



Representing Carers in Regional and Remote Western Australia

Wheatbelt Region
March 2024

Carers in the Wheatbelt Region

63.47% of carers believe there is a need for further recognition of carers.

In WA 24% of carers are in crisis.¹ This is especially prevalent in WA regional areas.

The Wheatbelt region is an area of socio-economic disadvantage.

80.5%

(4 out of 5) of the local government areas (LGAs) in this region are ranked as areas experiencing economic disadvantage.²

1 in 10 people in the region are carers



14,678 carers

A high proportion of the population is in the 55-64 and 65+ age groups.

This indicates a high current and future demand for aged care services, in-home care, and for carers.

4.3%

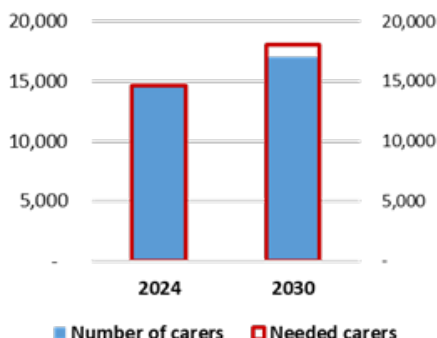
of people from a First Nations background, compared to 3.3% in WA⁵.

30.9%

(Nearly 1 in 3 people) living in the Wheatbelt region report having one or more long-term health conditions. This amounts to over 42,458 people⁶.

Projected Demand for Carers in the Wheatbelt Region

Shortfall of carers in the Wheatbelt

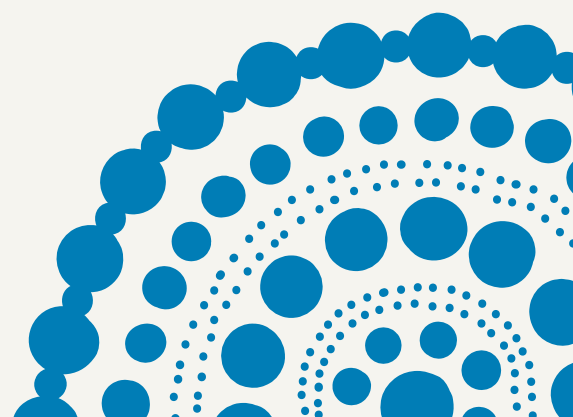


While the demand for informal carers in Australia is projected to increase **23%** by 2030, the number of informal carers is only projected to increase by **16%** over this timeframe⁷.

For the Wheatbelt region, this represents a **shortfall of 1,027 carers by 2030**. This amounts to a minimum cost of \$28.6 million in wages per year for formal carers to cover this shortfall.

This does not account for the cost of other alternate care arrangements for the person receiving care.

- (SAGE Design & Advisory, 2023)
- (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023)
- (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023)
- (Rural Health West, 2016)
- (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021)
- (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021)
- (Deloitte Access Economics, 2020)



What can be done to better support carers in the Wheatbelt Region?

Carers WA 2024-25 Policy Priorities:

- Better recognition of carers in WA
- Investment to improve the health and wellbeing of carers
- Better economic outcomes, carer advocacy and lived experience participation
- Improving the systems that carers navigate and use

Key recommendations from consultations with the Wheatbelt community, to assist on addressing identified barriers, include:

1. Build awareness of carers, carer services and carer referral pathways in the Wheatbelt region.
2. Establishment of a carer retreat/respice house in the Wheatbelt region.
3. Establishment of initiatives which provide increased and affordable access to quality respice services in the Wheatbelt region.
4. Establishment of initiatives which offer service navigation support for carers in the Wheatbelt region.
5. Improved access for carers to quality affordable housing in the Wheatbelt region, and/or improved access to trades for housing maintenance for carers in the Wheatbelt region.
6. Increased initiatives for quality transport support to carers and those they care for in the Wheatbelt region.

What is Carers WA doing for carers in the Wheatbelt Region?

