



**Carers Tasmania's Submission to the  
Independent Review into  
Education in Tasmania**

**October 2024**



## About Carers Tasmania

Carers Tasmania is the Peak Body representing the more than 87,000 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 partnership 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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## Contents

1. Background.....	4
2. Introduction .....	5
3. Young Carers .....	6
4. Children in informal kinship care situations.....	10
5. Children with disability or other additional needs .....	11
6. Conclusion and Recommendations .....	17

## 1. Background

Carers Tasmania is the Peak Body representing the more than 87,000 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 Australian Government 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 is pleased to respond to the *Independent Review into Education in Tasmania*. This review provides a crucial opportunity to make the Tasmanian education system a safer, more inclusive, and more engaging place for children and young people.

As suggested within the Public Consultation Paper,<sup>1</sup> we have provided responses to only questions relevant for comment based on our experience. Our response takes focus on three priority groups, which include young carers, children with disability and additional needs, and children in informal kinship care arrangements. These groups of children and young people can face significant challenges with regards to participating fully in education. We acknowledge the full scope of challenges facing the education system in Tasmania is significantly broader, with other cohorts of children and young people also in need of particular attention due to their unique circumstances.

Across these three key groups, this response broadly addresses the following questions from the Consultation Paper:

- *“How can we better encourage young people to aspire to achieve their ambitions?”*
- *What support helps families to do this?*
- *What can be done to better support students who are struggling or at risk of falling behind to get back on track?*
- *How can we ensure all Tasmanian learners get the most out of their education and reach their full potential?*
- *How best can students be supported to successfully complete and achieve by the end of Year 12?*
- *What are the top 2 or 3 priorities or changes you believe are needed so all Tasmanian young people can complete Year 12 or an equivalent?”*<sup>2</sup>

Carers Tasmania thanks the carers who have shared experiences to help inform this response, with particular thanks to the young carers we specifically engaged with about some of the review questions.

Before providing more detail on the aforementioned areas, we highlight the following Principles from the *Tasmanian Education Act 2016*:

*“(f) the importance of a child having the opportunity, and being encouraged, to be actively involved in decisions affecting the child's participation in education, having regard to the age and understanding of the child;*

*(g) the importance of the State, education regulators, parents, teachers, schools, other educational institutions (including TasTAFE and the University of Tasmania) and the wider community working collaboratively to engender a commitment in all sectors in Tasmania to achieving the best educational outcomes for children;*

*(j) that the provision of education at a school recognises the individual needs of children with disabilities and, to that end, persons involved in the administration of*

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<sup>1</sup> Tasmanian Government (2024). Terms of Reference, Independent Review of Education in Tasmania, [ier.tas.gov.au/wpcontent/uploads/Independent-Review-of-Tasmanian-Education-System-Terms-of-Reference-.pdf](https://ier.tas.gov.au/wpcontent/uploads/Independent-Review-of-Tasmanian-Education-System-Terms-of-Reference-.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

*this Act and the provision of education at a school will make appropriate, reasonable provision for those needs;*

*(k) that all students are entitled to education of a quality that is capable of enabling them to reach their potential and so maximise their achievements and contribution to the community.”<sup>3</sup>*

This review provides an important opportunity to review these principles and to explore how they may be more effectively realised to ensure a better education for all Tasmanian children and young people.

### 3. Young Carers

The following section provides information about young carers in Tasmania and their experiences and needs within the education system.

Tasmania is home to an estimated 9,300 young carers.<sup>4</sup> A young carer is a person aged under 25 years or under, who is providing support to a family member or friend who:

- (a) has disability; or
- (b) has mental ill health; or
- (c) has a chronic or life-limiting condition; or
- (d) has alcohol or other drug dependence; or
- (e) is frail or aged.

Young carers aged between 18 and 25 may also be informal kinship carers if they are caring for a child or young person under 18 because the biological parent is unable to.<sup>5</sup>

While roles and responsibilities vary for each young carer, some of the tasks young carers undertake or assist with include cleaning, cooking, washing, shopping, paying bills, completing paperwork, interpreting, helping with medication, personal care such as showering or dressing, and providing emotional and social support.<sup>6</sup> Although some of these tasks may be considered as normal chores, young carers hold greater responsibility with these tasks compared to other young people, because the person they care for may not be able complete these tasks at all, or without help.

Some young carers are considered ‘primary carers’, meaning they are the main support for another person (for example, caring for a parent). Others might assist their parent or other relative who is the main carer (for example, supporting a sibling). It is critical that methods to identify and support young carers are strengthened through government policy and processes to help young carers access the supports they need for themselves and the people they care for.

