

# Federal Budget 2023–24

**What it means for carers, what is missing and why it is important**



# There is no ‘stronger foundation’ without carers

The Australian Government delivered its 2023–24 Federal Budget, which aims to build a ‘stronger foundation’, on 9 May 2023. As outlined in our media release, the Government’s aim to build a ‘stronger foundation’ with this Budget will not succeed without clear recognition and inclusion of Australia’s 2.65 million carers<sup>1</sup>, whose support and care for family members and friends save the economy more than [\\$77 billion a year](#).

The Carers Australia [2023–24 Pre-Budget Submission](#) again included a range of asks to benefit carers, none of which were met directly by the Government in this Budget. Our asks reflect a consistent focus on the need for recognition, economic and financial security, mental health and wellbeing supports and individual advocacy for carers.

Many of the measures announced within the 2023–24 Federal Budget include increased supports to people receiving care, particularly in efforts to alleviate cost-of-living pressures. Although these investments may indirectly benefit carers, Carers Australia continues to advocate for targeted supports and recognition for carers. This was not achieved within this Budget.

## The diversity of caring and importance of recognition

Carers Australia welcomes and supports the much-needed investments targeted to assist those within identified underserved or at-risk populations. However, targeted measures are needed to better address and recognise the diversity and uniqueness of carers, caring relationships and people receiving care. Our advocacy efforts will continue to raise awareness of this diversity and call on government across portfolios to provide more carer-inclusive activities that consider carers may:

- be in multiple care relationships, caring for a partner, young child, adult child, parent, older parent, another person they consider family or friend or a combination of these
- have employment and/or education commitments
- live in rural and remote Australia
- be young (with 235,000 young carers aged 12 to 25 years)
- be accessing mental health, disability support or aged care services themselves
- look after someone 24 hours a day, help with daily activities, or provide less intense caring or care that is episodic
- be from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, be an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person, be part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex or asexual (LGBTQIA+) community, or be caring for people within these populations.

Our call to action is for those involved in the following measures to improve their awareness of carers within these specific populations, and involve carers in co-design as distinct from ‘consumers’:

### 1. The focus on children and young people, including employment programs, education opportunities, mental health initiatives and social service payment changes.

As we have highlighted in many [responses to government](#), young carers face additional barriers and are at increased risk of mental health issues and disengagement from school or education opportunities due to caring responsibilities. Most young carers have not studied beyond high school and, on average, young carers are expected to be on income support for 43 years over their lifetime.

There are also specific considerations for those at risk of homelessness or experiencing family violence due to a lack of recognition of their caring role and its impact, not being identified by services they interact with, and fear in regard to other siblings.

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<sup>1</sup> Carers Australia uses the term ‘carer’ as defined by the Commonwealth Carer Recognition Act 2010 (the Act). It should not be used broadly and without context to describe a paid care worker, volunteer, foster carer or a family member or friend who is not a carer. The terms ‘informal carer’, ‘unpaid carer’ or ‘family and friend carer’ are also often used by organisations, governments and the community to describe a carer. We may use these terms to assist in providing context and to differentiate between other types of care provision.

- 2. Support for the mental health of First Nations people related to the referendum on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, funding to improve access to NDIS supports in remote and First Nations communities, actions to support the commitment to close the gap Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health, wellbeing and improve aged care outcomes, and the range of measures to support investment in infrastructure, employment, justice, education and housing.**

[Fourteen per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are carers](#). Although Carers Australia acknowledges that Australia's First Nations carers may experience many of the same issues as other carers, the care they give and support they need is influenced by a range of unique historical, cultural, spiritual and socio-economic factors.

Any measures must consider that First Nation individuals and communities may use the term 'carer' but attach different cultural meanings, in addition to there being contrasting views of health and wellbeing.

- 3. Development of a 10-year National Action Plan to support the health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and asexual (LGBTQIA+) people to improve their health outcomes and address health disparities.**

The impacts of the caring role must be specifically addressed in the National Action Plan, as the [2022 Carer Wellbeing Survey](#) shows LGBTQIA+ carers experience higher levels of psychological distress and lower satisfaction with their health than all carers generally.

- 4. Specific measures for multicultural communities, such as funding for the Australian Multicultural Health Collaborative, media literacy, employment and education outcomes and specific mental health initiatives.**

Carers Australia acknowledges the concept of being a 'carer' or seeking help within culturally and ethnically diverse populations may be an additional barrier for many reasons in accessing information and support.

