



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Communities**

New Western Australia Carers Strategy discussion paper

October 2026



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Foreword

Western Australia's carers make an extraordinary contribution to our community and economy every day. Caring is an essential part of a compassionate and inclusive society, and carers deserve to be recognised, valued and supported. Caring also presents many challenges from navigating complex service systems to personal relationships to changed participation in the workforce to physical and mental health impacts.

In 2020 the estimated value of unpaid care was over \$70 billion nationally. We know people prefer to receive care from someone they know over to a stranger. People want to step up to help their loved ones. While caring can be an act of love and provide people a sense of meaning and purpose, that does not make it easy. We know it can also be physically and emotionally hard, overwhelming and frustrating, often with a sense of isolation and impacts on multiple aspects of a carer's life and identity.

In October 2025, the Hon Matthew Swinborn MLC, Minister for Community Services, announced the development of a new WA Carers Strategy to establish a contemporary, long-term vision for how government, employers, community organisations, service providers and our local communities can work together to better support and recognise carers.

It has been my honour to lead the consultation and development work of the strategy. With a background in social work, I have spent my career working alongside and advocating for carers. It's been a great responsibility and privilege to participate in conversations with carers and the organisations who support them, to hear directly about what it is to be a carer in modern Western Australia.

Through a statewide survey, and in-person and online conversations across the state, carers from metropolitan and regional communities have generously shared their stories. We have heard your experiences, insights, and ideas for action. It has helped us develop a rich picture of both the rewards and challenges of caring, including the diversity of the care experience. We've also heard clear opportunities to strengthen support for carers across our state.

This discussion paper reflects what we've heard so far – and seeks to extend our understanding. I encourage carers, employers, organisations and community groups across Western Australia to have their say. Your feedback will help ensure the Strategy reflects the diverse experiences, needs and aspirations of carers across the State. You can write as much or as little as you would like - you don't need to respond to every aspect - we just want to hear what you have to say.

Together, we can develop a strategy that recognises, values and supports carers, now and into the future.

Dr Katrina Stratton MLC

Acknowledgement of Country

The Government of Western Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners throughout Western Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to Aboriginal peoples and their cultures, and to Elders past and present.

Purpose of discussion paper

This discussion paper forms part of the Western Australian (WA) State Government's consultation to inform the new WA Carers Strategy (Strategy) and Action Plan. It discusses issues relevant to and important for unpaid carers.

We want to develop a picture of the contemporary experience and diversity of caring, and to further understand key challenges experienced by carers, explore options and potential improvements to support carers within the WA context. This includes an understanding of what's currently working well for carers, what we might be able to build on and sustain.

By responding to this paper, you are helping to shape the new Strategy.

Make a written submission

Any individual or organisation can make a submission in response to this paper and the questions it presents.

- You may wish to respond to all questions or choose to answer only the questions of most interest to you.
- You are also welcome to write a submission outlining your views and/or own experience, and to suggest alternative options for addressing matters of concern to you.
- We encourage you to share your experiences, examples, case studies, data and evidence to support your views.
- Please de-identify information unless you have consent to share details that could identify individuals. All submissions will be subject to freedom of information requests.
- The WA Government may quote from your comments in future publications and/or choose to publish submissions. If you prefer your name to remain confidential, **please indicate this in your submission.**

You can lodge your written submission to this paper to carers@communities.wa.gov.au.

Closing date

12 November 2026

Introduction

Why a new Strategy

The current WA Carers Strategy was published in 2016¹. It provided a guiding framework for agencies, service providers and the community to better recognise and support carers. Over the years, there have been changes in the policy context, emerging issues and research trends as well as the experience of caring.

In 2024 the (Commonwealth Parliament) Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs released a report following an inquiry into the recognition of unpaid carers², and the National Carer Strategy 2024-2034 was subsequently released.

The current WA Carers Strategy has provided an important foundation for valuing and supporting carers across government and community services.

During National Carers Week in October 2025, the Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC, Minister for Community Services announced the development of the Strategy to replace the current Strategy. The Strategy is being led by the Hon Dr Katrina Stratton MLC.

The new Strategy (when complete) is intended to set a contemporary whole-of-government framework to recognise, value and better support unpaid carers over the next 10 years.

In scope

The new Strategy will focus on the big-picture improvements for carers across Western Australia. This includes:

- 10-year statewide framework: Setting the long-term vision, priorities and actions that will guide government, community, and sector partners over the next decade to better recognise and support carers.
- Improving recognition and support for carers: Looking at how carers are valued, acknowledged, included, and supported across government agencies, services, workplaces and communities, including specific consideration of diverse cohorts.
- Strengthening compliance with the *Carers Recognition Act 2004 (WA)* (Act): Considering how the Act is put into practice, including reviewing reporting mechanisms, improving awareness of the Carers Charter, and strengthening carer-inclusive service delivery.
- Partnerships and collaboration: Working with carers and communities, service providers and other organisations, to identify solutions and drive coordinated action. This includes how collaboration with and working across Federal systems could be enhanced.
- Exploring access issues and service gaps as part of the broader support system for carers.

