


OCTOBER 2014

# VICTORIAN CARER ACTION AGENDA



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## MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

The Victorian Government is committed to supporting carers and recognises the invaluable contribution that over 700,000 Victorian carers make to the people they care for and the wider community.

For many carers this is a time of significant change and opportunity with the roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme from July 2016, changes to the Commonwealth and State jointly funded Home and Community Care service system, the implementation of the Out of Home Care plan and the new Mental Health Act. These changes provide the opportunity to continue to improve the lives of families and carers and those they care for.

This Carer Action Agenda outlines the Victorian Government's approach to delivering supports and services to carers, including assisting carers to plan and prepare for these changes.

Our Agenda identifies the actions we will take to ensure carers are; supported and recognised in their role; aware of the services and supports that are available to them; and involved in the policies and services which affect them.

Caring can have a significant impact on the life of carers and they can feel isolated as a result of their carer responsibilities. Providing carers with information and opportunities to connect with one another is important. We need to make services and systems simple to navigate and increase accessibility to them.

To achieve this agenda it is fundamental that we engage with carers and listen to their ideas. Ongoing consultation and discussion with carers will continue to be a priority.

The Victorian Government is committed to working with the Commonwealth to ensure the needs and views of carers are considered as services change for people with disabilities and older Australians. Our vision is that all carers feel recognised, valued and supported in the work they do by government, service providers and the broader community.

On behalf of the Victorian Government, I thank all of Victoria's carers for everything you do and for your support and care for people with disabilities, mental illness, medical and health conditions, older people and children.



**Hon Mary Wooldridge MP**  
Minister for Mental Health  
Minister for Community Services  
Minister for Disability Services and Reform

# VICTORIAN CARER ACTION AGENDA

## Victorian Carers – who are they and why they are important?

There are over 700,000 carers in Victoria who make an enormous social and economic contribution to the lives of some of the most vulnerable members of our community. Carers provide crucial support to family or friends with a mental illness, disability, chronic or life-limiting illness or age-related care needs. Carers also support children by providing foster, kinship and permanent care.

Carers vary widely in their age, gender, cultural background, life stage and social circumstance. Every care relationship is unique and will inevitably change over time as the needs, life circumstances and aspirations of the people involved change.

Carers see themselves as ordinary people who would like the broader community to understand that caring is both rewarding and often challenging. The government is committed to ensuring the community formally recognises and values the role of carers and the importance of care relationships in the Victorian community.

## Supporting people in care relationships in Victoria

Caring can be a tough job, so supporting carers can make a big difference to their lives, and the lives of the people they care for. While the needs of carers and the needs of those being cared for are different, supporting the care relationship brings benefits to both.

When care relationships are better supported, carers and those receiving care are more likely to take part in planning and managing care. They can also provide ideas about how services can be improved.

## The Carers Recognition Act 2012

Since 1 July 2012, Victoria has had legislation that recognises people in care relationships and the role of carers in our community.

The Act recognises, promotes and values the role of people in care relationships, recognising differing needs and promoting the benefits that care relationships bring.

The Act defines a carer as someone who provides care to another person, and includes carers under the age of 18. Carers can provide care for a person who:

- > has a disability
- > has a mental illness
- > has an ongoing medical condition
- > is an older person with care needs.

Care relationships also include those situations where a person is being cared for in kinship or a permanent care arrangement.

The Act includes a set of principles about the significance of care relationships, and specifies obligations for state government agencies, local councils, and other organisations that interact with people in care relationships.

## Victorian charter supporting people in care relationships

The Charter encourages care organisations and services to better respect the important role carers play in our community. The Charter has been updated to reflect and support the Act.

## Why Victoria needs a Carer Action Agenda?

The Carer Action Agenda will assist government to work with carers to support them in their caring role.

These are exciting times, but change can bring challenges in understanding new systems and new ways of working. With plans to roll out the National Disability Insurance Scheme from July 2016, changes to the Home and Community Care service system, the implementation of the Out of Home Care plan, and the new Mental Health Act many carers are facing a period of significant change in how and what funded support services will be provided.