Carers WA is the peak body for carers in WA and the service provider for the Carer Gateway in WA, which provides a range of individualised services for carers. These services are available state wide. Carer Gateway is an Australian government initiative providing a mix of online, telephone and in-person supports, services and advice for family carers. This may include in-person peer support, facilitated carer coaching, counselling, tailored support packages and emergency respite.

Carers WA has dedicated outreach teams which travel to regional areas, such as the Wheatbelt, and also undertakes regional engagement to connect with carers and regional communities.

As part its regional engagement in the Wheatbelt region in March 2024, Carers WA consulted widely with the community on what was and wasn't working for carers in the region.

As a result of the feedback from these consultations, Carers WA has committed to undertake:

1. Increased awareness raising and information on carers, Carers WA, the Carer Gateway, how processes work and who to contact.
2. Carers WA to continue to build relationships with service providers for delivery of practical supports, domestic supports, respite and services for carers within the region that reflects the demands on the ground.
3. Explore options for increased engagement with the Wheatbelt community, including: more face-to-face service provider network meetings; more local referral points; collaborative support for carers and clients to maximise services.
4. Explore options for carers in the Wheatbelt region to have increased opportunities for lived experience participation.
5. Investigate options for increased engagement with First Nations carers in the Wheatbelt region, and opportunities for increased advocacy on issues of relevance to First Nations carers.
6. Build awareness of initiatives which support carers to re-enter the workforce, and which build capacity of employers to be more carer friendly. i.e. the Carers WA Be Job Ready Program and Carer Friendly Employers program.

Identified Barriers for Carers in the Wheatbelt Region

Barrier	Description	Impact
<p>Awareness of carers and carer services</p>	<p>63.47% of carers believe there is a need for further recognition of carers.</p> <p>While the community was positive about having two local Carers WA staff members in the Wheatbelt, opportunities for improvement were identified for increased awareness of Carers WA, carers and carer services in the region. This was particularly needed for young carers and First Nations carers. The community called for more regular stakeholder meetings and engagement to assist in spreading this awareness.</p>	<p>This results in a lack of carer recognition, identification and support, and carers not being able to access services at all or in a timely manner due to misunderstandings or lack of referral.</p>
<p>Opportunities for carers to contribute their lived experience</p>	<p>The Wheatbelt community was keen for carers to have more opportunities to contribute their lived experience to projects, and be more consulted, with particular involvement of young carers in discussions.</p>	<p>Where carers are not involved in contributing their lived experience to policy, project and service design; this can result in these projects not being fit for purpose and carers feeling unheard and isolated.</p>
<p>Support for First Nations carers</p>	<p>First Nations carers raised a lack of awareness of services and supports for First Nations carers in the Wheatbelt region, including of Carers WA's First Nations Wellbeing and Engagement Team. The community was supportive of increased and continued engagement with Carers WA and advised on improvements which could be made to services to improve supports for First Nations carers in the region.</p>	<p>A lack of awareness of available services and lack of engagement with First Nations carers can exacerbate existing issues, increase isolation and result in carers not being able to access services in a timely manner.</p>