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<sup>3</sup> Tasmanian Government. (2016). Tasmanian Education Act 2016. <https://www.legislation.tas.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-2016-051>

<sup>4</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet. (n,d). [https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/cpp/community-policy-andengagement/carer\\_policy\\_and\\_action\\_plan/carer-action-plan-2021-2025/what-the-data-tells-us-about-carers](https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/cpp/community-policy-andengagement/carer_policy_and_action_plan/carer-action-plan-2021-2025/what-the-data-tells-us-about-carers)

<sup>5</sup> Tasmanian Carer Recognition Act (2023). <https://www.legislation.tas.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/2023-04-20/act-2023-001>

<sup>6</sup> Carers NSW. (n,d). Learn about young carers. <https://www.carersnsw.org.au/services-and-support/programsservices/young-carers/learn-about-young-carers>

Results from the 2022 *National Carer Survey* identified that of the 92 young carer survey respondents, (which included 10 young carers from Tasmania), most young carers (65.1%) were caring for a parent, and 34.9% were caring for a sibling. Noting that people often have multiple caring roles, the survey found that most young carer respondents (80.9%) reported they were caring for at least one person with disability. In addition, 46.1% reported they were caring for someone with mental ill health, and 41.6% were providing care to someone with chronic illness. Four in five young carer respondents reported experiencing financial stress.<sup>7</sup>

There are many positive aspects of being a young carer. It can be intrinsically rewarding and foster the development of empathy, problem-solving and organisational skills, as well as resilience. However, caring can also be challenging. Research highlights some negative impacts of being a young carer, such as difficulties in developing and maintaining social connections,<sup>8</sup> poor wellbeing, and reduced educational and employment outcomes.<sup>9</sup>

Findings show that by Year Nine of school, boys who spent at least two hours per day in a caring role were approximately 1.9 years behind their peers in NAPLAN reading, and girls who provided care for two or more hours per day were 1.6 years behind in NAPLAN reading. Both boys and girls in Year 9 who were caring for at least two hours per day were approximately fifteen months behind their peers in NAPLAN numeracy. Furthermore, young carers have been found to be less likely to complete Year 12 or equivalent in comparison to their peers, and research has found that nationally, over 60% of primary carers between the ages of 15 and 25 were not studying.<sup>10</sup> These are stark findings, which highlight some of the significant impacts on the educational outcomes and participation rates of young carers, which can have long lasting effects on future employment outcomes and entrench financial insecurity.

There are many factors that contribute to poorer educational outcomes for young carers. Young carers may be frequently late or absent from class. It can be particularly challenging if they rely on their parent to provide transport to school, especially if some days their parent is busy caring for the family member who needs support, or if the parent themselves needs support and is unable to drive. Young carers may often be tired, stressed, or have difficulty concentrating at school.

Young carers may require flexibility with regards to alternative methods to access and complete schoolwork, they may need tutoring, financial support to purchase items such as a laptop, or connect to the internet. They may also need the ability to access notes when classes are missed, a quiet space at school, or to use their phone to maintain contact with the person they are caring for.

There are various forms of in-home supports available to assist young carers, but they might not be aware of them. In certain situations, emergency respite services could also provide relief. Young carers may also benefit from peer support, opportunities to engage in activities with other children and young people, and access to counselling.

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<sup>7</sup> Carers NSW. (2023). 2022 National carer Survey, Young carer fact sheet.

[https://www.carersnsw.org.au/uploads/main/Files/3.Resources/Policy-Research/CarerSurvey/2022\\_National\\_Carer\\_Survey\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_2\\_Young\\_carers.pdf](https://www.carersnsw.org.au/uploads/main/Files/3.Resources/Policy-Research/CarerSurvey/2022_National_Carer_Survey_Fact_Sheet_2_Young_carers.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Moore, T., Bourke-Taylor, H., Greenland, N., McDougall, S., Bromfield, L., Robinson, L., & Brown, T. (2019). Young carers and their engagement with education: 'No space in my brain to learn'. Adelaide, SA: University of South Australia. [https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Young-Carers-ReportFINAL\\_vsmall\\_compressed1.pdf](https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Young-Carers-ReportFINAL_vsmall_compressed1.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Becker, Saul, & Sempik, Joe. (2019). Young Adult Carers: The Impact of Caring on Health and Education. *Children & Society*, 33(4), 377–386. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12310>

<sup>10</sup> Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2017). Longitudinal Study of Australian Children 2016 Annual Statistical Report Young Carers

Some young carers may miss out on participating in sports, music, or other extracurricular activities due to limited parental time, capacity, and the financial impact of their caregiving duties. This can sometimes result in bullying from other young people and increase levels of social isolation. Care2Serve may be able to assist with funding some of these activities to support young carer wellbeing, social connection and education, and can refer to other organisations who can assist.

Whilst at school, young carers supporting a sibling might provide emotional, regulatory, or social support to that sibling. This can result in young carers missing time from their own classes, along with opportunities for social interaction and rest during break times and before and after school.