The Carer Action Agenda will guide the government's work:

- > to effectively meet its obligations under the *Carers Recognition Act 2012* and how it will monitor awareness and understanding of the Act and the Charter
- > in developing actions to assist carers to feel more confident and able to navigate the changes in service systems
- > in engaging with carers so they become more aware of what they can suggest for planning and delivering services to support people in care relationships, and more confident about expressing their needs.

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring policies and procedures support outcome focused service delivery.

The Agenda will focus on three areas and aim to achieve better and enduring outcomes for carers.

### FOCUS AREAS

Recognise and support care relationships



Information and advice is readily available



Develop policies, programs and services that support care relationships



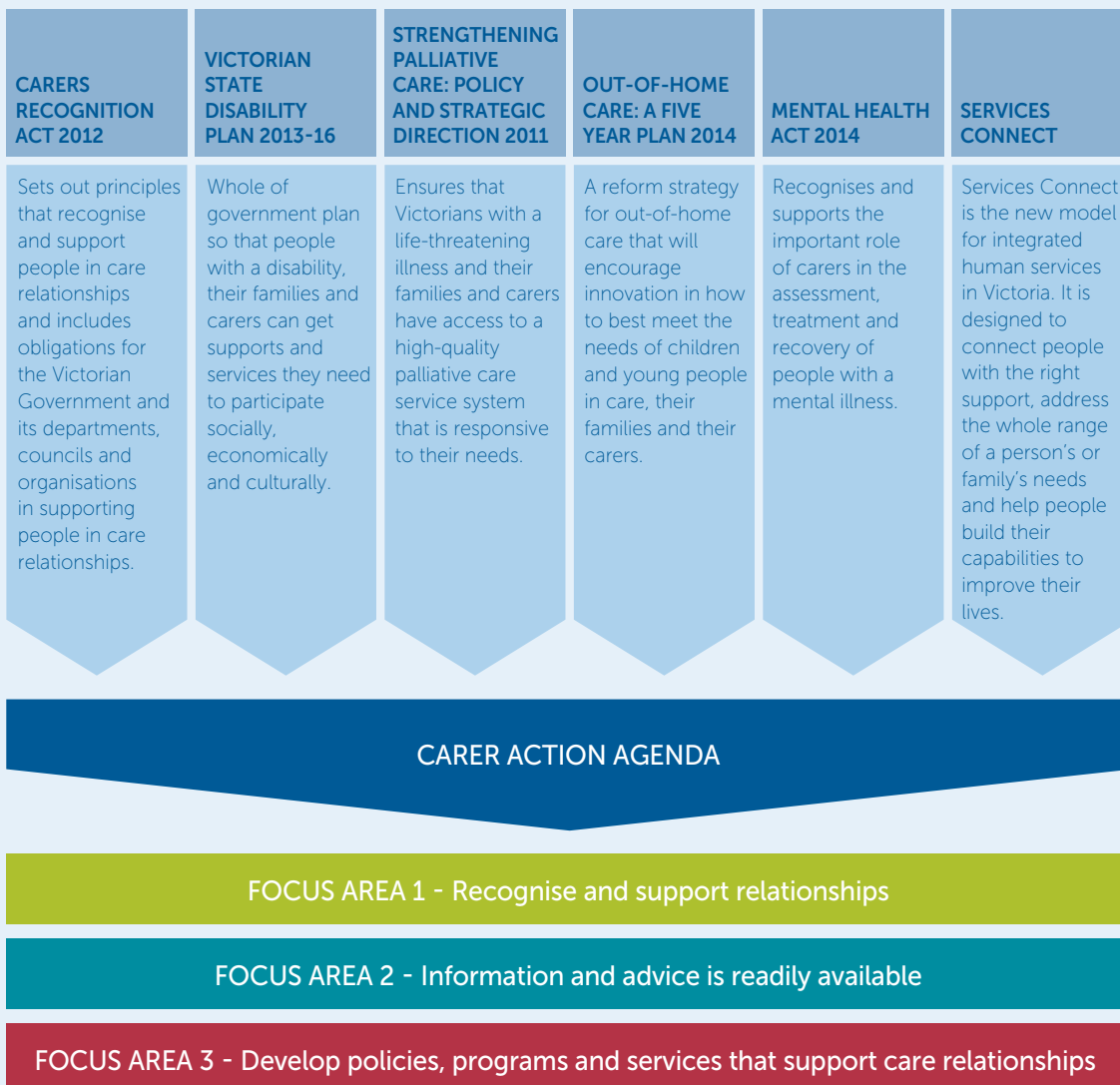
### OUTCOMES

Carers are supported in their caring role and formally recognised for their effort, dedication and the vital role they have in our community.

