



# Representing Carers in Regional and Remote Western Australia

Esperance Region  
February 2024

## Carers in the Esperance Region

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

**Nearly one-third** of Esperance service providers identified respite as a significant area of need for carers.

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

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

**75%**

of the local government areas (LGAs) in this region are ranked in the 37 most relatively disadvantaged LGAs in WA (out of 139 LGAs in the state)<sup>2</sup>.

**1 in 10** people in the region are carers



**1,709** 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%**

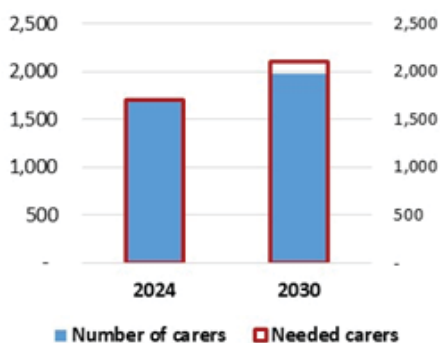
of people from a First Nations background, compared to 3.3% in WA<sup>5</sup>.

**27.2%**

(1 in 10 people) living in the Esperance region report having one or more long-term health conditions. This amounts to over 4,340 people<sup>6</sup>.

## Projected Demand for Carers in the Esperance Region

Shortfall of carers in Esperance

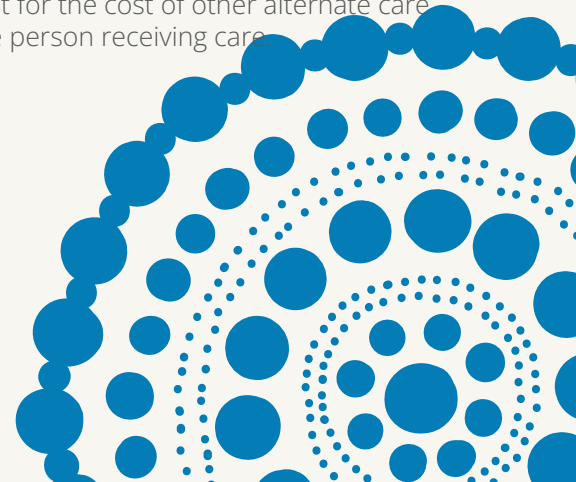


While the demand for informal carers in Australia is projected to increase **23%** by 2030, the number of informal carers is only projected to increase by **16%** over this timeframe<sup>7</sup>.

For the Esperance region, this represents a **shortfall of 120 carers by 2030**. This amounts to a minimum cost of \$3.3 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 is Carers WA doing for carers in the Esperance 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 Esperance, and also undertake regional engagement to connect with carers, regional communities and staff on the ground..

During the February 2024 regional engagement in the Esperance region, 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, Carer Gateway, how processes work and who to contact.
2. 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. Establish carer peer support groups in Esperance.
4. Investigate opportunities for increased in-person support for young carers and First Nations carers in Esperance.
5. Development of ongoing consultation opportunities for carers living in rural and remote WA.

## What can be done to better support carers in the Esperance 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 Esperance community, to assist on addressing identified barriers, include:**

1. Build awareness of carers, carer services and carer referral pathways in the Esperance region.
2. Establishment of initiatives that provide increased and affordable access to quality respite services, including residential, in-home, for children, palliative, cottage, high-level and emergency.
3. Establishment of a local carer retreat.
4. Long term funding and initiatives for sustainable community programs within the Esperance region, in response to identified unmet needs.
5. Initiatives which provide end-of-life palliative care services and/or a dedicated hospice facility in Esperance.
6. Initiatives which provide transitional support for young people from school, to further education or employment.
7. Initiatives which provide increased housing options for carers that are timely, available, accessible and affordable.

