Carers Tasmania's Submission to

The Productivity Commission's Inquiry on Delivering Quality Care More Efficiently

September 2025

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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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, family and friend 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.

Anyone may become a carer at any time. The likelihood of this occurring in Tasmania is high, with estimates showing that one in six people living in Tasmania is a carer. This proportion is higher than the national average. The Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) revealed that there were 80,100 carers in Tasmania in 2018.[1] By 2022, this figure had increased to more than 87,000.[2]

The Carer Gateway program provides a range of free services and supports for carers which are designed to build resilience and knowledge, 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.

[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021). 44300DO006_2018 Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Tasmania, 2018. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (abs.gov.au)
[2] Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022. Australian Bureau of Statistics (abs.gov.au)

2. Introduction

Carers Tasmania is pleased to provide a submission to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry on Delivering Quality Care More Efficiently. Carers Tasmania supports the three primary opportunities of focus presented in the Commission's Interim Report. These include:

- *"The need for greater alignment of safety and quality regulation in the care economy.*
- *The need for governments to embed practices of organisations working in collaboration to support more integrated care, address gaps in service and tailor support to need.*
- *A new approach to prevention investment, through a National Prevention Investment Framework."* [3]

We acknowledge that worker regulation is essential for protecting people's rights and safety and understand that different approaches across sectors creates risk, reduces choice and can lead to unnecessary costs for providers. This has potential impacts on overall service delivery. Aligning regulatory processes across the care and support sectors may also support carers and the people they care for in understanding the quality of services they are accessing, and the minimum standards they can expect to receive.

It pleasing that the Interim Report includes a focus on greater alignment in the regulation of behaviour support plans and restrictive practices across both NDIS and aged care services. Carers Tasmania supports this move, which will help maintain a consistent approach to safety when receiving services at all life stages. Carers Tasmania has previously raised concerns about misalignment in these approaches, in submissions related to aged care legislation and changes.[4]

Collaboration across government and government-funded services is hindered by competitive funding arrangements, cost-of-living increases, rising service demand, and funding limitations. Governments should embed the practice of organisations working in partnership to plan, procure and evaluate services relevant for their local communities and their emergent issues. This approach has potential to support more integrated care, address service gaps and better tailor services to local needs.

Carers Tasmania supports the need for a stronger commitment and investment into prevention and early intervention. Historically, prevention has been poorly funded and addressed, with consequent increasing rates of chronic health conditions, alcohol and other drug dependence, and mental ill health. Earlier, appropriate investment in effective prevention can reduce demand for acute and more costly services in future. The Interim Report states that the proposed framework will support a different approach to government investment in prevention by recognising that the benefits fall across sectors and levels of government, and over extended timeframes.

[3] Productivity Commission. (2025). Delivering quality care more efficiently: Interim report. Australian Government Productivity Commission. https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/quality-care/interim/quality-care-interim.pdf
[4] Carers Tasmania. (2024). Carers-Tasmania-Submission-on-the-Aged-Care-Bill-Exposure-Draft-1.pdf

For carers, prevention must not only be considered in terms of physical and mental health. Key areas of focus in terms of prevention and early intervention should include:

- Routine identification and referral of carers to support early in their caring journey
- Access to timely, adequate and flexible respite.

Investing in these two areas will support the wellbeing of both carers and those they are caring for, leading to reductions in carer stress, burnout, and other mental and physical difficulties. This in turn will reduce pressure on health and allied health services.

Carers Tasmania supports the proposal for a new, national independent advisory board responsible for evaluating ongoing prevention programs and assessing the cost-effectiveness of new programs. This advisory board must include representation from all state and territories, professional stakeholders, community members, and carers. There must be an ongoing commitment from governments to work with the advisory board and to consider their findings and recommendations.

3. Additional feedback on the Interim Report

Another essential aspect relevant to this reform is the provision of long-term, sustainable funding with simple mechanisms to apply for increases to meet emerging needs and extenuating circumstances. This will enable services adequate time for service and strategic planning, to provide job security for their employees (thus retaining staff), and to build a culture that attracts new employees. Short-term funding cycles bring uncertainty and are a barrier to delivering quality care, increasing capacity and capability, and investing in longer-term programs and supports.