We urge the Australian Multicultural Health Collaborative to include carers specifically within their focus as [up to 30% of carers in Australia are from multicultural backgrounds](#); however, we believe this is likely to be an underestimate due to the lack of reporting or identification of the caring role within these communities.

- 5. Measures outlined in the Women's Budget Statement, where all measures in the Budget have had to consider gender equality, and the particular focus on supporting women facing disadvantage, including single parents and low-income workers across the care and support sector. In addition, the investment in research and data collection activities that support women and girls' health outcomes.**

Carers Australia believes that gender equity cannot be achieved without adequate support for carers, in recognition that [seven out of 10 primary carers are women](#). Further research is needed on the gendered impact of caring across the life course and reflective of the diversity of caring. We also respectfully highlight that the caring role is different to child-rearing or parenting.

- 6. For those living in rural and remote areas of Australia, additional bulk billing incentives, increased rural health spending for the Rural Flying Doctor Service, diagnostic imaging, medical training and midwifery, regional employment services, a specific focus on regional initiatives for suicide prevention, and funding to ensure the viability of rural and remote aged care providers.**

We urge governments and stakeholders to recognise the additional needs of the 31% of all carers living in regional and remote areas, who often provide care to more than one person and more intense caring due to a lack of services. [2022 data](#) emphasises that carers in outer regional and remote locations have lower wellbeing, higher financial distress, and more difficulty accessing services for themselves or the person they are caring for than carers overall.

As with many services, respite is even more difficult, if not impossible, to access in many regional, rural and remote locations. For many, being able to 'access' respite means the person being cared for is separated by great distances from the carer and off Country, adding greater emotional, practical and financial strain.

## Our commitment

As many have already said of the 2023–24 Budget, the devil will be in the detail.

Carers Australia will be advocating for the necessary resources and attention required to ensure the voice of carers, distinct from those receiving care, are included in all aspects of co-design processes and planned reform to our health, aged care, mental health, disability support, social services and employment assistance systems.

We will also continue to remind the Australian Government of its 2022 pre-election commitment to a new National Carers Strategy within its first term, as well as a review of the outdated Commonwealth [Carer Recognition Act \(2010\)](#).

## 2023–24 Federal Budget

Below is an overview of the May 2023–24 Federal Budget measures that specifically target or may affect carers that Carers Australia believes are important to highlight.

More information on these and other measures not included in this document can be found at [www.budget.gov.au](http://www.budget.gov.au).

Note: Budget measures must be passed by Parliament before they can come into effect.



# Mental health

## What was in the Budget?

\$8.7 million over three years from 2023–24 is being provided to establish and operate two independent national mental health lived-experience peak bodies. One of these bodies will be for families, carers and kin who support people living with mental ill health.

There were many measures to strengthen Australia's mental health and suicide prevention system including:

- \$260.2 million to extend psychosocial supports for people with severe mental illness who are not in the NDIS through Primary Health Network commissioned programs
- \$14.4 million over two years from 2023–24 to support the continuation of services nationally for people experiencing grief and distress as a result of suicide loss
- \$2.8 million in 2023–24 to extend mental health supports for Australians living with eating disorders and their families
- \$2 million to continue the Department of Veterans Affairs mental health literacy and suicide intervention training program for the ex-service community.

## What does it mean for me as a carer?

While any measures that benefit mental health are welcomed, and many may be accessible to a carer by extension, there is no recognition of the mental health needs of carers specifically.

Carers overall have among the lowest levels of wellbeing of any group of Australians. The [2022 Carer Wellbeing Survey](#) found that carers were three times less likely to have high levels of wellbeing compared to those that do not have a caring role. Carers also continued to be at higher risk of psychological distress, with 48.1% experiencing moderate to high levels of psychological distress, almost twice as many as the 25.0% of Australian adults who experience this.

We urge any mental health or wellbeing services or programs to consider the specific needs of carers within their focus areas, how carers can be involved in co-design, and how to reach carers to provide information and support.

### **Mental health lived experience peak**

An independent national mental health lived-experience peak body specifically for family, carers and kin will open channels for direct consultation with the Government on mental health policies and programs. This follows from the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health recommendation to ensure the separate views of carers and families, distinct from those of mental health consumers, are heard nationally.

