

House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs

Written Question on Notice – 20 September 2023

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Inquiry into the recognition of unpaid carers

Question reference number: IQ23-000078

Question asked by: Peta Murphy

Type of Question: Written. **Hansard Page:** N/A

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 13 October 2023

Question:

1. There is support for amending the Carer Recognition Act 2010 (the Act) so that it sets out a rights-based approach to delivering support services to carers. Are there any policy arguments for retaining an act that provides no legally enforceable rights to carers?
 - a. What would be the legal implications for the Australian Government if the Act were amended to provide legally enforceable rights to carers?

Answer:

1. Policy questions on any amendment of the *Carer Recognition Act 2010* (the Act) are a matter for government.
 - a. It is not possible to comment on the implications of such amendments, without further detail on the nature of the enforceable rights proposed.

There are a range of existing rights and protections expressly for carers in Commonwealth legislation. The following Commonwealth Acts expressly provide rights and protections for carers, including:

- *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth)
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth)
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth), and
- *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986* (Cth).

House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs

Written Question on Notice – 20 September 2023

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Inquiry into the recognition of unpaid carers

Question reference number: IQ23-000079

Question asked by: Peta Murphy

Type of Question: Written. **Hansard Page:** N/A

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 13 October 2023

Question:

2. The National Carer Strategy 2011, which gave effect to the Act, was replaced in 2015 by the Integrated Plan for Carer Support Services.
 - a. How does the Integrated Plan give effect to the Act?
 - b. Does the Integrated Plan include outcome reporting?

Answer:

- (a) The object of the *Carer Recognition Act 2010* (the Act) is to increase recognition and awareness of carers and to acknowledge their valuable contribution. The Act includes the Statement for Australia's Carers, which sets out ten key principles for how carers should be treated and considered in policy, program and service delivery settings.

The Integrated Plan for Carer Support Services (the Plan) was developed to reflect the Australian Government's priorities for carers, and outlines actions to recognise, support and sustain the contribution of unpaid carers. The Integrated Carer Support Service model, known as Carer Gateway, was launched in April 2020.

Carer Gateway reflects the principles of the Statement for Australia's Carers and supports the Act's objective by providing practical services to carers to support them in their caring role and improve their wellbeing.

- (b) The Department of Social Services (the Department) reports on the performance of the Integrated Carer Support Service Model (Carer Gateway) in its Annual Performance Statement. The 2021-22 Annual Report is available on the Department's website (via dss.gov.au/about-the-department/publications-articles/corporate-publications/annual-reports).

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Inquiry into the recognition of unpaid carers

Question reference number: IQ23-000080

Question asked by: Peta Murphy

Type of Question: Written. **Hansard Page:** N/A

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 13 October 2023

Question:

3. What work is currently being undertaken to address the financial challenges faced by carers, such as reduced capacity to work, study and to save for retirement, and increased caring costs (such as utilities to run medical equipment)?

Answer:

The Australian Government delivers a range of programs and measures to provide financial support for carers.

[Carer Payment and Carer Allowance](#) are Government payments for eligible carers providing constant care and support to someone who has a disability, a severe medical condition or is an adult who is frail aged.

Carers with reduced capacity to work or study due to the care they provide may be eligible to receive Carer Payment, which is paid at the highest legislated rate in the social security system, comparable to the Age Pension. Carer Payment is indexed twice a year in line with the higher of the increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) or the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index (PBLCI). The CPI and PBLCI measure changes in prices on a range of goods and services such as food, health care, telecommunications, fuel, housing and utilities costs. Base pension rates are also benchmarked to Male Total Average Weekly Earnings. On 20 September 2023 the maximum rate of Carer Payment increased by \$32.70 to \$1,096.70 a fortnight for a single person, and by \$49.40 to \$1,653.40 for a couple combined.

Carer Payment qualification includes access to a Pensioner Concession Card, which can provide access to bulk billed medical appointments (at the discretion of individual medical practices) and reduced pharmaceutical costs. Discounts on state funded services such as public transport, car registration and homeowner rates may apply. Carers who rent in the private market may also receive Commonwealth Rent Assistance, and benefit from the 15 per cent increase to the maximum rate that commenced from 20 September 2023.