Tasmania is facing considerable challenges with regards to financial insecurity and poverty at present. Many families are struggling to make ends meet, and for young carers, financial challenges can be significant. Carers Australia, funded by the Department of Social Services, facilitates the Young Carer Bursary program.<sup>11</sup> The Young Carer Bursary is \$3,768 that young carers aged 12 and over can apply for annually to assist them with educational expenses. The application process is completed online, and whilst the Tasmanian Department for Education Children and Young People (DECYP) and various schools share this information, it may be overwhelming for young carers to complete the application on their own. Care2Serve can assist with this process.

Through various engagements, young carers have informed Carers Tasmania that it's very important for their teachers or other school staff to build rapport with them. If young carers feel as though they are getting in trouble for being on their phone during class, for missing work or handing it in late, then they often won't feel safe to explain more about their circumstances. Young carers have said that if a teacher notices they are struggling and asks them what's going on, or if they need help, then they are more likely to open up, especially within confidential spaces where their peers can't hear. Many young carers describe fear of perceived or actual bullying and stigma because their family situation may be different to others.

The Report, *No Space in My Brain to Learn*, derived from a study commissioned by Carers Australia, explores the experiences of young carers in education and the varying impacts of caring roles on educational engagement and attainment.<sup>12</sup> This report outlined some young carer experiences such as lack of sleep, stress, mental health issues, missing school, and not feeling part of the school community.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the large proportion of young carers in Tasmania, there are challenges in trying to engage them with carer support due to limited identification and referrals from and within educational settings. It's crucial to identify young carers as early as possible, so they can access available supports, information, and services. Early intervention, appropriate support and information is critical to addressing the barriers that marginalise young carers and can assist to reduce the negative impacts of their caring roles.

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<sup>11</sup> Carers Australia. (2024). [Young Carer Bursary | Young Carers Network](#)

<sup>12</sup> Moore, T., Bourke-Taylor, H., Greenland, N., McDougall, S., Bromfield, L., Robinson, L., & Brown, T. (2019). Young carers and their engagement with education: 'No space in my brain to learn'. Adelaide, SA: University of South Australia. [https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Young-Carers-ReportFINAL\\_vsmall\\_compressed1.pdf](https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Young-Carers-ReportFINAL_vsmall_compressed1.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



Within the public education system, young carers are identified through the vulnerability indicators that sit within the case management platform. However, despite efforts to engage with schools, Care2Serve sees limited referrals of young carers to support. Carers Tasmania, with assistance from Tasmanian young carers, has recently developed two new young carer resources. One booklet is tailored for teachers and school staff to help them identify and support young carers, and the other booklet is for students to help them figure out if they are a young carer and how to access the support that's available. <sup>14, 15</sup>

## Young carer thoughts about the Independent Review into Education in Tasmania

Carers Tasmania asked several Tasmanian young carers to share their thoughts on questions related to the *Independent Review into Education in Tasmania*. The following are some de-identified answers to questions, shared with permission from these young carers.

**Question: Imagine yourself at the end of school, what do you want school to have helped you become?**

*"I want them to have helped me become independent and help me be on track with my future"*

**Question: If you could change one thing about your schooling, what would it be?**

*"It would be more supportive"*

*"Be more open to different perspectives"*

*"Keep the classes engaging"*

*"Listen to us and please act upon what we say we need"*

*"Staff who understand"*

**Question: What does your school or teacher currently do well to support young carers?**

*"It's a private school so they have available support (i.e. therapists etc)"*

*"It helped speaking to someone who knew more about young carers"*

*"I did get some extra time for assignments when needed, and the information I missed"*

**Question: What could be improved to better support young carers at school?**

*"Listen to their needs to help them solve their problems"*

*"Flexibility around deadlines"*

*"Counselling support and resources"*

*"A focus on reducing stigma"*

*"Teachers learning more about young carers and what's involved"*

*"Talking and coming up with ways to help"*

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<sup>14</sup> Carers Tasmania. (2024). Young Carer Resources. [YoungCarer\\_A5\\_Web.pdf \(carerstas.org\)](#)

<sup>15</sup> Carers Tasmania. (2024). Teacher Resource. [TeacherResource\\_A5\\_Web.pdf \(carerstas.org\)](#)

*“Involve young carers more in discussions about needs as well as parents. Don’t just assume that everything a parent says is correct or the full point of view of the young carer”*

*“Have better access to counsellors and school psychologists. In high school, the waiting list was months and months long. At college we have wellbeing hubs and this support is far easier to access”*