Out of scope

- Legislative review of the Act: Changes to the Act itself is not being considered in developing this Strategy, as it was already reviewed in 2018. The focus will instead be on improving how the Act is understood, implemented, and reported against.

¹ Current WA Carers Strategy, can be accessed at: [WA-Carers-Strategy.pdf](#)

² <https://www.aph.gov.au/UnpaidCarers>

- Regulation of aged care or disability service systems: The new Strategy cannot recommend or make any changes to Federal-regulated systems such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Carer Allowance and Carer Payment, or aged care. However, it could highlight navigation challenges and system pressures and opportunities to work better across government, and identify areas where the State may play an advocacy role with the Federal Government.
- Service-specific funding decisions: The new Strategy will not make decisions about funding for individual programs or organisations. Future investment decisions will continue to occur through normal government budget processes, however, the Strategy will be a useful guide in ensuring future investment aligns with priority areas.

What we've heard

Development of the new Strategy is being informed by consultation and evidence from a range of sources.

Throughout this consultation, carers have described caring as a meaningful and valued role, driven by commitment to family, community and the person they support. Many spoke about the skills and strengths developed through caring, including problem-solving, coordination, communication, and health and care skills.

At the same time, carers consistently described the scale and intensity of caring responsibilities, which for many extend across the day and night and increase over time as needs change. Many carers provide multiple forms of support simultaneously, as well as spending significant time coordinating services and navigating systems on behalf of the person they care for. As a result, carers develop resilience and skills in advocacy, negotiation and crisis management.

Services are described as fragmented, with complex eligibility requirements and limited coordination between systems. Many carers support family members or friends with high-intensity care demands across multiple systems. In particular, the impacts of navigating Federal systems such as NDIS and My Aged Care are particularly challenging. For some carers, the effort required to access support was described as outweighing the benefit.

Consultation has also highlighted the impact of caring on employment and financial security. A majority of carers said their caring role affects their ability to work. Many reduce their work hours, delay returning to work, engage in casual work for its flexibility, decline career opportunities, or leave the workforce entirely, leading to financial pressure and impacts on long-term income and superannuation.

Access to practical support and respite are frequently identified as a significant issue, with respite often being limited, inflexible or unsuitable, particularly when caring needs change or escalate. Practical supports such as in-home assistance, transport and help navigating systems can make a meaningful difference but are not always available or accessible when needed.

Carer wellbeing emerged as a key priority throughout the consultation, with carers describing physical and mental health impacts associated with long-term and intensive caring, including fatigue, stress and burnout. Many carers emphasise the need for earlier and more consistent support, rather than assistance becoming available only once situations reach crisis point. This includes a better personal and community understanding of the carer life cycle – from recognising one as a carer to succession planning to transitioning out of a caring role.

Looking to the future, carers described an ideal system as one that is simpler, better coordinated and more responsive to the realities of caring. Carers emphasised the importance of recognition that leads to practical outcomes, including being included in planning and decision-making processes and having their knowledge and experience respected.

Carers also highlighted the need for supports that reflect diverse circumstances, including the needs of carers in regional and remote areas, Aboriginal carers, LGBTIQ+ community carers, young carers and carers supporting people with complex needs.

Discussion paper guide

The box below outlines key topics and questions we are seeking your views on. You are encouraged to provide your experiences, examples and ideas.

Following sections of this paper provide context for each topic.

Recognition of carers
1. How are carers currently recognised, valued and included across services, organisations, education, workplaces and communities? 2. What would better recognition look like in practice? 3. How do caring responsibilities influence participation in community, the workforce, or education?
Diversity of carers
4. What are the unique needs, experiences and opportunities for the carers or carer groups you represent, belong to, or support? 5. What systemic or cultural barriers are most urgent to address? 6. What supports or policy changes would create better outcomes?
Strategy vision and priorities
7. Does the vision of the current Carers Strategy provide a clear and meaningful direction for carers in WA? How could it be improved? 8. What priority areas should be retained in the new Strategy? What could be strengthened, changed or added?
Additional information
9. What additional insights or experiences would you like to share?

Recognition of carers

Definition of a carer

WA was the first jurisdiction in Australia to formally recognise the role of carers through legislation. All states and territories and the Commonwealth now have legislation recognising carers.