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<p>Access to respite and carer retreats</p>	<p>Access to respite was identified as one of the biggest areas of need for carers in the Wheatbelt region. Gaps in respite services were particularly seen in relation to residential respite, emergency respite, and in-home respite (sporadic and ongoing). One service provider particularly commented that there was a big need for residential and emergency respite. Access to these services were reported to not be great in metropolitan areas, but were almost impossible to get in regional areas, with respite being almost non-existent in the Wheatbelt region.</p> <p>The community raised that useful solutions or areas of collaboration with local service providers could include strengthening of referral pathways into respite options; more respite funding; access to a local respite facility for higher care clients; provision of opportunities for retirees to work in supporting transport, social support and in-home respite for carers and those they care for.</p>	<p>Informal carers experience increased and heightened levels of social isolation, loneliness, psychological distress, as well as ill health and low wellbeing. Access to respite for an informal carer can help carers to have a healthy level of wellbeing, and better maintain and thrive in their caring role.</p> <p>Despite this, many barriers exist which hinder carers being able to access an appropriate level of respite services. In regional WA and the Wheatbelt, access to respite and the ability for carers to take a break is even more constrained, leading to increased isolation, burnout and low wellbeing for carers.</p>
<p>Availability of services</p>	<p>Service availability in the Wheatbelt was reported as being impacted by staffing and workforce issues, and the availability of many key services in the region as well. Other variables impacting availability also included service and client access to funding, service wait times, and gaps in services in the Wheatbelt.</p> <p>Community members spoke of the need for increased collaboration between services, including more use of communities of practice, service mapping, and increased knowledge of different ways to access services. i.e. online or travel options where services are based in specific areas. Particular services that were identified as being needed included household support services, an all-abilities gym in Northam, services in remote areas, in-home services and funding, emergency planning for high-care clients, availability of public services, and more emotional and psychological supports for carers.</p>	<p>A lack of availability of services results in reduced early-intervention for consumers and carers; increased carers' roles as they step up to fill gaps in services; and increased stress and burnout for carers.</p>

Identified Barriers for Carers in the Wheatbelt Region

<p>Affordability of services</p>	<p>The Wheatbelt community reported many services only being available privately, impacting the ability of people being able to afford them.</p> <p>Many carers also spoke of the difficulty of being able to afford these services for themselves and those they cared for, due to their capacity to afford them on carer or other pensions, or without having other government funding to access services.</p>	<p>Carers and those they care for are either not able to easily access services due to cost, or experience financial difficulties from the cost of services, resulting in further impact to their economic and financial security.</p>
<p>Service navigation support</p>	<p>The Wheatbelt community raised that there was also a lack of support for those in need on how to navigate and access care, services, funding and support. This was a particular gap identified for carers, with service providers reporting a need for more information and guidance to be provided to carers in general.</p>	<p>Carers and those they care for miss out on much-needed services, and carers experience stress and burn out.</p>
<p>Access to the essentials</p>	<p>Access to essential services such as housing, transport, health services, childcare, etc was raised as a significant concern in the Wheatbelt region. A reduction in mainstream services such as banks in the region, also has significant impacts on carers and those they provide care for.</p>	<p>Carers and consumers face increased difficulties in accessing essential services, resulting in increased caring responsibilities. A carer from Wongan Hills raised concerns over impending bank closures in the region. The carer stated they would travel to Northam specifically so that the person they cared for could do some banking, and also did some shopping whilst there. Closure of these essential services would also take this income away from smaller towns as well.</p>

Identified Barriers for Carers in the Wheatbelt Region

<p>Housing affordability, suitability and accessibility</p>	<p>Community members in the Wheatbelt raised concerns over the lack of affordable housing in the region, and identified a great need for access to vehicle and home modifications for carers and those they care for. Needs were also raised for improvements to social housing maintenance in the Wheatbelt. Feedback from the community indicated widespread issues with sourcing trades to maintain and fix social housing in the region, resulting in under maintained or empty social housing.</p>	<p>A carer raised that they had been experiencing leaking in their government home for more than 2.5 years, which was producing a mouldy smell and seeping into their bedroom, carpet and dressing table. The carer said they had made several phone calls regarding this, to no avail.</p>
<p>Transport support</p>	<p>In Australia, about 28% of its population live in regional, rural or remote areas with poor access to specialist health services. Transport was identified as a great area of need for carers and the person/s they cared for in the Wheatbelt region, particularly due to gaps in services and transport to services.</p> <p>At present, there was not transport, volunteers or services set up to provide this transport, and no public budget for this to be covered. These gaps in services became more pronounced for people living in more remote areas further from townships. Community members also raised a need for increased access to vehicle and home modifications for those who need it. Shortages in accessible public transport and taxis were also raised as a concern.</p>	<p>Limited access to healthcare and other essential services. Carers experience increased isolation and subsequent impact on their wellbeing.</p>