#### 4. Children in informal kinship care situations

Informal kinship care is a form of care where a child or children live with a relative, such as a grandparent, because their parent is unable to care for them, without any court order or formal arrangement in place. The parents of the child remain the legal guardians, but the informal kinship carers take on the primary responsibility of raising the child. Informal kinship care is different from formal kinship care, which is supervised by the Child Safety Service and involves legal orders or agreements.<sup>16</sup>

It is estimated that there are 1,548 grandparent families in Tasmania<sup>17</sup> and over 1,100 children in some form of kinship care. However, there is no one full and reliable data source, rather data is derived from multiple sources.<sup>18</sup>

Carers Tasmania has been informed that there are sometimes barriers in supporting children in informal kinship care to enrol in school or participate in excursions or activities. When a child comes into informal kinship care, a number of factors may require them to change schools. Scenarios have been shared with Carers Tasmania where informal kinship carers have tried to enrol the child in a new school for relevant reasons, but the administrative processes around enrolling them at the school have been challenging, resulting in significant wait times before starting at the new school.

In informal kinship care arrangements, the child’s parent remains the legal guardian, so it can sometimes be difficult to obtain their consent for the child to move schools. In some scenarios, this takes time. This is an issue that has been raised with some Tasmanian Government representatives, and we are hopeful that this will be resolved in a timely manner, so that no child misses time away from school because there are difficulties in obtaining parental consent. It is important that school staff are educated about this process and that this is communicated with families via methods such as the DECYP website, private and independent school websites, and within school handbooks and information packs. Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states *“all children have a right to education.”*<sup>19</sup> Children in informal kinship care must not be disadvantaged and have the right to access school in a timely manner.

With regards to private schools, there are often upfront fees that need to be paid to be put on the waitlist to enrol. This means that informal kinship carers may need to pay several waitlist fees whilst trying to have the child accepted into a private school.

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<sup>16</sup> Department of Communities Tasmania. (2021). Informal Kinship Care Summary Review Report 2021. <https://publicdocumentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/library/Shared%20Documents/Informal-Kinship-CareSummary-Review-Report.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). Census of Population and Housing: Household and families data summary, 2021. Extracted from Table 4. Grandparent Families by State and Territory. [abs.gov.au](https://abs.gov.au)

<sup>18</sup> Tasmanian Government Department of Communities. (2021). Informal Kinship Care Review. Informal-Kinship-Care-Summary-Review-Report.pdf ([education.tas.gov.au](https://education.tas.gov.au))

<sup>19</sup> United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

There are other scenarios whereby children in informal kinship care may not change schools but may miss out on participating in school events, because their parent cannot sign the permission form. Whilst safety of children is paramount, these children should not be disadvantaged by missing out on the opportunities their peers have. Missing out on activities can also lead to bullying, stigma and further isolation of these children, and may contribute to lower school participation.

In consultations with informal kinship carers in 2023, some informal kinship carers said that they wish the school had connected them with relevant supports and information to assist them to care for these children. Schools are well placed to identify informal kinship carers and could be routinely providing informal kinship carers with information on supports available. Sometimes children come into informal kinship care arrangements suddenly and the family member may not have all that is needed to effectively support the child. This can place a huge financial and emotional toll on the kinship carer.<sup>20</sup> It is important that these families are identified and supported to access what they need.

## 5. Children with disability or other additional needs

The most recent data release from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, shows that 5.7% of children aged up to four years old, and 13.5% of children aged between five and fourteen years old are reported to have disability. For those aged fifteen to twenty-four years, the rate of disability is 13.9%.<sup>21</sup> In addition, these rates of disability were significantly higher for males than females across various age groups.<sup>22</sup> However, there is emerging research showing a greater tendency for females to not have their disability picked up as early on as males (especially in Autism and ADHD) due to increased capacity to mask.<sup>23, 24</sup>

The most common disability types for children have been reported as intellectual and sensory/speech.<sup>25</sup> Tasmania has the highest rate of children and young people with disability of all states and territories.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Carers Tasmania. (2023). Understanding the Experiences and Needs of Informal Kinship Carers. <https://carerstas.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Executive-Summary-Understanding-the-Experiences-and-Needs-of-Informal-Kinship-Carers-2023.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2024). [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/australian-bureau-of-statistics/australia-summary-of-findings-2022)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> ood-Downie H, Wong B, Kovshoff H, Mandy W, Hull L, Hadwin JA. Sex/Gender Differences in Camouflaging in Children and Adolescents with Autism. *J Autism Dev Disord.* 2021 Apr;51(4):1353-1364. doi: 10.1007/s10803-020-04615-z. PMID: 32691191; PMCID: PMC7985051. Retrieved from: [Sex/Gender Differences in Camouflaging in Children and Adolescents with Autism - PMC](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32691191/)