Carer Payment recipients are able to undertake up to 25 hours a week of work or study while remaining qualified for payment, and can earn up to \$204 per fortnight for a single carer and \$360 for a couple combined before their payment is reduced. Earned income can improve the carer's short and long term economic outcomes.

Carer Allowance is a supplementary payment of \$144.80 a fortnight available to someone who gives additional daily care to someone who has a disability, has a medical condition or is frail aged. This payment is indexed annually.

Carer Payment and Carer Allowance recipients also receive the annual \$600 Carer Supplement each July. Carer Allowance carers of a child under 16 years may also receive the annual \$1,000 Child Disability Assistance Payment. These payments are not indexed.

The Government provides the [Essential Medical Equipment Payment](#) (EMEP), which is an annual lump sum supplementary payment to assist eligible people, or their carers, who have additional home energy costs because they rely on specified essential medical equipment or require additional heating or cooling due to being unable to regulate their body temperature due to specified medical conditions. EMEP is available in addition to existing state and territory government medical equipment rebate schemes.

[The Energy Bill Relief Fund](#) provides eligible households with assistance to reduce their energy costs. Pensioner Concession Card holders (which includes Carer Payment recipients) and recipients of Carer Allowance are eligible for assistance from the fund, however the amount that can be paid varies between each state and territory.

The Government also offers the [Young Carer Bursary Program](#) to support young carers to continue with their education. The Program aims to relieve the financial pressure on young carers, in particular by reducing the need to undertake part-time work while studying and managing their caring responsibilities. The program offers around 1,600 bursaries of \$3,768 each year.

Through the Government's national carer support service known as [Carer Gateway](#), carers can access services and supports tailored to their individual needs and caring role. This may include access to planned respite, payment for training courses or purchase of a laptop to assist carers in engaging in work or study. Carers can also access ongoing practical supports such as cleaning services, assistance with shopping and cooking.

The [Your Caring Way](#) program pilot funded by the Government is a vocational outcomes program that assists carers of working age in accessing accredited education and training, and assistance with seeking and establishing employment.

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Written Question on Notice – 20 September 2023

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Inquiry into the recognition of unpaid carers

Question reference number: IQ23-000081

Question asked by: Peta Murphy

Type of Question: Written. **Hansard Page:** N/A

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 13 October 2023

Question:

4. What work has been undertaken to progress a new National Carer Strategy?

Answer:

The Department of Social Services is undertaking foundational tasks, such as collating and analysing information from available research, feedback and consultations.

House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs

Written Question on Notice – 20 September 2023

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Inquiry into the recognition of unpaid carers

Question reference number: IQ23-000082

Question asked by: Peta Murphy

Type of Question: Written. **Hansard Page:** N/A

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 13 October 2023

Question:

5. What funding is currently allocated to support unpaid carers?

a. What are the funding arrangements for Carer Gateway?

Answer:

5. The Australian Government's total commitment for carer support services for unpaid carers is over \$1.108 billion over five years to 2026–27 for the Integrated Carer Support Service (known as the Carer Gateway). This includes Carer Gateway service providers, national phone counselling service and other programs, such as the Young Carer Bursary Program.

A breakdown of estimated annual funding is as follows:

2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	Total over 5 years 2022-23 to 2026-27
\$213,068,000	\$213,279,000	\$225,530,000	\$231,336,000	\$224,875,000	\$1,108,088,000

As outlined on page 37 of the 2023-24 Department of Social Services Portfolio Budget Statements, the Australian Government also provides financial support to carers through Carer Payment, Carer Allowance, Carer Supplement, Child Disability Assistance Payments, and Carer Adjustment Payment, at a cost of more than \$60 Billion over 5 years.

A breakdown of estimated annual funding is as follows:

2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	Total over 5 years 2022-23 to 2026-27
\$10,577,741,000	\$11,547,361,000	\$12,245,502,000	\$12,930,669,000	\$13,376,881,000	\$60,678,154,000

- a) Ten not-for-profit organisations are funded as Carer Gateway service providers, receiving approximately \$650.2 million over five years (November 2019 to 30 June 2024).