The *Carers Recognition Act 2004 (WA)*³ (Act) defines a carer as a person who provides ongoing care, support and assistance to a family member or friend who has a disability, a chronic or terminal illness, mental health conditions, alcohol or other drug dependency, or who is frail due to age, without receiving a salary or wage for the care they provide.

Carers may provide emotional support, personal care, household support, transport, advocacy and coordination of health or community services. Carers can be parents, partners, children, neighbours, friends, found family, or kinship carers. Some carers may receive a Commonwealth support payment from Centrelink.

Note: Grandcarers and Foster carers play a vital role in providing every-day care to children. Within the scope of this Strategy, a carer under these care arrangements would need to be providing care to a person who has additional needs (as prescribed above, for example a disability, chronic/terminal illness and/or mental health conditions) to meet the definition of a carer. Additional resources and supports for Grandcarers and Foster carers can be found by visiting: [Foster carers](#) and [Grandparent carers](#).

WA Carers Charter

The Act establishes the WA Carers Charter, which sets out principles for how carers must be treated in service settings.

The Act also establishes the Carers Advisory Council (Council). The Council provides advice to the Minister for Community Services on matters relating to carers, and delivers a report each year on reporting organisations' compliance with the Act and Carers Charter.

The WA Carers Charter specifies:

- Carers must be treated with respect and dignity.
- The role of carers must be recognised by including carers in the assessment, planning, delivery and review of services that impact on them and the role of carers.
- The views and needs of carers must be taken into account along with the views, needs and best interests of people receiving care when decisions are made that impact on carers and the role of carers.
- Complaints made by carers in relation to services that impact on them and the role of carers must be given due attention and consideration.

The Act requires government and service providers to include carers in planning and delivery of services, comply with the Charter, and mandated organisations to report annually on their compliance with the Charter. The reporting organisations are the Department of Health, Disability

³ The Act can be accessed at:

https://www.legislation.wa.gov.au/legislation/statutes.nsf/main_mrtile_114_homepage.html

Services Commission and health service providers. The Mental Health Commission is not a mandated organisation, however, continues to provide voluntary reporting since 2008.

Your views

Recognition of carers

There are a number of carer support services making a difference for carers and their families. The WA Carers Charter guides how service providers and organisations should treat carers, including being treated with respect and dignity; carers are recognised in the assessment, planning, delivery and review of services; carers views are considered in decision making; complaints are considered.

We would like to hear from you on how carers could better be recognised and supported in WA.

Please refer to questions 1-3 in the Discussion Paper Guide.

Diversity of carers

Carers are diverse. They can be young people, older people, live in regional or metropolitan areas, and come from diverse cultural, linguistic and socio-economic and religious backgrounds, and gender and sexual identities. These factors influence whether they know or choose to identify as carers, and how support services are accessed.

Through consultation, carers highlighted experiences of multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage and discrimination that can create additional barriers to accessing support. For example, Aboriginal carers, carers from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTIQ+ carers, carers living in regional and remote areas, and carers with disability may face challenges navigating systems that are not always inclusive, culturally safe, accessible or responsive to their circumstances. Experiences of discrimination, stigma or mistrust can reduce awareness of available supports and affect willingness to seek assistance.

Consultation participants also described how carers' needs and experiences can differ significantly depending on their stage of life and caring circumstances. Young carers may be balancing caring responsibilities with education, employment and important developmental milestones such as leaving home, establishing independence and forming social connections. Older carers may be managing their own health concerns while planning for the future care arrangements of the person they support, including succession planning and transitions in care. Aboriginal carers spoke about the importance of intergenerational caring roles and responsibilities, often caring for multiple family and community members across different generations.

Caring journeys also begin and evolve in different ways. Some people become carers immediately, such as parents whose child is born with a disability, developmental delay or health condition. Others transition into caring gradually, for example as a parent, partner or family member experiences declining health, disability or age-related changes over time. These different pathways into caring can influence how carers identify with the role, when support is sought, and the type of information, services and assistance that are most helpful at different points in their caring journey.

Demographics and characteristics of carers:

- There are an estimated 3 million carers in Australia, representing 11.9 per cent of all Australians living in households⁴. In WA, approximately 243,500 people provide unpaid care⁵.
- The average age of a carer is 50 years⁶.
- Females are more likely to be carers compared to males. Two-thirds (67.7 percent) of primary carers are women⁷.
- Males are more likely to take on a caring role later in life, with males over 65 years providing the most unpaid care compared with males across other age groups⁸.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). "Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings". [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#).