Carer supports are not explicitly included within the Interim Report, despite there being more than 3 million carers in Australia.[5] It is essential that this Inquiry explicitly includes and refers to carer supports. Carer Gateway is a national program for carers that became fully operational in 2020, after its initial establishment in 2019. What started as a website and phone line in 2015, is now a nation-wide, Australian Government-funded initiative providing a range of free supports and services to Australia's carers.

The 2023 Intergenerational Report stated that *"The largest positive increase to income support payments between 2022–23 and 2062–63 is the Carer Payment. It is expected to grow by around 0.2 percentage points of GDP over the period. The Disability Support Pension is also projected to increase by around 0.1 percentage points of GDP over the same period. This reflects a larger number of recipients as the population ages."* [6]

While Carer Gateway and the Carer Payment are fundamental for supporting carers, further investment in carer support is needed, to enhance prevention and early intervention.

Government-funded services, including aged care, NDIS, health, education and childcare sectors, must also work more collaboratively together and with services supporting carers. The Inquiry must set clear guidance on who is responsible for what, encourage services to deliver on their commitments, and work in collaboration with, not in competition or to the detriment of, other services.

[5] Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022. Australian Bureau of Statistics (abs.gov.au)
[6] Commonwealth of Australia. (2023). Intergenerational Report 2023. Commonwealth of Australia. https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/p2023-435150.pdf

For example, Care2Serve, the Tasmanian Carer Gateway provider, often receives calls from carers requesting packages of support to fill gaps in services that should be provided by NDIS, aged care, or other service types. Carer packages are intended to support the carer, not the person being cared for. The Inquiry must recommend policy that promotes and supports services to work together and fulfil their obligations.

Further, when Care2Serve seeks to book respite through the residential respite booking service, some residential aged care facilities will not take clients who have NDIS funding, despite having approval for residential respite. This is because the facility has not completed the specific training required for NDIS clients. This means that for older Tasmanians who remain on the NDIS, their access to residential respite in aged care facilities is limited, which impacts them and their carers. Carers Tasmania is unable to comment on whether this is an issue in other states and territories.

The Productivity Commission stated in their Report on Government Services, that:

- "*Nationally, in 2022, 31.3% of primary carers of people aged 65 years and over need more formal assistance than they currently receive, higher than in 2018 (25.1%) and 2015 (22.5%).*
- *Nationally, in 2023-24, 36.3% of carers of people aged 65 years and older reported poor access to support from a formal service for in-home care and assistance with specific needs, higher than in 2022-23 (35.9%) but lower than 2021-22 (39.2%) (table 14A.29).*
- *Nationally, in 2023-24, carers of people aged 65 years and over reported a range of barriers to accessing services, including poor service co-ordination (28.8%), lack of service availability (38.8%) and long waiting times (45.4%)."* [7]

The Interim Report contains a strong focus on improving outcomes for 'care users' which is incredibly important. However, the impact on carers as the 'care user's' navigator, organiser, supporter, and advocate must be recognised. This Inquiry should recognise the aims of the National Carer Strategy, some of which were also highlighted through the Inquiry into the Recognition of Unpaid Carers.[8]

The 2023 Draft National Care and Support Economy Strategy was a major piece of work prior to this current review, that strongly and explicitly recognised carers. For example, it noted *"Carers play a vital role in supporting the needs of people with a disability, medical condition (including terminal or chronic illness), mental illness or a person who is frail due to ageing. Quality care and support services support carers' wellbeing and sustain them in their caring role."* [9]

The same report included "*Goal 1: Quality care and support*: *1.6 The contribution of informal carers is valued, and they are supported to sustain their caring roles,"* reinforcing the recognition of carers and the need to ensure carers are adequately supported.

[7] Productivity Commission. (2025). Report on Government Services 2025: Part F – Community services: Community services – sector overview and sections. Released as Part F of RoGS 2025. Retrieved from https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2025/community-services/rogs-2025-partf-overview-and-sections.pdf

[8] House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs. (n.d.). Inquiry into the recognition of unpaid carers. Parliament of Australia. Retrieved from: https://www.aph.gov.au/UnpaidCarers

[9] Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. (2023). Draft National Care and Support Economy Strategy 2023. Retrieved from https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/draft-national-care-and-support-economy-strategy-2023.pdf

4. Considerations from the National Carer Strategy Action Plan

The National Carer Strategy[10] was released in December 2024, following consultation with carers across Australia, carer advocates, and the wider carer sector. The Strategy provides a national framework to support informal carers across Australia. It aims to improve the lives of carers through increased recognition, the enabling of clearer pathways to access support, policy and legislative reform and improvements to the delivery of carer supports.