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Written Question on Notice – 20 September 2023

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Inquiry into the recognition of unpaid carers

Question reference number: IQ23-000083

Question asked by: Peta Murphy

Type of Question: Written. **Hansard Page:** N/A

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 13 October 2023

Question:

6. Low language and digital literacy skills have been identified as key barriers to some carers seeking support. What is the Australian Government doing to assist Australians with low language and digital literacy skills to engage with services that support carers?
 - a. Are there currently any education campaigns, outreach or targeted information available about carer services for First Nations and migrant and refugee communities, including in-language resources?

Answer:

Carer Gateway and National Awareness Campaign

[Carer Gateway](#) is the Government's national carer support service for carers of people with a disability, medical condition, mental illness or who are frail due to age. Carer Gateway services are available online, over the phone or in-person.

The Carer Gateway website includes functionality that converts written text to speech to assist people who may have reading difficulties access information about support services.

Carer Gateway provides a range of materials and resources in Auslan and up to 30 languages for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) carers which can be found on the [Services and Support page of the Carer Gateway](#).

The [Carer Gateway First Nations fact sheet](#) on the [First Nations Carers page of the Carer Gateway](#) provides tailored information on support available to First Nations carers.

[The Carer Gateway national advertising campaign](#) aims to increase awareness of services and supports and assist carers to self-identify. In line with the Australian Government guidelines, specialist communication agencies for First Nations and CALD were engaged to support delivery of the campaign (see finance.gov.au/government/advertising/australian-government-guidelines-information-and-advertising-campaigns-non-corporate-commonwealth-entities).

These agencies were engaged to ensure advertising materials were appropriate for both audiences during campaign development, including imagery being reflective of diverse community. Campaign advertising materials were concept tested with both audiences to ensure comprehension of campaign messaging.

Campaign advertising includes investment in targeted social media, radio and out-of-home placement for First Nations and CALD audiences.

- Radio was translated into 15 languages for First Nations audiences (Anindilyakwa, Arrernte, Burrara, Kimberley Kriol, Kalaw Lagaw Ya, Kumwinjku, Meriam Mer, Murrinh Patha, Ngaanytjarra, Nth Kriol, Pitjantjatjarre, Tiwi, Warlpiri, Yolngu Matha, Yumpla Tok).
- Radio was translated into eight languages (Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Croatian, Greek, Italian, Turkish, and Vietnamese) and social media into four languages (Mandarin, Cantonese, Arabic and Vietnamese) for CALD audiences.

A range of specific materials have been developed for First Nations audiences. They include:

- a stakeholder kit distributed to First Nations stakeholders, intermediaries, community services and peak bodies
- a media kit distributed to key First Nations media outlets
- as well as a range of materials including in language radio, and
- written and video case studies highlighting needs of First Nations carers, which have been distributed online.

A range of specific materials have been developed for CALD audiences, including written and video case studies that highlight the personal experience of caring. The case studies are translated into 8 languages. All materials include Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) contact details in the call to action. The campaign includes engagement with over 500 community organisations, multicultural centres, health care centres, pharmacists and doctors.

My Aged Care Resources

There is also support to older people in Australia, their families, representatives and carers to access consistent, accessible, inclusive, reliable and useful information about the aged care system and aged care providers. [My Aged Care](#) is the starting point to find information and to access Government-subsidised aged care services. My Aged Care can be accessed online, over the phone or in-person. Further information on accessing help to contact MyAged Care is available [Contact us | My Aged Care](#).

My Aged Care resources are [accessible for all](#), and regularly reviewed and updated to ensure information remains accurate and is easy to understand. Translated versions of many of the resources are available in 18 CALD and 4 First Nations languages.

The Department of Health and Aged Care funds a free translation service for aged care providers to assist them to better communicate with aged care recipients and their carers from CALD backgrounds through having their written material translated into languages other than English, including Braille and sign languages. The Department of Health and Aged Care is working to increase the uptake by aged care providers and their care recipients of these interpreting services, which are delivered through TIS.