience moments of joy, progress, and connection that remind me why I keep going.

Carers WA came into my life when I needed support most. I'm grateful for their comfort, education, practical assistance and encouragement to cope in our family's stressful, chaotic daily lives.

It's not our loved ones choice to have additional care needs. We choose to love and care for them unconditionally, and Carers WA chooses to care for us.



General Information

Conference Venue

Optus Stadium, Perth. River View Room.

Morning tea, lunch, exhibition tables, Lookout Lounge and the Carers WA 30th Anniversary Sundowner will be located on *Champions Terrace*.

Optus Stadium meets all the requirements needed for an enjoyable and productive working environment and is an ideal host venue for the Carers WA Conference 2026.

It is a fully accessible venue with world class conference facilities. Enjoy spectacular river and city views, with floor to ceiling glass windows, in the *River View Room*.

Conference Registration Desk

For delegates attending in-person, the conference registration desk will be open from 8.00am.

General enquiries can be directed to the uniformed Carers WA Event team, either at the registration desk or in the main conference areas throughout the day.

Conference Lanyards

Name lanyards, given to all delegates and participants upon arrival at the *Registration Desk*, must be worn at all times during the conference. The lanyard acts as an official entry pass to all conference sessions and areas, including to enjoy morning tea and lunch.

Catering

Tea and coffee will be available upon arrival, followed by morning tea and buffet lunch. All catering will be served on *Champions Terrace*.

For delegates with special dietary requirements, please refer to signage on the catering tables or ask an Optus Stadium staff member for assistance.

A range of refreshments and cocktail food will be served at the *30th Anniversary Sundowner*.

Hearing Aids

A Hearing Loop is available throughout the venue. Hearing aid users should position themselves closer to the front of the room for maximum effect.

Mobile Phones

Ensure that your mobile phone is switched to silent or off during conference sessions.

Toilets

Located outside the *River View Rooms*.

Media

All media enquiries should be directed to: marketing@carerswa.asn.au or 1300 227 377.

Parking / How to Get There

Parking:	Free parking is available in the stadium precinct (refer to map on page 22): P1 - Marlee Loop Car Park (ACROD parking available here), P2 - Bus Hub, and P3 - The Camfield Car Park. (Transfers provided, if required, via buggy driven by venue staff.)
Public Transport:	Armadale Line trains stop at Perth Stadium Station. Buses stop regularly near Matagarup Bridge.
Taxi/Rideshare:	Participants can be picked up or dropped off in the Marlee Loop car park.

Social Media

Conference hashtag: [#CarersWAConference2026](#)

Facebook/Instagram: [@CarersWA](#)

Conference website: www.carerswa.asn.au/conference

WiFi Availability

Dedicated access within the venue with network and password.

Network:	Corporate Guest
Password:	ItStartsWithYes

Program Disclaimer

Information presented in this program handbook, including speaker names and session times are correct at the time of publishing. However, in the event of unforeseen circumstances, Carers WA reserves the right to make changes to the conference program as deemed necessary. While every effort is made to ensure accuracy, Carers WA cannot be held accountable for any errors, omissions or alterations to conference content. Additionally, Carers WA entrusts that conference speakers and all participants will present and communicate their content with accuracy, authenticity and sensitivity, however we cannot guarantee this.

Photography and Video

Still and moving images will be captured by official photographers at the conference. Carers WA may use these images and footage as part of its communication products and promotional material. If you do not wish to have any video footage or photographs taken of you, please inform the Carers WA Event team at the registration desk or the photographer / videographer on the day.

Post-Conference Queries

There may not be time for all questions to be asked and answered during the conference sessions. Post-conference questions and other questions queries can be emailed to: conference@carerswa.asn.au. Queries will be forward questions for the attention of the relevant organisation or session presenter.



Stadium Map



For over 117 years, Chung Wah Association & Community Care have been providing exceptional care and support to our culturally and linguistically diverse community.

We provide culturally appropriate aged care and disability services to more than 1,200 older people and individuals with disabilities from vibrant cultural backgrounds across the Perth metro area. Our services are tailored to the needs and interests of everyone, with a strong focus on reablement and self-independence.

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CHUNG WAH COMMUNITY CARE
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11th October
9.30am-12.30pm
Kickoff Event
Kings Park

Cuppa in the PARK

Free Coffee

13th
9-11am
Neil Hawkins Park
Joondalup

14th
9-11am
Woodbridge Riverside Park
Midland

15th
9-11am
Governor Rd Reserve
Rockingham

11th - 17th October | www.carerswa.asn.au/carersweek

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Notes



Notes





National Carers Week

11th - 17th October 2026

Carers are an integral part of our health system. They are the foundation of our aged, disability, palliative, and community care systems. This week we acknowledge their work and celebrate their contribution to our community.



Carers WA

For information about local WA activities visit carerswa.asn.au



NATIONAL

CARERS WEEK



**CARE FOR A CARER:
MAKING CARERS VISIBLE**

CARERSWEEK.COM.AU

National Carers Week 2026 is a initiative of Carers Australia and funded by the Australian Government