Carers Australia will work with the new lived experience peak to ensure cross-portfolio awareness of issues for carers of people living with mental ill-health (often called mental health carers). While there is yet no real information available on how the peak will operate or how carers can be engaged, we will ensure any information is made available to carers as we receive it.

Mental health services often focus on the needs of the person living with a mental health condition or psychosocial disability without considering that the person providing care may also require mental health support, and may be a consumer of mental health services.

Lower wellbeing is [more common among people caring for a person living with a mental health condition or psychosocial disability](#). In addition, general health is also considerably lower, and their experience of loneliness is higher. These findings are echoed in the [2022 Report to the Nation by Mental Health Australia](#), which states that mental health carers were more likely than others to have been diagnosed with a mental health condition and rated their mental health lower than non-carers.



# Disability support

## What was in the Budget?

There were many Budget announcements related to disability support, including for the NDIS. Carers Australia draws attention to:

- several measures aimed a policy development and co-design
- \$732.9 million to support participant outcomes and the effective and sustainable operation of the NDIS, including the setting of an annual growth target in the total costs of the scheme of 8% by July 2026, with funding aimed at seven key initiatives, including:
  - specialised planning and ensuring consistency across participant plans in defining supports under 'Reasonable and Necessary'
  - Improvements to Supported Independent Living (SIL) processes
  - Better support for participants to manage their plans
  - flexibility through implementing a lifetime planning approach
- \$487 million to continue the Disability Support for Older Australians Program.

## What does it mean for me as a carer?

Carers may benefit from measures that help the person they care for who is living with disability. However, there were no measures explicitly aimed at supporting carers in their role.

Carers Australia highlights that not all people living with disability want to engage with, or are eligible for, the NDIS and there must be better supports outside the NDIS. In addition, [approximately 30% of carers live with disability](#) themselves. It cannot be assumed that to be a carer means you cannot also be living with a disability, or conversely that a disability prevents a person from being a carer.

Regarding measures focused on reform, such as the NDIS Review, the development of the welcomed National Autism Strategy and activities under the Australian Disability Strategy, it remains unclear how carers will be embedded into these processes from the outset and ongoing. It is hoped that the new central coordination funding for disability policy within the Department of Social Services will address this.

Increased efforts to recognise, validate and address the issues raised by carers, including carers of adult children living with disability, would increase the capability of government and better inform staff and service providers of the valuable role carers have and how this intersects with the supports required for person receiving care and the carer to maintain their caring role. In particular, accountability for outcomes focused on relying on 'informal supports', and in the context of the target of capping the scheme, cannot be achieved without engagement with, and recognition of, carers.

We also draw attention to the new performance measure included in budget documents for the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission for 2023–24: *'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'*. We are seeking clarification as to how this is measured from the carer's perspective, or if it will be reported separately from the recipient.

### Disability Support for Older Australians (DSOA) Program

The DSOA provides support to people aged 65 years and over (and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 years and over) who were previously receiving Continuity of Support (CoS) Programme funding and are not eligible for the NDIS. It is not available to new participants.

For carers of those already within the DSOA, there is some relief in knowing the funding will continue, where [Individual Support Plans](#) must relate to the client's goals and planned outcomes, including consideration of the needs of the client's carer and plan for unexpected events (like a carer being sick).

For people living with disability who do not already receive support under the DSOA, they can only apply for NDIS support if they are under 65 on the day the NDIS application is made (complete, in the format required,

and received by the NDIA). A person already receiving an NDIS package before they turn 65 may continue to receive services, but their NDIS package will be withdrawn when they enter residential aged care.

People over 65 must also leave the NDIS if they [start getting home care services](#) permanently for the first time under My Aged Care.



# Aged care

## What was in the Budget?

There were many measures directed toward improving the quality and safety of aged care. Carers Australia draws attention to the following for carers:

- move to a new single Support at Home program delayed another year, now targeted for July 2025.
- \$166.8 million to fund an extra 9,500 Home Care Packages (HCP) in 2023–24.

## What does it mean for me as a carer?

There were no measures funded in the Budget directly targeted at carers of older people.

Major improvements to home care, including access to community respite, remain a work in progress and have again been extended for another year. This means that current Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) arrangements will be extended for a further 12 months to 30 June 2025.

While we welcome the additional 9,500 HCPs, these still will not meet current demand. At [December 2022](#), 255,628 people had access to a HCP, but a further 37,894 were waiting for a package at their approved level, where wait times for all levels were one to three months.

