



**Carers Tasmania's Response to:
Tasmanian Positive - Our State's Sustainability Strategy
Discussion Paper**

October 2023



About Carers Tasmania

Carers Tasmania is the Peak Body representing the more than 80,000 informal carers (hereafter carers) in the state.

Carers Tasmania's vision is for an Australia that values and supports carers.

Our mission is to work to improve the health, wellbeing, resilience and financial security of carers and to ensure that caring is a shared responsibility of family, community, and government.

Our values drive everything we think, say, and do.

- **Carers first** – we listen to what carers need, commit to their desired action plan, and deliver results that matter most to carers
- **Care in all we do** – we care for our work, about each other, about Tasmania's family and friend carers, and the bigger world we all share
- **Integrity always** – we are transparent, act ethically, own when things don't go to plan and do what we say we will
- **Quality every time** – we don't accept 'good enough' because carers deserve our very best every time
- **Speed that matters** – we are agile and don't put off what can be done today.

These values represent how we engage with and serve carers, how we work with each other, and our commitment to the broader community. Carers Tasmania encourages partnerships with governments and health and community sectors to enhance service provision and improve conditions for family or friend carers through policy development, research and advocacy.

We acknowledge and support people of all genders, sexualities, cultural beliefs, and abilities and understand that carers in Tasmania, whilst sharing the common theme of caring for a family member or friend, are diverse individuals with varying beliefs, experiences, and identities. We value and respect the diversity of carers, their lived and living experiences, and recognise that carers are the experts in their own lives.

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1. Background

Carers Tasmania is the Peak Body representing the more than 80,000 informal carers within the state.

A carer is a person who provides unpaid care and support to a family member, or friend, with disability, mental ill health, a chronic or life-limiting condition, alcohol or other drug dependence, or who is frail or aged. Informal kinship carers who care for a child under the age of 18, because the parent is unable to, are also recognised as carers. Carers are predominantly family members, but may also be friends, neighbours, or colleagues. Informal carers are not to be confused with paid support workers who are often called 'carers', with the difference being that support workers are fully employed and remunerated with all the benefits of employment. On the contrary, informal carers perform their caring duties without remuneration, other than minimal carer payments and allowances from the Australian Government.

In addition to representing carers through the Peak Body activities, Carers Tasmania provides support to carers living in Tasmania through its service delivery arm, Care2Serve. The Commonwealth Carer Gateway program is delivered through Care2Serve in Tasmania, as are other supports and services, such as the Tasmanian Government's Home and Community Care program.

The Carer Gateway program provides a range of services and supports for carers which are designed to build resilience, increase wellbeing, improve quality of life, and sustain carers to effectively continue their caring roles. The available supports include the provision of information, advice and referrals, holistic identification of carer strengths and needs through a carer support planning process, professional counselling, peer support, and coaching which aims to support carers in achieving specific goals.

Care2Serve, through the Carer Gateway, has capacity to fund certain instances of planned, practical support services such as in-home respite, personal care, domestic assistance, and meal preparation. Care2Serve may also fund items such as laptops to assist carers who are studying or trying to enter the workforce. Care2Serve also coordinates the provision of emergency support during instances where a carer may be unable to provide the care that they usually do, resulting from unexpected illness or injury of the carer.

2. Introduction

Carers Tasmania welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to *Tasmanian Positive – Tasmania’s Sustainability Strategy* consultation. We support the overall aims of developing this strategy and agree with the need to create a strategy that will ensure a sustainable Tasmania for years to come. In the Discussion Paper, the Premier of Tasmania reflects upon his vision for “no Tasmanian to be left behind.”¹ Unfortunately, right now, there are Tasmanians being left behind. We strongly urge, as the first step towards sustainability, that Tasmanians who are currently living in need, are supported to ensure a sustainable future for us all.

One in six Tasmanians are unpaid carers, caring for a family member or friend with disability, mental ill health, a chronic or life-limiting condition, alcohol or other drug dependence, or who is frail or aged. The proportion of carers in Tasmania is higher than the national average, reflecting high rates of disability, mental ill health, and health conditions, as well as our rapidly ageing population.

The 2022 National Carer survey revealed that in Tasmania, three in five carers experienced financial stress and 46% felt socially isolated.² Carers from Tasmania typically spend more than 100 hours per week caring and have been caring for 11.3 years. Their caring role has a significant impact on lifetime earnings and superannuation, with carers on average losing \$39,600 in lifetime earnings and \$17,700 in superannuation for each year they are a primary carer.³ Income support through a carer payment is 28% of the weekly ordinary earnings for a single person in Australia, with the carer allowance equal to only 10% of the aged care pension for a couple.

If we are to achieve the vision of a sustainable Tasmania, it is important to consider the needs of Tasmanian carers to ensure they are not left behind.

3. Feedback on the consultation paper

Carers Tasmania strongly urges the Tasmanian Government to explicitly consider, recognise, and include carers within the upcoming Tasmanian Sustainability Strategy and any associated action plans. There are more than 80,000 carers living all across Tasmania, which includes people of varying ages, genders, socio-economic status, cultural backgrounds, literacy, health, and ability.