## Identified Barriers for Carers in the Esperance Region

| Barrier   | Description   | Impact  |
|---|---|---|
| <p><b>Awareness of carers and carer services</b></p>      | <p>63.47% of carers believe there is a need for further recognition of carers. While awareness of carers and carer services was improving in Esperance, opportunities for improvement were identified in small, rural and remote towns; and in engagement of First Nations carers.</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><b>Lack of respite services and carer retreats</b></p> | <p>Nearly one-third of Esperance service providers identified respite as a significant area of need for carers. All areas of respite were needed, including residential, in-home, for children, palliative, cottage, high-level and emergency. The community also called for the establishment of a respite house/carer retreat, and for the establishment of carer peer support groups. This included groups for men, and yarning circles.</p> | <p>Carers feel frustrated, burnt out and dissatisfied with their caring role. They also describe needing to use the hospital regularly as an emergency respite facility.</p>                            |
| <p><b>Shortages and affordability of housing</b></p>      | <p>Housing affordability and shortages was raised as a substantial problem in Esperance, which exacerbated many other issues. This impacted availability of housing for essential workers, and directly impacts affordability, cost of living and critical worker shortages within essential services<sup>8</sup>.</p>  | <p>This places additional strain on carers in the region as tasks which would have been performed by care workers for those they care for, now fall to them to complete.</p>                            |

8. (Urbis, 2022, p. 5)

## Identified Barriers for Carers in the Esperance Region

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| <p><b>Services for young carers</b></p>                            | <p>Service providers made it very clear that young people in Esperance are under serviced and receive no support if they are in a caring role. While some organisations are attempting to fill this gap themselves when working with families, the capacity to do so is limited due to funding and resource constraints.</p>   | <p>Young carers remain hidden and unsupported, impacting long-term on their current &amp; future education, employment prospects, and quality of life.</p>   |
| <p><b>Access to culturally safe services and employment</b></p>    | <p>There is a need for increased cultural competency and safety within organisations, including more First Nations positions in government and community organisations.</p>  | <p>First Nations peoples miss out on employment opportunities and needed services.</p>   |
| <p><b>Service navigation and access</b></p>                        | <p>Many carers were in the early stages of navigating government services, which were reported as being far from each other and they would find themselves being sent from service to service, with none being able to help. Carers describe giving up because of a lack of time to travel between different towns multiple times, due to their caring role/s and other responsibilities.</p>  | <p>Carers and those they care for miss out on much-needed services, and carers experience stress and burn out.</p>   |
| <p><b>Availability and affordability of essential services</b></p> | <p>Due to the remoteness of the region, many services lack availability and affordability, with identified needs including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialist health services</li> <li>• A local hospice</li> <li>• More local bulk-billing GPs</li> <li>• Shortages in aged care services contributed to blockages in the health system from people who should be in aged care facilities, being in hospital beds instead.</li> <li>• A mental health facility was also identified as being needed. At present, people are flown out to Perth for this service.</li> </ul> <p>Where there were staff available for essential health services, it was reported that these services often had high staff turnover and short-term contracts.</p> | <p>This lack of specialists had ongoing impacts for carers in the time taken to get a diagnosis for their loved ones (5+ years in some cases); extensive waiting lists; lack of connection and communication with services; services not listening to carers where an appointment was obtained; as well as having to travel to Perth for appointments. One carer described having to travel to Perth sixteen times over the past year for their children's appointments.</p> |

## Identified Barriers for Carers in the Kimberley Region

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| <p><b>Access to practical supports</b></p> | <p>A need for more practical supports was identified, especially for everyday needs such as transport and shopping. Financial supports were also raised as being needed, as well as increased funding and assistance to access funding for those caring for family.</p>  | <p>This places additional strain on carers in the region as tasks which would have been performed by these services for those they care for, now fall to them to complete.</p>  |
| <p><b>Access to transport</b></p>          | <p>In Australia, about 28% of its population live in regional, rural or remote areas with poor access to specialist health services<sup>9</sup>. Access to transport was identified as a particular issue in Esperance, with limited bus services, only one taxi in town, and no public taxi for wheelchair users.</p> <p>The Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS) was also raised as an issue. The community reported only a third of travel costs being covered and funding for an escort to cover carer travel costs being difficult to get. One carer raised needing to get the local MP involved to get a flight ticket funded for their daughter.</p> | <p>Limited access to healthcare and other essential services, as well as not being able to have a seat at the table to have a say in policy and service design. Carers experience increased isolation and subsequent impact on their wellbeing.</p> |

9. (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023)