Carers can easily access the information they need, when they need it.

Carers are involved in decisions about policies and services which affect them.

## How the Carer Action Agenda links to other government initiatives



## Principles

The Victorian Government is committed to working with carers, their advocates and carer support organisations on an ongoing basis to make sure the Carer Action Agenda achieves its outcomes.

## Our investment

The Victorian Government is investing over \$200 million per annum to provide people in care relationships with a range of services and supports that can assist them.

The current range of funded support for carers or to assist them in their caring roles includes:

- > information, training and advocacy
- > carer support groups
- > counselling
- > respite
- > financial support (including the Victorian Carers Card)
- > subsidised aids and equipment including home and vehicle modifications.



# FOCUS AREA 1 - RECOGNISE AND SUPPORT CARE RELATIONSHIPS

**Carers deserve recognition for the work they do and the contribution they make. The community needs to be aware of carers' experiences, rights and needs so it can better support them. Raising awareness and changing attitudes to be more supportive and inclusive of carers is an important step.**

**Ensuring the community knows about the obligations imposed by Victoria's Carers Recognition Act and the Charter will assist with this.**

## What has already been achieved?

The Carer Action Agenda builds on what the Victorian Government is already doing to raise awareness and recognition of the challenges carers face. It complements reforms in areas such as disability, health, mental health and ageing.

- > The *Carers Recognition Act* came into effect on 1 July 2012. The Act formally recognises and values the role of carers and the importance of care relationships in the Victorian community. The Act includes a set of principles about the significance of care relationships, and specifies obligations for state government agencies, local councils, and other organisations that interact with people in care relationships. This is a fundamental underpinning that this agenda seeks to build on.
- > The government provided funding to promote carer awareness of the *Carers Recognition Act 2012*. The funded organisations sought input from carers and carer organisations regarding the most effective ways to promote carer awareness and understanding of their rights under the *Carers Recognition Act 2012*. The funding targeted organisations working with hard to reach audiences including carers from Indigenous and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities.
- > Factsheets with information about what the Act and Charter mean for carers and people in care relationships are now available.
- > The government funded Carers Victoria to provide training and education to support service providers to understand and develop carer friendly policies and practice.
- > In 2013-14 a campaign to promote the Victorian Carers Card Program resulted in over 110 new businesses, councils and other organisations partnering with the program.

## Future actions

- > Continue to promote carer recognition and achievements in community awareness strategies such as Carers Week, National Child Protection Week, Mental Health Week, World Alzheimer's Day, Dementia Awareness Week, Seniors Week and the International Day of People with Disability.
- > The Victorian Government departments will lead the way in promoting the Act by undertaking a range of activities such as:
  - developing a staff awareness strategy about the Act principles and Charter, and what they mean for staff
  - including information in staff induction about the Act and Charter, and what the Act principles and Charter mean in the way staff do their work
  - checking that human resource policies support carers to balance work and their role of carer, by including carers leave and flexible working conditions, and scheduling regular meetings at a time a carer can attend.

The Act says that the Victorian Government, councils and organisations funded to provide programs or services to people in care relationships, must report on how they met their obligations under the Act in their annual report.

- > The government will work with carers and carer peak support agencies to:
  - identify meaningful processes for monitoring how the Act is being implemented and identifying ways of improving
  - explore opportunities to better incorporate a carer focus into existing government sector guidelines and policies
  - build the capacity of service providers and employers to better meet the needs and preferences of carers
  - support Carers Victoria in training and education of service providers to understand and develop carer friendly policy and practice.
- > Promote the 2013-15 Victorian Carer Card discount directory with discounts and benefits from businesses, local government and community organisations at more than 1,300 locations in Victoria.