In April 2023, the *Tasmanian Carer Recognition Act*⁴ came into effect. This legislation aims to increase the recognition of carers within the State and assist in supporting carers to access information and support. It also aims to ensure that carers are included in decisions concerning policy, programs, and planning that are relevant to them. The sustainability of Tasmania is important to carers, and they must be considered and included within the

¹ Department of Premier and Cabinet Tasmania. (2023). *Tasmania Positive – Our state’s sustainability strategy Discussion Paper*. https://hdp-au-prod-app-dpactas-positive-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/2616/9318/2499/TasPos_DiscussionPaper_v1_WCAG.pdf

² Carers Tasmania. (2023). *National Carer Survey Tasmanian Results*. <https://carerstas.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/2022-10-07-TAS-Carers-Week-Results-Briefing.pdf>

³ Carers Australia. (2022). *Caring Costs Us*. <https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/programs-projects/caring-costs-us/>

⁴ *Tasmanian Carer Recognition Act* (2023). <https://www.legislation.tas.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/2023-04-20/act-2023-001>

context of this strategy. Specifically, we seek for the *Tasmanian Carer Action Plan*⁵ to be referred to as a relevant plan to sit alongside the Sustainability Strategy. Ensuring that carers are recognised, supported, and included is paramount, as they are critical to the sustainability of the State.

The Sustainability Strategy Discussion Paper refers to the following quote about sustainability from the *1987 Brundtland Commission Report*:

“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”^{6,7}

We agree that the strategy should draw goals and aspirations from the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals⁸ but urge the Tasmanian Government to focus on meeting the present needs of the Tasmanian community first.

We note the following question, as highlighted in the Discussion Paper:

*“What are the most important challenges we need to overcome to achieve your vision for Tasmania in 2050?”*⁹

To achieve a sustainable Tasmania, the basic needs of the Tasmanian community must be adequately addressed. Resolving these needs will not only support carers but also the wider Tasmanian community. We know that people in Tasmania face significant challenges with the cost of living, resulting in people living in poverty and going without. Often, for carers, this means they go without basics so they can support the person they are caring for. Recent statistics reported by the Tasmanian Council for Social Services (TasCOSS), indicate that 120,000 Tasmanians live below the poverty line.¹⁰

In addition, there is a rental crisis in Tasmania, with many people unable to obtain suitable, safe, and affordable housing. The Homes Tasmania Dashboard reported that as of August 2023, there were 4,455 applicants still waiting on the social housing register in Tasmania, and the average time to house priority applicants was 73.6 months.¹¹

We often hear from carers who are concerned about significant issues with education, particularly for children who have disability or additional needs. As of the end of Term 1, 2023, the state attendance rate for students in years Prep to 10 was only 87.8%.¹² A report from June 2023 indicated that there were projected to be approximately 10,000 suspensions

⁵ Department of Premier and Cabinet Tasmania. (2021). *Supporting Tasmanian Carers: Tasmanian Carer Action Plan 2021-2024*. https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0026/246248/Supporting-our-Carers-Action-Plan-2021-24_-JULY-2021.pdf

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Brundtland Commission. (1987). *Our Common Future*. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>

⁸ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

⁹ ⁹ https://hdp-au-prod-app-dpactas-positive-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/2616/9318/2499/TasPos_DiscussionPaper_v1_WCAG.pdf

¹⁰ <https://tascoss.org.au/>

¹¹ Homes Tasmania. (2023). *Housing Dashboard*. https://www.homestasmania.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0031/272956/Housing-Dashboard-August-2023.pdf

¹² Department for Education, Children and Young People Tasmania. (2023). *Student engagement and participation data*. <https://www.decyp.tas.gov.au/about-us/policies-legislation-data/data-and-statistics/student-engagement-participation-data/>

in Tasmanian state schools this year.¹³ Furthermore, in 2022, 55% of all Tasmanian state school suspensions were handed down to students with disability, students who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or students who were in out-of-home care. Alarming, the total suspension number from 2022, which was estimated at 9,000, included more than 60 children who were only in Kindergarten or Prep.¹⁴

Statistics such as these indicate that Tasmanian schools are not equipped to support children who require additional support to enable them to participate effectively at school. This is despite the growing body of research suggesting that school suspensions, particularly for students who are still in the early stages of school can have significant and long-lasting negative effects on a child's life.^{15, 16,17} Recommendations 7.1 to 7.3 in the *Disability Royal Commission Final Report* provides further advice on supporting children with disability within the education system.¹⁸

Most, if not all, Paediatricians in Tasmania currently have closed books due to a high demand, which makes it challenging for people to obtain diagnoses so their children can access support. In addition, there is little state-funded support available for people with disability who are ineligible for the NDIS.

Despite the ongoing improvements to Tasmanian Health Services and the work being implemented under the *Our HealthCare Future* banner, there are still significant issues in Tasmanian hospitals. It is pleasing to see that an independent review of Tasmania's emergency departments has been called. We are hopeful that this review can facilitate positive changes to ensure that people can access the right care when they need it. Despite this, we still hear from carers about poor hospital discharge processes, resulting in re-admission within days, often a worsening of their condition, and additional strain on carers.