<sup>24</sup> Young S, Adamo N, Ásgeirsdóttir BB, Branney P, Beckett M, Colley W, Cubbin S, Deeley Q, Farrag E, Gudjonsson G, Hill P, Hollingdale J, Kilic O, Lloyd T, Mason P, Paliokosta E, Perecherla S, Sedgwick J, Skirrow C, Tierney K, van Rensburg K, Woodhouse E. Females with ADHD: An expert consensus statement taking a lifespan approach providing guidance for the identification and treatment of attention-deficit/ hyperactivity disorder in girls and women. *BMC Psychiatry.* 2020 Aug 12;20(1):404. doi: 10.1186/s12888-020-02707-9. PMID: 32787804; PMCID: PMC7422602. Retrieved from: [Females with ADHD: An expert consensus statement taking a lifespan approach providing guidance for the identification and treatment of attention-deficit/ hyperactivity disorder in girls and women - PubMed](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32787804/)

<sup>25</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2020). Australia's Children. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/6af928d6-692e-4449-b915-cf2ca946982f/aihw-cws-69-print-report.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

<sup>26</sup> Commissioner for Children and Young People Tasmania. (2016). Health and Wellbeing of Tasmania's Children. <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/CCYP-Health-and-Wellbeing-Report-Part12.pdf>

The lack of affordable assessments for conditions such as Autism and ADHD is often a barrier to obtaining diagnosis of disability. Some families simply cannot wait to have an assessment completed through government-funded services due to the nature of the needs and behaviours of their child. Many private assessments cost upwards of \$1,000 and Medicare rebates are not applicable to all of these assessments.

Accessing specialists such as paediatricians, psychologists, and other allied health professionals in Tasmania is challenging, with travelling to the mainland from Tasmania becoming a more common occurrence. Most psychologists and paediatricians in Tasmania have their books closed to new clients and there are significant workforce shortages in allied health. Obtaining diagnosis interstate can present challenges with legislation around the co-prescribing of certain medications.

For the few specialists who are accepting new patients, waiting times are long, regardless of whether the appointment is private or public. Therefore, many children are missing out on early intervention supports, which also has significant impacts on their carers. We recommend that a targeted approach to the expansion of diagnostic services and allied health professionals to support this workforce is taken to ensure that people can access timely diagnoses.

For those unable to access support outside of the school, recent reports have indicated that in Tasmanian public schools:

- *“2,217 students are waiting to see a school psychologist*
- *380 students are waiting for a school social worker (and 808 were referred to external services)*
- *598 are waiting for a speech and language pathologist*
- *The average number of waiting days for Tasmanian students see a school psychologist for an initial assessment is 250 days*
- *To receive an intervention, the average is 198 days, meaning the average wait time for an assessment and intervention is 448 days.”<sup>27, 28</sup>*

In addition to the lack of access to in-school psychological support, such as counsellors and psychologists, there is a significant need to better support required educational adjustments within schools. Although students with disability should have access to individual learning plans, some carers report that not all schools undertake this process in a routine or evidence-based way. There are also sometimes different approaches between schools in terms of applying for educational adjustment funding, and this process often takes a significant amount of time.<sup>29</sup> Some states, such as South Australia, have Autism Inclusion Teaching staff in every public school.<sup>30</sup> This is a model that could be replicated and broadened out to other forms of disability, but given the high prevalence of Autism in Tasmania, Autism inclusion teachers are a good starting point.

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<sup>27</sup> Tasmanian Labor. (2024). [Tasmanian students suffering on specialist waitlists \(taslabor.org.au\)](https://taslabor.org.au)

<sup>28</sup> The Mercury Tasmania. (2024). [www.themercury.com.au/tasmania-education/schools-alarm-bell-long-wait-list-for-student-psychology-assessments/news-story/fd46ef76eaa33d42602a3bea64cfe46ff&memtype=anonymous&mode=premium](https://www.themercury.com.au/tasmania-education/schools-alarm-bell-long-wait-list-for-student-psychology-assessments/news-story/fd46ef76eaa33d42602a3bea64cfe46ff&memtype=anonymous&mode=premium)

<sup>29</sup> Australian Education Union – Tasmania. (2023). [Thousands of students with disability miss out as Government dodges action - AEU Tasmania](#)

<sup>30</sup> Government of South Australia. (2023). [Australian-first Autism Inclusion Teachers start in schools from this week](#)

Carers Tasmania highlights the recent announcement by the Tasmanian Government regarding increased funding for the school resourcing standard (SRS) through signing of the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (2024-2034), followed by a Bilateral Agreement with the Commonwealth Government.<sup>31</sup> A media release on the topic stated that:

*“Currently, the Commonwealth provides 20 per cent of the SRS for Tasmanian public schools. This will now increase to 22.5 per cent by no later than 2029. The Tasmanian Government, as the primary funders of Tasmanian public schools, will increase its contribution to 77.5 per cent of the SRS by no later than 2029.”*<sup>32</sup>