## FOCUS AREA 2 – INFORMATION AND ADVICE IS READILY AVAILABLE

**Carers can find the various service systems difficult to navigate, leading to a lack of awareness of available support. We know carers want to access information in the shortest period of time, and we need to make sure we best use available technology to bring information into people's homes.**

**Access to good information helps carers enormously. Caring often starts suddenly and people need to quickly learn about the new needs of the person they are caring for, what services are available, and how to access these services.**

**Access to accurate information will be particularly important as the changes to services occur through Commonwealth reforms.**

**This will require information to be updated regularly and for front line staff, who provide information to carers, to be informed so they can provide accurate and timely advice.**

### What has already been achieved?

- > The Victorian Government funded the *Confident Connected Carers* initiative to support carers in the process of transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in the Barwon trial site. The Confident Connected Carers project provided support to family carers of people with a disability. Through a series of general and targeted workshops in the Barwon Area, the role of the carer in the implementation of participant plans and building carer capacity to exercise choice and control in the purchasing of services under the NDIS model was explored.
- > Kinship Carers Victoria has released the *Kinship Carer's Handbook – A resource for kinship carers in Victoria* with comprehensive information and advice for kinship carers.
- > Australian Childhood Trauma Group, Anglicare Victoria, and Berry Street were engaged to deliver information and support sessions about trauma to kinship carers. Training was also delivered to enhance the skills and knowledge of kinship care staff to support carers through trauma informed theory and practice.
- > Foster Care Association of Victoria has been supported to enable more effective training opportunities for carers. In particular carers were supported to attend the International Trauma Conference, the National Kinship and Foster Care conference and the International Foster Care Organisation Conference (IFCO) meeting in Ireland in August 2014.
- > Respite Victoria (online information) has been established to improve access to information about respite for carers and people with a disability in Victoria. Each of the eight websites is maintained by a local service provider. These providers meet on a six-monthly basis to ensure consistent and current information is accessible to carers.
- > The Victorian Government funded relevant peak organisations such as Carers Victoria, Ethnic Community Council of Victoria, the Victorian Aboriginal Disability Network and Alzheimer's Australia Vic to provide information and advice for carers including those from CALD backgrounds and Aboriginal people.
- > Additional funding was provided to increase the availability of after-hours support at home for carers and clients with a life threatening illness.
- > *Financial support guide for home-based carers October 2014*. This recently released guide outlines the range of financial supports available to assist carers in meeting the needs of the children and young people in foster care, kinship care, permanent care and special needs local adoption placements.

## Future actions

The government will work with carers and carer peak support agencies to ensure that information is available in formats that carers find useful and easy to access.

- > We will better use web-based information and make sure it can be updated regularly and be accessed at times that suit carers.
- > Build on and update information available for carers through Respite Victoria, Better Health Channel, Victoria's Mental Health Services, Consumer Carer and Communication, Kinship Carers Victoria, Foster Care Association and Seniors Online Victoria websites.
- > Develop a 'Carer Needs Identification Guide' to support Department of Human Services and Health staff and service providers to identify carer needs and a guide for carers and service providers, which outlines available supports and services for carers.
- > Promote carer support services *Kinship Carer's Handbook* through the activities of peak advisory services such as Kinship Carers Victoria.
- > Provide state-wide support, specialist information and community education services to kinship carers where families have been affected by illicit drug use.
- > Implement the changes to the Mental Health Community Support Services program to make it easier for people and their carers to get information and advice about mental illness and available supports. The introduction of this program includes the introduction of a routine carer needs assessment.
- > Support carers in the transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme by building skills and capacity to manage individualised funding, including comparing and choosing service providers, agreeing on how services will be delivered and working with services.
- > Continue to provide after-hours support to clients with a life threatening illness and carers in their homes.
- > Support Carers Victoria through the transition of the Commonwealth and State jointly funded Home and Community Care (HACC) program to the Commonwealth, incorporating the principle of focus on 'supporting care relationships'.
- > Continue to support the development of local carer networks and work to identify and support hidden carers.
- > Continue to explore opportunities to deliver programs such as the Behaviour Support Program, which assist families and carers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders in languages other than English.

