

MEDIA RELEASE



10 May 2023

Federal Budget 2023: There is no 'stronger foundation' without carers

Carers Australia welcomes the Federal Budget focus on healthcare and cost-of-living relief but urges the Australian Government not to lose sight of the needs of Australia's unpaid carers.

"Carers are an integral part of Australia's health, mental health, aged care, disability and social services systems. This has been identified by the Aged Care Royal Commission, Disability Royal Commission, Productivity Commission and more," said Alison Brook, CEO of Carers Australia.

"The Government aims to build a 'stronger foundation' with this Budget, and we note the measures included for people with disability and receiving aged care. However, Australia's 2.65 million carers, whose support and care for family members and friends [saves the economy more than \\$77 billion a year](#), must be included in the development of this foundation across sectors for the foundation to succeed.

No carers strategy

"Disappointingly, the Budget did not include funding for a new National Carers Strategy, which the Albanese Government committed to developing during its first term of government," Ms Brook said.

While the [Carer Recognition Act 2010](#) formally acknowledges the valuable social and economic contribution of carers in Australia, carers continue to be largely mentioned or considered only in relation to 'consumers, their families and carers', without recognition of their specific needs."

"We need clear leadership from the Government and a clear awareness of the diversity of caring relationships, the diversity of carers and the diversity of people being cared for."

Cost-of-living measures

Carers Australia welcomes the Australian Government's cost-of-living relief measures, such as the \$3 billion in electricity relief to support households, and that this will be targeted at those most in need, including those who receive carers payments.

"Although the government is slightly increasing welfare payments like JobSeeker and Commonwealth Rent Allowance, the budget papers are unclear about whether the Carer Payment will also receive the \$40 a fortnight increase. Carers Australia is seeking clarification from the Department of Social Services."

Each year of being a primary carer results, on average, in a [\\$17,700 reduction in superannuation balance at age 67 and a \\$39,600 reduction in lifetime earnings](#). This demonstrates a significant disparity in the Government's willingness to fund formal care services compared to investing in adequate financial assistance for carers.

"More than half of Australian carers have experienced at least one significant financial stress event in the previous 12 months, such as being unable to pay bills on time, going without meals, or having to ask for financial assistance, compared to under a third of Australian adults," Ms Brook said.

Carers Australia has repeatedly called for a broad review of economic and financial support for carers, including the purpose, intent and adequacy of the Carer Payment and Carer Allowance. The government's own [Interim Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee's](#) recently noted the need to reconsider the level of the Carer Payment.

"We urge the Government to prioritise this work," Ms Brook said.

Disability support

Carers Australia cautiously welcomes the planned central coordination of the Disability Policy function in the Department of Social Services to drive whole-of-government action on disability policy, as well as the work to build a National Disability Data Asset. However, it is unclear how carers will be embedded into this process and disability policy more broadly.

“We encourage the Department to reconsider membership of the Disability Representative Organisations (DROs) as part of this reform. While we appreciate the important role of organisations focused on the needs of people living with disability, we believe that the carer voice is needed, as is the case with the NDIA’s Disability Representatives and Carer Organisations (DRCO) group,” said Ms Brook.

“Carers Australia notes the Government’s commitment within this budget to make [Australia’s Disability Strategy](#) accountable. Several of the strategy outcomes are focused on informal supports, and accountability for these outcomes cannot be achieved without engagement with, and recognition of, carers.”

NDIS

Carers Australia supports the Australian Government’s commitment to lift the National Disability Insurance Agency’s (NDIA) capability, capacity and systems to better support participants in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). However, it is essential that carers are involved in this process.

“Not only are carers often supporting navigation of the NDIS alongside the person they care for, but [over a third of primary carers also live with disability](#)—more than twice the rate of non-carers,” Ms Brook said.

“Increased efforts to recognise, validate and address the issues faced by carers, including carers of adult children living with disability, would increase the capability of the NDIA services and better inform staff and service providers of the valuable role carers have in providing care and how this intersects with the supports required within a participant’s plan.”

Carers Australia also welcomes the new performance measure of the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission of ‘people with disability know their rights and trust us to support them and their carers and advocates to make complaints, and report violence, abuse, neglect and risk of harm’.

Medicare

Carers Australia broadly supports activities to ensure improved access and quality of healthcare for all Australians, noting that carers continue to be [at very high risk of poor wellbeing and health](#). However, at the time of this release, Carers Australia was awaiting clarification from the Government on whether the new \$3.5 billion bulk billing incentive at general practices will extend to carer payment recipients.

“Medical expenses are one of the largest out-of-pocket expenses for carers, who are already often stretched financially, so the Medicare Bulk Billing incentive increase will be a welcome relief,” Ms Brook said.

Carers Australia encourages measures within the Albanese Government’s commitment to ‘rebuild’ Medicare to include the voices of carers.

“Sadly, the primary health care system does not proactively identify carers or include carers in appropriate discussions or decision-making, which, in effect, ignores the impact that a person’s care needs have on their carer,” said Ms Brook.

This includes carer lived experience input into the \$98.9 million investment to connect frequent hospital users with general practices to receive multidisciplinary care in the community. Carers must be included in all stages of this investment, including advisory and governance structures, codesign and evaluation, given that ‘frequent hospital users’ often have a carer involved in their support and care.

Aged care

Carers Australia welcomes the \$81.9 million provided to develop and implement a new *Aged Care Act* and the government's decision to postpone the commencement of the Support at Home Program until 1 July 2025 in response to sector feedback.

"In-home aged care services and supports for the people they care for are of vital concern to carers. Carers want the best for the people they care for, and many access aged care services themselves, with over a third of carers over the age of 65. In addition, many carers need substitute care and support to combine education, training and work with their caring role, and to look after their health and wellbeing."

Carers Australia also supports the funding for an additional 9,500 Home Care Packages, but notes that substitute care through Home Care Packages can involve long wait times; this is likely to remain the case.

"There has been a long history of carers falling to the bottom of the list of priorities in aged care reform," said Ms Brook.

"We continue to call for an investigation into barriers to accessing respite care, including day centres, with [a high proportion of carers who use these services reporting issues with access](#). The need for this investigation has been echoed by the [Senate Select Committee on Work and Care's recent report](#)."

"We hope that the further postponement of the Support at Home Program will provide the opportunity to appropriately develop future policy and reform decisions for sustainable and equitable access to respite care."

About Carers Australia and the National Carer Network

Carers Australia is the national peak body representing Australia's carers, advocating to influence policies and services at a national level. The National Carer Network, which consists of Carers NSW, Carers ACT, Carers Victoria, Carers Tasmania, Carers SA, Carers WA, Carers NT, and Carers Queensland, deliver a range of essential carer services across states and territories.

About carers

An informal, unpaid carer is a family member or friend that cares for someone that has a disability, chronic or life-limiting illness, is frail aged, has a mental health illness, alcohol or other drug related issue. Informal carers are distinct from paid support workers who are colloquially also called carers but are fully employed and remunerated with all the benefits of employment. Conversely, family carers perform their caring duties without remuneration

For media enquiries, please contact Angel Hellyer, National Director Communications, on 0428 948 415 or (02) 6122 9900, or email communications@carersaustralia.com.au