Carers Australia continues to make strong representations that carers must be involved in consultation and co-design processes. We emphasise that adequate and timely home-based supports for the aged care recipient and the carer are necessary to allow people to choose to remain in the home. This includes carers of older Australians and older carers aged over 65 years who may also be accessing aged care services.

Carers aged over 65 years accounted for [34% of all carers in 2018](#). They each have different needs and interface with the aged care system. Carers aged 65 and older are also less likely to access psychological support services.

Our [2022 Carer Wellbeing Survey](#) investigated the barriers carers experienced when seeking access to support services for the people they cared for. The most significant were:

- lack of funding for the service (including My Aged Care)
- difficulty finding high-quality services and lack of local service availability
- complicated application processes and long waiting times to access services
- staff turnover amongst service providers and poor coordination between services.

Most carers reported experiencing multiple of these barriers, highlighting the complex range of challenges many carers face when seeking to access aged care support services.

We also highlight the need to have improved responsibility and accountability for aged care related carer support and appropriately resourced carer engagement within the Department of Health and Ageing and relevant authorities, to address a diffusion of responsibility and perception that carer supports are a role only for the Department of Social Services, or are primarily focused on carers of people living with a disability.



# Social security



## What was in the Budget?

There were many measures announced under the Budget heading 'Support for those who need it most' to ease cost-of-living pressures, particularly through amendments to certain social service (Centrelink) payments or based on eligibility for payments. Carers Australia draws attention to the following measures:

- \$7.6 billion over four years to increase the rate of JobSeeker Payment and other eligible income support payments by \$40 per fortnight
- \$2.7 billion to increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance rates by 15%
- \$1.9 billion over five years from 2022–23 to expand eligibility for Parenting Payment (Single)
- \$1.5 billion to offer up to \$500 relief on power bills.

## What does it mean for me as a carer?

### \$40 increase per fortnight

Carers Australia has confirmed that [the \\$40 per fortnight increase](#) to eligible income support payments **does not** apply to the Carer Payment.

This measure will increase the base rate of working age and student payments, including JobSeeker Payment<sup>2</sup>, Youth Allowance, Parenting Payment (Partnered), Austudy, ABSTUDY, Disability Support Pension (under 21 without a dependent child) and Special Benefit and Farm Household Allowance.

In addition, eligibility for the higher rate of the JobSeeker Payment, currently set at 60 years of age, will be extended to people aged 55 to 59 who have been unemployed for nine months. These people will receive an additional \$52 a fortnight, for an overall increase of \$92.

The measure will start on 20 September 2023 (subject to legislation passing). Applicable payment rates will also be indexed on 20 September 2023.

Carers Australia welcomes any increases to these payments, which will benefit many carers that receive the eligible benefits. It is a common misunderstanding that all carers receive the Carer Payment.

Data provided to Carers Australia by the Australian Government from September 2022 gives some indication of the broader range of social security payments that carers rely on, based on people who receive the Carer Allowance (a supplementary payment for people who provide daily care and attention to a person with a disability or medical condition). This includes:

- 95,295 people on the Age Pension
- 23,470 people on the Disability Support Pension
- 12,715 people on JobSeeker
- 85 people on the Youth Allowance.

We remain disappointed the increase does not extend to the Carer Payment despite the increase being in recognition of the 'challenges that many income support payment recipients face'. In [December 2022](#), 303,520 people were receiving the Carer Payment as their main income. They cannot engage in work, education, or volunteering for more than 25 hours per week, including travel time and breaks, before the payment is impacted.

We understand the measure is targeted to working-age and student income support payments. On seeking clarification from the Australian Government, we have been informed that the exclusion of 'pensions' (including Carer Payment) in this measure is in part because the Carer Payment is paid at a higher rate than

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<sup>2</sup> Does not include JobSeeker Payment single principal carers of a dependent child exempted from mutual obligation requirements for the following reasons: foster caring, non-parent relative caring (court order), home schooling, distance education, or large family (Source: [Services Australia](#), accurate at 9 May 2023).

other payments ([\\$971.50 maximum base rate/fortnight](#) for a single person. The JobSeeker maximum base rate for a single person is \$693.10/fortnight before any of the new increases.

The [Australia Government Social Security Guide](#) (v1.307) defines the Carer Payment as ‘a fortnightly income support payment for people who are unable to support themselves through substantial paid employment due to the demands of their caring role.’