Ramping and overworked hospital staff is still a significant issue. People are being sent home earlier than they should be because beds are being used by patients who are waiting for space to become available in residential aged care facilities. It is pleasing that there are two new urgent care clinics operating in Tasmania, however, these are only accessible to a small number of people due to their locations and the accessibility issues experienced across Tasmania.

¹³ The Mercury. (2023). *Tasmanian Schools in crisis*. <https://www.themercury.com.au/tasmania-education/tasmanian-government-schools-in-crisis-as-suspensions-escalate/news-story/c09dbbca3072e914ff8d75d7cc579e31>

¹⁴ Rob Inglis. (n.d). *School Figures Cause Alarm*.

https://www.education.pagesuite.com/popovers/dynamic_article_popover.aspx?artguid=6fb70fe3-6227-4878-a1cd-b6c47526392a

¹⁵ Hemphill S.A. & Hargreaves J. (2010). *School suspensions - a resource for teachers and school administrators*. Centre for Adolescent Health, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, Melbourne.

https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/cah/School_suspension_booklet.pdf

¹⁶ Lacoë, J., & Steinberg, M. P. (2019). Do Suspensions Affect Student Outcomes? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 41(1), 34–62. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45281342>

¹⁷ Anderson, K. P., Ritter, G. W., & Zamarro, G. (2019). Understanding a Vicious Cycle: The Relationship Between Student Discipline and Student Academic Outcomes. *Educational Researcher*, 48(5), 251–262. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45176364>

¹⁸ Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. (2023). <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2023-11/Final%20report%20-%20Executive%20Summary%2C%20Our%20vision%20for%20an%20inclusive%20Australia%20and%20Recommendations.pdf>

Right now, there are significant workforce shortages across Tasmania in essential industries such as, but not limited to health, community services, and education. We have exceedingly high rates of mental ill health, chronic health conditions, and disability, when compared to the rest of Australia. In addition, we have the highest population ageing rates in the country.¹⁹

We know that TasCOSS and other Community Sector organisations are tirelessly advocating for improvements in workforce development and capacity, but while workforce shortages remain, it is carers who are providing a large proportion of support and care, unpaid, and often to the detriment of their own emotional, physical, and financial health.

The Community Services Sector in Tasmania is also struggling. TasCOSS has advocated for appropriate funding and indexation in the sector. The Community Services Sector plays a significant role in supporting vulnerable Tasmanians, but if the sector cannot attract and retain quality staff or afford to keep their services running, Tasmania is at risk of losing these important supports. To support sustainability, we need a skilled, knowledgeable, cohesive, and fully resourced workforce within a sustainable Community Services Sector.

Of note, the Tasmanian Community Services Industry Plan 2021-2031 holds the following vision:

“A connected community services industry that supports all Tasmanians to live a good life and enriches our state’s social, cultural and economic wellbeing.”²⁰

We encourage reflection on the submission provided by TasCOSS as part of this consultation, as it highlights significant current issues in Tasmania and ideas on building a sustainable future.

In order to achieve a sustainable Tasmania, these issues must be addressed. In the meantime, the carers who are supporting the Tasmanian economy must be supported so their caring roles can be sustained, and with as little disadvantage to their own wellbeing as possible. To provide further context, in 2020, Deloitte Access Economics modelled the national replacement value of informal care to be \$77.9 billion based on more than 2.2 billion hours of unpaid care provided by carers nationally.²¹ In Tasmania, this would cost approximately \$2.2 billion if the care provided by informal carers were to be replaced through the state health system or service providers.²² It is extremely concerning when considering what might occur if carers are not supported to sustain their caring roles and if essential services remain inadequately staffed.

¹⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022). *Snapshot of Tasmania*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/snapshot-tas-2021#:~:text=In%20the%202021%20Census%2C%20the,city%20area%20of%20Greater%20Hobart>

²⁰ https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/228041/Community-Services-Industry-Plan-2021-2031-web.pdf

²¹ Deloitte Access Economics and Carers Australia. (2020). *The value of informal care in 2020*. <https://www.deloitte.com/au/en/services/economics/perspectives/value-of-informal-care-2020.html>

²² Carers Tasmania. (2023). *Carers Tasmania Response to the Hospitals Discharge Framework*. <https://carerstas.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Carers-Tasmania-Response-to-the-THS-Statewide-Hospitals-Discharge-Framework.pdf>

4. Summary

Carers Tasmania supports the development of *Tasmanian Positive – Tasmania’s Sustainability Strategy*. We urge the Tasmanian Government to explicitly consider, recognise, and include carers within the Strategy. Further, we request urgent actions are identified in the Strategy to address systematic issues within Tasmanian Government service delivery, including in the education, health, hospital and housing frameworks, to reduce the increasing financial, physical, emotional and social impacts on carers. We also request the Tasmanian Government works in partnership with TasCOSS to build a sustainable Community Services Sector and workforce.

Carers Tasmania looks forward to further discussions on the Sustainability Strategy and to playing our part in ensuring a sustainable future for all Tasmanians, including our carers.