Whilst this progress is welcomed, there are students who don't currently have the extra support they require. By the 2029, they may be extremely disengaged, have experienced significant difficulties, or have left school already. We seek for the full implementation of these commitments in as early a timeframe as possible. These commitments will deliver increased access to school psychologists and social workers, a stronger and more sustainable workforce, and a greater focus on the inclusion of all children and young people, no matter their circumstances.<sup>33</sup>

Recommendations 7.1 to 7.3 in the *Disability Royal Commission Final Report* provide further advice on supporting children with disability within the education system:

- *Recommendation 7.1 Provide equal access to mainstream education and enrolment*
- *Recommendation 7.2 Prevent the inappropriate use of exclusionary discipline against students with disability*
- *Recommendation 7.3 Improve policies and procedures on the provision of reasonable adjustments to students with disability*<sup>34</sup>

Across public schools, it is well known that there are challenges in achieving suitable attendance rates, which can lead to poor completion rates of Year 12. Data shows that the rate of direct retention to Year 12 in Tasmanian public schools in 2023 was 58.4%.<sup>35</sup> Australian data also shows that historically, there have been significantly low rates of Year 12 completion for young people with disability, with Australian research from 2022 showing that “45.3% had completed Year 12 or equivalent, which was an increase from 33.4% in 2018.”<sup>36</sup>

DECYP student engagement and participation data showed that the attendance rate for public schools was 85.7% at end of Term 2, 2024 for students in Prep to Year 10. Furthermore, public school suspension data from the same source found that 4.9% of students at end of Term 2, 2024 from Prep to Year 12 had been suspended. High School grades had the highest proportion of suspensions, varying from 11 to 14.2%, and then dropping of significantly in Years 11 and 12. Alarming, the data showed that 0.8% of Prep

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<sup>31</sup> Australian Government. (2024). Minister's Media Centre. [Australian and Tasmanian Governments agree to fully fund all Tasmanian public schools | Ministers' Media Centre \(education.gov.au\)](https://www.education.gov.au/australian-and-tasmanian-governments-agree-to-fully-fund-all-tasmanian-public-schools)

<sup>32</sup> Tasmanian Government. (2024). Premier of Tasmania. [Australian and Tasmanian Governments agree to fully fund all Tasmanian public schools | Premier of Tasmania](https://www.premier.tas.gov.au/australian-and-tasmanian-governments-agree-to-fully-fund-all-tasmanian-public-schools)

<sup>33</sup> Australian Government Department of Education (2024). Heads of Agreement (Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025- 2034), [education.gov.au/recurrent-funding-schools/resources/heads-agreement](https://www.education.gov.au/recurrent-funding-schools/resources/heads-agreement)

<sup>34</sup> Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. (2023). <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report-executive-summary-our-vision-inclusive-australia-and-recommendations>

<sup>35</sup> Tasmanian Government. Department for Education, Children and Young People. (2024). [Student engagement and participation data - Department for Education, Children and Young People \(decyp.tas.gov.au\)](https://www.decyp.tas.gov.au/student-engagement-and-participation-data)

<sup>36</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2024). [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/disability-ageing-and-carers)

students had been suspended. Some of these children may have been as young as five years old.<sup>37</sup> In 2023, the proportion of public students suspended was 7.9%.<sup>38</sup> In 2022, this percentage was 6.3%<sup>39</sup> and included more than 60 children in Prep and eight children in Kindergarten.<sup>40</sup> In addition, data has revealed Tasmanian students with disabilities were the subject of approximately 30 per cent of all school suspensions in 2022 and 2023.<sup>41, 42</sup>

Despite inclusion policies and procedures, many children with disability or other additional needs are not supported effectively at school. They are often not provided with appropriate learning support or adjustments and find it difficult to navigate the school system. As a result, children with disability may be sent home frequently or suspended.

For children with disability or additional needs such as ADHD, Autism, Pathological Demand Avoidance or mental Ill health, some of the reasons for suspension within public schools, as stated within the *Tasmanian Education Act 2016*,<sup>43</sup> need to be considered with context. In particular:

- *“Behaviour that is likely to impede significantly the learning of the other students of that school (0.4%)*
- *Disobedience of instructions which regulate the conduct of students (2.3%)*
- *Unsociable behaviour (1.2%)*
- *Contravening school rules and policies (0.9%)*
- *Any other behaviour that a Principal determines to be unacceptable behaviour (0.9%)”*<sup>44</sup>

Whilst these are reasonable standards, they must be looked at within the context of a child with disability or additional needs. Children who have Pathological Demand Avoidance may exhibit these behaviours if they are not well supported, or the teaching staff do not have the skills to engage them in a meaningful way to participate. For Autistic children or children who have ADHD, especially when dysregulated, their behaviour could sometimes fit within some of the listed behaviours, for example, behaviour that is likely to impact the learning of others, or disobedience.