We will be raising this with the government, including with the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee and newly funded Evaluation Unit within Treasury. We have 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 [Interim Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee](#) also recently noted the need to reconsider the level of the Carer Payment, and we urge the Committee to add weight to prioritise this work.

### **Young carers**

The increase to Youth Allowance, Austudy and ABSTUDY is likely to be particularly welcomed by eligible young carers. Young carers may also benefit from an increase in the number of [Young Carer Bursaries](#) available and the money each bursary is worth in 2024, as announced in April.

In 2024, the program will offer 1,592 bursaries at \$3,768 each to provide financial assistance to young carers to help with educational needs and reduce their need to undertake paid work at the same time as their study and caring duties. Applications for the 2024 round will open on 18 July 2023.

### **Increase in Rent Assistance**

The [increase of 15% to Rent Assistance](#) is available to people on the Carer Payment. It is also available to those receiving ABSTUDY Living Allowance, Youth Allowance, Austudy, Special Benefit, Family Tax Benefit Part A, Parenting Payments, Jobseeker or Farm Household Allowance. This includes payment recipients living in community housing, defence housing or a non-homeowner in a retirement village.

The level of rent assistance depends on individual circumstances (sole renter, a shared renter, a couple or a couple separated due to illness) and how much a person pays for rent. For example, a single renter who spends more than \$140 per fortnight will get an additional \$21, but if their rent is at least \$350 per fortnight, it will be an increase of \$52 per fortnight.

The increase in rental assistance will be welcome by people on the Carer Payment in private rental accommodation, numbering 93,375 in [December 2022](#). However, it does little to meet the costs of rapidly rising rents or other cost of living pressures, which are compounded for carers by the additional costs associated with providing care and out-of-pocket medical expenses for both carers who do have access to Rent Assistance and carers generally.

The increase in payments will come into effect in September 2023 (subject to legislation).

### **Single Parenting Payment**

There is no change in the base rate of the Parenting Payment (Single), but a person will [be able to stay on the payment for longer, be eligible with an older child and earn more income from work](#). Recipients will be able to be eligible for and receive the payment until their youngest child turns 14, a change from the current eight-year-old cut-off. However, current mutual obligations will be maintained for recipients with children aged six years or above.

Changes to the income-free area, a person will also be able to earn more money from employment. For example, a person with one child can earn at least \$2,622.35 per fortnight (and an additional \$24.60 per child per fortnight) before receiving no payment, a \$569.10 per fortnight increase relative to current settings.

Many people who rely on the Parenting Payment (Single) have children with disabilities or chronic illnesses but do not meet the full eligibility requirements for the Carer Payment. As of September 2022, 11,655 people on the Parenting Payment (Single) were also receiving the Carer Allowance.

### **Energy bill relief**

[Up to \\$500 relief on power bills](#) is available to people who receive the Carer Allowance. It is also available to those on a Pensioner Concession Card (including those issued by DVA), Health Care Card (including Low

Income Health Care Card), DVA Gold Card, Commonwealth Seniors Health Card (including those issued by DVA) and those who receive Family Tax Benefit (FTB) Part A or B.

The money will not be provided to an individual directly but will be reflected in reduced energy bills from 1 July 2023 for customers currently getting a state or territory energy relief payment or rebate. This will be automatic; customers do not have to do anything. Services Australia will make system changes to enable customer eligibility to be confirmed and contact customers from September 2023 if any action is required.

How much a person will receive off their energy bill [will depend on which state or territory they live in](#). Those in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia can get the full amount of \$500 per household, while those in the ACT, the Northern Territory and Western Australia it will be \$350.



# Access to medicines and primary health care

## What was in the Budget?

There were many announcements under 'Building a Stronger Medicare' designed to improve access to general practices and other primary health care. Carers Australia draws attention to four measures:

- \$3.5 billion in bulk billing incentives for GPs to increase the current incentive by 30% for pensioners, concession card holders and children under 16
- establishing MyMedicare to provide General Practices with more comprehensive information about their regular patients and access to additional funding packages
- changes to allow people to buy two months' supply of certain prescription medicines from 1 September 2023
- \$13 million over four years from 2023–24 to strengthen consumer and community representation in the design and delivery of primary care policy.

## What does it mean for me as a carer?

### Bulk billing

This **does** include those on the Carer Payment.