# FOCUS AREA 3 - DEVELOP POLICIES, PROGRAMS AND SERVICES THAT SUPPORT CARE RELATIONSHIPS

**Carers deserve the respect of our community and should be supported within their community by all levels of government and organisations. The views and needs of carers must be taken into account together with the views, interests and best interests of the people they care for when making policy decisions.**

**Carers feel it is important that health and community professionals acknowledge and respect their caring expertise, and that they are involved as partners in the provision of formal care.**

## What has already been achieved?

- > The *IDEAS* initiative involved a community engagement process to seek people's input into the future development and delivery of disability supported accommodation, respite and carer support services. This initiative led to the allocation of more than 30 innovative respite support and school holiday respite support programs and an additional 247 supported accommodation places and ten facility based respite places for people with a disability. A further 86 new places will be available by the end of 2016.
- > Services Connect trials bring together services such as child protection, public housing, disability, youth justice, family violence, mental health, and alcohol and drug services. This model includes a detailed assessment that looks at the holistic needs of individuals, their carers and families, including how to best support the family unit and address the support needs of each family member.
- > The *Victorian state disability plan 2013-16* articulates the government's view to the future and gives a clear direction for this four year period. The plan works across the whole of government so that people with a disability, their families and carers can get the supports and services they need to participate socially, economically and culturally. The plan was developed in consultation with people with a disability, their families and carers and directly supports the legitimate and positive involvement of family carers.
- > The *LEAD* Project supported people with a disability and carers to develop increased leadership and communication skills to provide advice and feedback to other participants, the community, the Victorian Government and National Disability Insurance Scheme Agency (NDIA) about their experience of the NDIS, and to offer improvement feedback during the first year of the trial.
- > The Victorian Government has since provided some additional funding to the project leader to support the development (in conjunction with NDIA) of a Participant Engagement Network.
- > The Department of Human Services has developed a 'whole of department' framework for client engagement. The framework offers 'best practice' guidance and is inclusive of client engagement at a number of levels – service design, participatory governance, self direction and continuous feedback incorporating a co-design approach.
- > Mental Health Carer Partnership Dialogues worked with the carer lived experience workforce to inform and influence issues and report on the impact of the Mental Health Reform Agenda and issues specific to families and carers.

## Future actions

- > Establish processes to seek the views of carers and incorporate carers' feedback in the development of government policy and programs by:
  - Implementing the Department of Human Services' Client Engagement Framework, which promotes client's rights to actively participate in decision making and maximises opportunities for clients and their carers to contribute to the way the department works.
  - Work with peak carer organisations to ensure carers have a voice in government policy development and service planning.
  - Working with key partners to implement the *Mental Health Act 2014* to recognise and support the critical role of carers in the assessment, treatment, care and recovery of people with mental illness.
  - Working with key partners to implement changes to the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* so that carers who care for children subject to child protection involvement, are able to make day-to-day decisions on behalf of children.
- > Developing a new approach to recruitment and retention of carers who care for children subject to child protection involvement, will be developed to improve recruitment and retention of current and future carers.
- > Using information gathered through the IDEAS initiative to further guide service system design and implementation of services for people with a disability.
- > Partnering with people with a disability, their families and carers as key participants in the monitoring and evaluation of the *Victorian state disability plan 2013-16*.

## Next steps: getting the views of Carers to progress the Agenda

The Victorian Government will work with the peak carer organisations to gain the views of carers, including those from CALD communities and Indigenous backgrounds. Specifically, consultation will be geared as to how we can:

- > promote awareness of the valuable role played by carers;
- > provide information that meets carers' needs and
- > involve carers in the development of policies and programs that support their caring responsibilities.

Once we have these views we will propose a set of comprehensive actions aligned to this agenda.

We will also work with peak carer organisations to identify ways of monitoring the impact of the actions implemented under each focus area.