Punishing children with disability for these behaviours is not going to help them or their family members who care for them. Further, it models to other children to isolate rather than aim to understand differences and support needs. Children must be supported so they can find ways to better cope with triggers in the long term. Children may need a quiet space, to

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<sup>37</sup> Tasmanian Government. Department for Education, Children and Young People. (2024). [Student engagement and participation data - Department for Education, Children and Young People \(decyp.tas.gov.au\)](https://decyp.tas.gov.au/decyp/education/engagement-and-participation)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Rob Inglis. (2023). School figures cause alarm. [https://edition.pagesuite.com/popovers/dynamic\\_article\\_popover.aspx?artguid=6fb70fe3-6227-4878-a1cd-b6c47526392a](https://edition.pagesuite.com/popovers/dynamic_article_popover.aspx?artguid=6fb70fe3-6227-4878-a1cd-b6c47526392a)

<sup>41</sup> The Educator. (2023). [Children with disability being suspended at alarming rate – new data | The Educator K/12 \(theeducatoronline.com\)](https://theeducatoronline.com/children-with-disability-being-suspended-at-alarming-rate-new-data/)

<sup>42</sup> The Examiner. (2023). [Labor highlights high suspension rate for Tasmanian students with disabilities | The Examiner | Launceston, TAS](https://www.examiner.com.au/education/education-labor-highlights-high-suspension-rate-for-tasmanian-students-with-disabilities/)

<sup>43</sup> Tasmanian Government. (2016). Tasmanian Education Act 2016. <https://www.legislation.tas.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-2016-051>

<sup>44</sup> Tasmanian Government. Department for Education, Children and Young People. (2024). [Student engagement and participation data - Department for Education, Children and Young People \(decyp.tas.gov.au\)](https://decyp.tas.gov.au/decyp/education/engagement-and-participation)

undertake a calming activity, to run around outside, to listen to some music, or have some food. Each child needs support to regulate in a way that is safe and appropriate for them.

Author and Clinical Psychologist, Dr Ross Greene, in his book *Lost at School* states: *“The essential function of challenging behaviour is to communicate to adults that a kid doesn’t possess the skills to handle certain demands in certain situations.”*<sup>45</sup>

Quote from a carer:

*“My son really wants to be at school, but he is ‘in the too-hard basket’. He is only 7 and had both Autism and ADHD and the school just don’t have the skills and resources to support him. He is frequently sent home and even suspended, suspended at the age of 7! He really wants to be there and he deserves that opportunity. This is seriously affecting my mental health, I feel belittled, powerless, and so anxious. Not to mention how my son feels.”*<sup>46</sup>

Notwithstanding the need to keep other students and staff safe, additional detail and exploration of these reasons would be welcomed. In addition, the experiences of children and young people, along with their families who have experienced suspensions of other disciplinary action must be heard and acknowledged to help minimise this approach to punishment. This is also reinforced by Recommendation 7.2 from the Royal Commission, *Prevent the inappropriate use of exclusionary discipline against students with disability.*<sup>47</sup>

Another difficulty that has been shared with Carers Tasmania on numerous occasions is that each School Principal has the discretion to allow or disallow a child’s NDIS support at school, with some principals not supportive of these supports in schools. During consultation on the NDIS Review, some parent carers indicated that they need a more collaborative approach between NDIS supports and the school to enable their child to better manage and learn at school.<sup>48</sup>

A historical report from the Tasmanian Children’s Commissioner in 2013<sup>49</sup> found that there was very little research on the views of children and young people in schools around suspension and disciplinary procedures. It was recommended that this occur in future, with an effort to engage not only with a wide range of children and young people, but also specific groups. The same report found that students with disabilities, such as ADHD as well as students with specific learning disabilities and other disabilities, were experiencing higher rates of suspensions. The report also outlined research on the detrimental consequences of school suspensions on students.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Dr. Ross Greene. (2014). [Lost at School by Dr. Ross Greene](#)

<sup>46</sup> Carers Tasmania. (2023). Submission on the Senate Inquiry into ADHD. [Carers-Tasmania-submission-on-the-Senate-Inquiry-into-ADHD-2023.pdf \(carerstas.org\)](#)

<sup>47</sup> Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. (2023). <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report-executive-summary-our-vision-inclusive-australia-and-recommendations>

<sup>48</sup> Carers Tasmania. (2023). Carers Tasmania Submission to the NDIS Review. [Carers-Tasmania-submission-to-the-22-23-NDIS-Review-2.pdf](#)