Bulk billing is when the consultation fee charged by a doctor is the same as the benefit Medicare pays them to provide the service, meaning the patient pays nothing out of pocket. This incentive tries to encourage more GPs to bulk bill. However, the incentive does not guarantee that a person will be bulk billed, even if they receive the Carer Payment or other eligibility criteria, as it is up to each GP to decide.

This incentive will apply to all face-to-face and telehealth GP services that take between six and 20 minutes from November 2023. It will also apply to other consultations and longer appointments only if a patient is registered with their GP through the new MyMedicare system.

We encourage carers to talk with their GP about bulk billing options for their care and that of the person they care for.

### MyMedicare

The new MyMedicare system will allow people to 'voluntarily register' as a continuing patient with their GP. This will allow a person to receive additional benefits or services, such as longer telehealth sessions, the potential for more bulk-billed appointments, and access to the new comprehensive care services to patients who are frequent hospital users, and the incentives for GP consultations in residential aged care.

Carers Australia has previously raised concern about voluntary patient registration if it is required to receive additional benefits or services. This suggests it is not voluntary, and we remain concerned without knowing more detail about access, the level of care available to those who choose not to register.

The diversity of caring **must** be included in co-design as distinct from 'consumer' involvement.

### Changes to prescriptions

A person may get [60 days supply instead of 30 days at a community pharmacy](#) for certain approved medicines. It will mean saving money on dispensing fees, not needing to see the doctor as often for repeat prescriptions, and saving time associated with pharmacy and doctor visits.

It is important to understand that the price of the medicine will not change, but it reduces the number of times you pay the pharmacy (the dispensing fee), saving money. The decision to write a prescription that allows for two months of medicine to be dispensed by the pharmacy still needs to be made by the doctor.

We encourage carers to talk with their prescribing doctor about prescription options and medicines safety for themselves and that of the person they care for.

## Consumer involvement in codesign

We were unable to find additional details related to this measure. When information becomes available, we will include it in our communication activities and advocate for carer involvement.

Carers Australia is very supportive of consumer involvement in the design and delivery of primary health care. However, we highlight:

- All carers are consumers. However, not all consumers are carers. There is a need for the distinct and supported representation of carers alongside consumers.
- There was a lack of carer-specific targeted consultations in the development of the [Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan](#), similar to those facilitated for the LGBTQIA+ community and those from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds, despite repeated requests and offers of assistance.
- There is insufficient recognition of carers within the draft Plan, and only a last-minute addition of *'Develop and update guidance, frameworks and tools for primary health care providers to support the health and wellbeing of carers'* following consistent advocacy. However, we have not yet been approached by the Government or other organisations regarding this 'short term action'.
- There remains no representation of Carers Australia on the Primary Health Reform Steering Group despite several requests to the Department of Health and Ageing and Ministers.
- The wellbeing of patients accessing primary health care and their carers are interdependent, where the primary health care system does not proactively identify carers or include carers in appropriate discussions or decision-making.
- We need improved responsibility and accountability for primary health care related carer support within the Department of Health and Ageing and relevant authorities to address a diffusion of responsibility and perception that carer supports are only a Department of Social Services role, or primarily focused on carers of people living with a disability.

These concerns are fundamentally out of alignment with the *Carer Recognition Act (2010)*, which contains principles that articulate how carers should be treated and considered, including that *'carers should be considered as partners with other care providers in the provision of care, acknowledging the unique knowledge and experience of carers.'*

# Digital health



## What was in the Budget?

There were many Budget announcements related to digital health, including:

- \$429 million to modernise My Health Record
- 69.7 million over four years from 2023–24 to digitise additional health services
- \$8.7 million to continue digital mental health services and maintain the Head to Health website
- \$5.9 million over five years from 2022–23 to enable access to longer telehealth consultations under MyMedicare.

## What does it mean for me as a carer?

Digital health options, including telehealth, can reduce infection risk, travel time, costs and improve access to mental health and broader health care. However, digital health can also present a range of barriers associated with affordability, useability, problems with technology, insufficient funding, inadequate information provision by service providers, and lack of service support.

### Head to Health

Carers may benefit from the [Head to Health](#) which find digital mental health resources from trusted service providers. This includes information for accessing services specifically as a carer, and those related to COVID-19.

There is also the opportunity for carers to provide feedback on the website, including the ‘supporting yourself – carers’ section specifically. We encourage carers to provide their feedback to ensure their experiences and needs are informing the ongoing development of this initiative.