The Strategy is underpinned by five principles and six priority outcome areas.[11] The National Carer Strategy Action Plan contains 30 actions. Carers Tasmania strongly recommends that the following Strategy Actions be considered within the context of this review, and for future reform.

> *"1.3 Work with the carer sector and other stakeholders to examine how to further improve the access, quality and range of counselling and mental health supports, including linkages and referrals to other mainstream and complementary services.*
>
> *1.4 Work with carers, the carer sector and other stakeholders to identify strategies to improve access to respite arrangements in partnership with relevant policy and regulatory agencies including:*
>
> > *• Improve access to respite arrangements both directly through Carer Gateway and in partnership with Aged Care and the NDIS*
> >
> > *• Identifying current models of successful flexible and tailored respite models in service systems that could benefit carers*
> >
> > *• Identify options to ensure respite arrangements are tailored and personalised and address the needs of both the carer and the care recipient.*
>
> *1.7 Work with relevant stakeholders and the carer sector to research and co-design improved supports for First Nations carers, CALD carers, LGBTQIA+ carers, carers with disability, carers of veterans and young carers that address their unique needs and improve service outcomes.*
>
> *2.2 Work across the Commonwealth and with states and territories to support carers to be identified and provided with information relevant to their caring role and available supports through those working in medical/health systems and education systems such as GPs, pharmacists, hospital liaison officers, educators and school counsellors.*
>
> *2.3 Explore ways to improve professional training and resources for health sector professionals to better identify unpaid carers, recognise their expertise, and refer them to appropriate supports.*
>
> *2.4 Explore ways to strengthen recognition of carers within government funded service systems.*
>
> *2.5 Undertake a review of international best practice for the identification and recognition of unpaid carers and the nature of their caring role within communities and across service systems. Identify how this could be implemented in an Australian*

[10] Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services). (2025). National Carer Strategy 2024–2034. Retrieved from https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-07/national-carer-strategy-2024-2034.pdf
[11] Ibid.

Context to ensure carers' expertise and experience is acknowledged and the burden on carers to repeatedly explain their circumstances reduced.

3.2 Undertake work to identify other carer-relevant legislation and policy areas needing to be updated/ harmonised." [12]

5. Recommendations

In summary, Carers Tasmania recommends the following:

- Implement consistent, safety and quality standards across aged care, disability, health, and related systems, including for behaviour support and restrictive practices.
- Embed collaboration between government-funded services in planning, procurement, and evaluation to reduce duplication, fill service gaps, and tailor supports to local needs.
- Establish and adequately fund a National Prevention Investment Framework, that includes a focus on the early identification of carers, timely referrals, and access to carer supports.
- Recognise and embed carer supports within the Productivity Commission's recommendations, in line with the National Carer Strategy and Action Plan.
- Ensure policy clearly distinguishes between and recognises the need for supports for both carers and those being cared for.
- Reduce short-term funding cycles and establish long-term, flexible funding that allows services to respond to emerging needs, provide workforce stability, and build service capacity.
- Support flexible, culturally appropriate, and tailored respite models.
- Train health, education, disability, ageing and community sector professionals to identify carers early, recognise their expertise, and refer them to supports.
- Ensure the proposed independent national prevention advisory board includes carer representation and has the authority to monitor, evaluate, and advise on a broad range of prevention and support programs.

[12] Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Health and Aged Care). (2024). National Carer Strategy Action Plan 2024–2027. Retrieved from https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-07/national-carer-strategy-action-plan-2024-2027_0.pdf

6. Conclusion

Carers are an essential but often overlooked part of Australia's care economy. More than 87,000 Tasmanians, and over 3 million Australians, provide unpaid care to family members and friends, sustaining the health, disability, and aged care systems. This caring role often has significant impacts on their own wellbeing, social inclusion, workforce participation and financial security.

The Productivity Commission's Inquiry provides an important opportunity to strengthen integration across government services, align regulatory frameworks, and improve investment in prevention. To achieve quality care, reforms must explicitly recognise and support carers, ensuring they are identified early, provided with flexible and timely supports, and represented in policy design and oversight. Sustaining carers is a significant factor in supporting the entire care system. We trust that our contributions will be thoughtfully considered.