<sup>49</sup> Commissioner for Children Tasmania. (2013). Student Suspensions – A Research Review. [https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Student-Suspensions\\_A-Research-Review-November-2013.pdf](https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Student-Suspensions_A-Research-Review-November-2013.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Carers who are parents of children who are regularly sent home from school miss work, face additional stress, and risk financial insecurity, which further impact on the whole family. Carers Tasmania has heard from many carers for whom the impacts of inadequate support at school are profound. Throughout consultation on the NDIS Review, some parent carers shared experiences of moving their child to another (or multiple) schools, and in some instances, with this not being successful, they made the decision to homeschool. Not only does homeschooling impact on the parent's ability to work and family financial security, it also adds to carer stress, burnout, and social isolation.<sup>51</sup>

We refer to an email from a Tasmanian young carer that we provided with permission as part of our submission to the Development to the National Autism Strategy:

Email from a young carer:

*"Hi, my name is Miss A, and I am a young carer. I care for my younger sister who has both ADHD and Autism.*

*A few weeks ago at school, my sister was treated very badly by a teacher (this isn't the first time it has happened), The teacher was calling her an embarrassment and was screaming at her. My sister left the class and tried to speak to another teacher about what had happened, but she shut down and couldn't talk. My sister then asked to get me (as her sister/young carer/support person) and he said no, knowing that she was almost in tears.*

*She later messaged me telling me about what was happening, so I went to find her and things got worse to the point where the teacher heard her telling me about what happened and started yelling, telling my sister not to bring me into this and kept following us and making the situation worse. My sister has always been taught in occupational therapy to take herself out of the situation (to the toilet or somewhere quiet) so she did but locked herself in the bathroom stall in tears. The teacher then followed in making things worse. My sister mentioned that she'd had a bad week.*

*After explaining what has happened, I have a few questions.*

- Are they legally allowed to refuse her wishes for her support person/young carer?*
- Is there anyone from Carers Tasmania that I can call if this ever happens again?*
- Are teachers allowed (without permission from that particular kid) to follow into bathrooms when a kid who has autism is having a meltdown/shutdown?*
- What actions can I take if this happens again? (Any legal actions or just through school).*

*Sorry for writing so much, this is just the simplified version. Thank you for your time, I hope to hear back with some answers to my questions."*

In addition to increasing the supports available within Tasmanian schools, further investment within the community, social, and health sectors would be welcomed. Focus could be taken on supporting free or low-cost community programs aimed at increasing literacies (both general, health and digital), as well as parenting programs that are accessible (especially for marginalised groups and those in lower socio-economic areas). These supports must be delivered in non-judgemental ways. Neighbourhood houses, child and family centres,

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<sup>51</sup> Carers Tasmania. (2023). Carers Tasmania Submission to the NDIS Review. [Carers-Tasmania-submission-to-the-22-23-NDIS-Review-2.pdf](#)



community health centres, playgroups and childcare providers are well placed to deliver supports to the people who access their services.

There is also a need for increased specific training for parents who have a child with disability or additional health needs, to equip them with skills and information (e.g. training on specific disabilities, medication management, and advocacy skills). There are already services in Tasmania who are trusted, have the knowledge, skills and experience to deliver these forms of training. They must be invested in and supported to enable them to provide these supports in an inclusive, accessible and affordable way. Investing in these services and programs also aligns with the aims of the NDIS related Foundational Supports which are currently being developed.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Carers Tasmania is grateful for the opportunity to provide a response to the *Independent Review into Education in Tasmania*. Based on feedback from carers, we recommend the Tasmanian Government:

- Review *The Education Act 2016 (Tas)*,<sup>52</sup> with a specific focus on implementing Recommendation 7.2 of the Disability Royal Commission, aiming to reduce suspension rates for children and young people with disability or additional needs
- Embed routine identification and referral of young carers via school enrolment and information validation processes
- Implement a specific policy approach for young carers
- Through fast implementation of the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement:<sup>53</sup>
  - Invest in additional school psychologists, social workers and counselling staff
  - Invest into securing inclusion teachers at each school who can implement evidence-based practices within classrooms and learning plans
  - Invest in routine training for all school staff on Autism, ADHD and other disabilities that may be not well understood, as well as young carers, and children in informal kinship care arrangements and supports available for these
- Continue work on streamlining processes for enrolment and participation of children in informal kinship arrangements
- Support local organisations, aligning with the development of Foundational Supports, to ensure families can access information and connect to early intervention and support services.

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<sup>52</sup> Tasmanian Government. (2016). Tasmanian Education Act 2016. <https://www.legislation.tas.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-2016-051>

<sup>53</sup> Australian Government Department of Education (2024). Heads of Agreement (Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025- 2034), [education.gov.au/recurrent-funding-schools/resources/heads-agreement](https://www.education.gov.au/recurrent-funding-schools/resources/heads-agreement)