### My Health Record

Most Australians have a My Health Record and there are important benefits of creating a My Health Record as a carer and having access to the Record of the people receiving care. Carers Australia have detailed information on this for carers available on our website under [‘Digital Health Literacy’](#).

Carers Australia broadly supports an increase in digital infrastructure for consumers and carers who wish to use it. However, digital health initiatives **must** be considered from the lens of the health professional, consumer and the person caring for them.

Solutions must also improve digital inclusion or risk increasing the ‘digital divide’ which will impact on carers’ ability to not only undertake their caring responsibilities but also manage their own health and wellbeing. With an increased reliance on technology, it is important to note that while many carers do use digital technology, a significant number are digitally disadvantaged.

We highlight:

- [One in three carers](#) outside metropolitan areas lacks good access to high-speed, reliable internet, compared with 70% of all carers, highlighting a significant ‘urban-rural divide’ in access to critical infrastructure that many carers need to access digital supports and services.
- Consideration must include the costs of acquiring and setting up various IT equipment, maintaining an adequate internet connection and a private space within a home.
- It is critical to continue offline service delivery options for those who cannot, or do not want to, engage in digital environments. There are various reasons that online delivery may not be suitable for people, such as cultural norms, level of comfort, disabilities that may affect communication and accessibility needs, availability of translators, and hearing or vision impairment.



# Employment and training

## What was in the Budget?

There were many measures to rebuild and modernise the skills sector, to ensure Australians have the opportunity to access well-paid and secure jobs. These include:

- \$6.9 million over two years from 2023–24 to continue child and youth mental health supports, including the headspace digital work and study program for young Australians whose mental health is a barrier to work and study
- \$4.1 billion under the National Skills Agreement with states and territories to ensure better access to vocational education and training (VET), with TAFE at the centre
- \$436.4 million for redesign of the Skills for Education and Employment program to improve delivery of foundation skills, so more Australians over the age of 15 can access training for literacy, numeracy and digital skills
- \$5.1 million for the National Careers Institute to continue to provide Australians with an authoritative source of evidence-based information on education, training and careers pathways.

## What does it mean for me as a carer?

No measures specifically targeted assistance for carers to retain or re-enter employment or training.

This is following the cessation of the government [Mid-Career Checkpoint program](#) in December 2022 which was an initiative that helped people who had spent time out of the workforce undertaking caring responsibilities looking to return to paid employment.

It is **essential** redesign or the development of any new initiatives supporting employment and training access involve carers. There are many barriers to accessing programs and carer-inclusivity needs to be considered to ensure they are reaching a significant number of Australia's 2.65 million carers who need support to maintain or return to paid work.

[In 2018 carers were less likely to be employed](#) (66.6%) than non-carers (77.4%), which represents a largely underused portion of the population who are adversely affected when attempting to gain or sustain employment due to ongoing challenges with access, inclusivity and equality in employment because of their concurrent caring role. Further, primary carers who provide the most assistance to a person for one or more of the core activities of mobility, self-care and communication, are disproportionately affected, where only 55.5% of primary carers of working age were employed in 2018, creating another level of disadvantage.

The 2022 Carer Wellbeing Survey revealed that of those carers who were working or who wanted to be in paid work, 44.8% were doing less paid work than desired, compared to only 23.1% of Australians more generally. 70.8% of these carers who reported less paid work than desired also reported poor wellbeing.

### Headspace digital Work and Study online program

For young carers, the [Work and Study Support online program](#) may provide an opportunity for linkage with a 'specialist' to get tailored one-on-one support and advice on everything from study and education options to job hunting, as well as the ability to connect with other young people in group chats and get support from a mental health clinician.

# About Carers Australia

Carers Australia is the national peak body representing the diversity of the 2.65 million Australians who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends with a disability, chronic condition, mental illness or disorder, alcohol or other drug related condition, terminal illness, or who are frail aged.

In collaboration with our members, the peak carer organisations in each state and territory, we collectively form the National Carer Network and are an established infrastructure that represent the views of carers at the national level.

Our vision is an Australia that values and supports all carers, where all carers should have the same rights, choices and opportunities as other Australians to enjoy optimum health, social and economic wellbeing and participate in family, social and community life, employment and education.

**Disclaimer:** This document has been developed to provide basic information about the main May 2023–24 Federal Budget measures in relation to carers. It is not possible to cover every measure that may apply to carers and their individual circumstances.

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