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2025). "General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia". [General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2025 | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). "Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings". [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

- 391,300 young people (under the age of 25 years) in Australia are carers⁹.
- One third of carers provide 40 hours or more of unpaid care a week¹⁰. The caring role can take extra time away from paid work and limit labour market participation, which has adverse impacts on their health outcomes and socio-economic status.
- Carers often find their caring role results in burn-out, emotional distress, loneliness and social isolation.
- Caring for a person with a severe or profound disability can demand additional supports for carers.

As the Australian population continues to age and combined with shifts in health and disability needs the demand for carers is expected to increase.

According to Deloitte Access Economics (2020)⁷.

- The demand for informal carers will grow from around 1.25 million in 2020 to 1.54 million in 2030 (a 23 per cent growth). The growth in the number of carers taking on a caring role is not expected to keep pace (16 per cent), leading to an increasing 'carer gap' in the future.
- 2.2 billion hours of unpaid care is provided by Australian carers. If these hours were provided as paid formal care, this care would have a value of \$77.9 billion per year.

Your views

Diversity of carers

The lived experience of diverse carers requires nuanced and appropriate responses and services.

We would like to hear about the unique challenges faced by diverse carers and the ideas and opportunities to better support them.

Cohorts could include Culturally and Linguistically Diverse; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; LGBTIQ+¹¹ communities; older people; regional, rural and remote; young carers; people with disability, health or mental health conditions. You may also wish to share insights regarding other cohorts.

Please refer to questions 4-6 in the Discussion Paper Guide.

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). "Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings". [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#).

¹⁰ Deloitte Access Economics. (2020). "The value of informal care in 2020". [The value of informal care in 2020](#).

¹¹ The term LGBTIQ+ is used to recognise the diversity of people with varied sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and innate variations in sex characteristics. It also acknowledges Sistergirls and Brotherboys, recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gender-diverse identities and experiences, and that the use and meaning of the terms varies within Aboriginal culture and communities.

Strategy vision and priorities

A strategy often includes a vision and priority areas that work to provide direction and focus. The vision describes the desired future state or long-term outcome that the strategy seeks to achieve. Priority areas identify the key themes that require focused attention to guide efforts and progress toward that future. Together, these elements provide a framework for decision-making, guide the development of actions and initiatives, and help ensure that activities remain aligned with the strategy's overarching goals and intended outcomes.

The vision of the current WA Carers Strategy ([WA Carers Strategy](#)) is:

“Carers are recognised and valued for making a positive difference to the lives of families, friends, the community and the people they care for. Carers will be able to access support to build their capacity to care as well as maintain a balance between their caring responsibilities, their own wellbeing and pursuing life goals. Carers will be able to access the same life opportunities as all West Australians and participate in the community as full and equal citizens. Carers’ knowledge and experience will be respected, and they will be included as key partners in care.”

The current Strategy identifies five priority areas, accompanied by intended outcomes for carers and community.

Table 1: Current WA Carers Strategy Priority Areas and Outcomes

Priority area	Intended outcomes
Awareness, identification and recognition	Carers’ contributions will be recognised and respected by the community. Carers’ diverse situations, circumstances and backgrounds will be respected and accommodated.
Respected partners in care	Carers will be respected and included as expert care partners.
Supporting carers	Carers will have access to appropriate services and information that support them to care with confidence and maintain their personal wellbeing. Carers will be able to balance their caring responsibilities, personal wellbeing and life outside of caring
Participation in education and employment	Carers will have the same life choices and opportunities as other members of the community. Young carers will be supported to learn, develop and thrive, and enjoy positive childhoods.
Data and evidence	Carer policy, planning and service delivery will be evidence based.

Your views

Vision and priority areas of the new Strategy

The new Carers Strategy will set a long-term vision for carers in WA, providing a shared direction for Western Australia. Priority areas help to focus actions to achieve the vision and improve outcomes for carers. The new strategy will also be accompanied by a number of Action Plans across the short, medium and long term

We would like to hear what the vision and priorities of the Strategy need to reflect.

Please refer to questions 7-8 in the Discussion Paper Guide.

Additional information

This paper has been developed based on insights shared by carers and organisations during consultation so far. We recognise that there may be specific aspects of your caring experience that you may wish to share for consideration to inform development of the Strategy.

Please refer to question 9 in the Discussion Paper Guide.

Thank you and next steps

Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences, insights and ideas. Your contribution is an important part of developing a new WA Carers Strategy that reflects the diverse experiences of carers across Western Australia.

Following submissions closing, feedback will be analysed alongside evidence and stakeholder input to inform the development of the new WA Carers Strategy and accompanying Action Plans.

The perspectives shared through this consultation will help identify priorities, inform future actions and strengthen how carers are recognised, valued and supported over the coming decade.