



**Carers WA**



## **Representing Carers in Regional and Remote Western Australia**

Geraldton and Midwest Region  
**May 2024**

## About Carers WA

Carers WA is the peak body representing the needs and interests of carers in Western Australia and is part of a national network of Carers Associations. Carers provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends with disability, mental ill health, long term health conditions (including a chronic condition or terminal illness), have an alcohol or drug dependency, or who are frail aged. The person they care for may be a parent, partner, sibling, child, relative, friend or neighbour.

Caring is a significant form of unpaid work in the community and is integral to the maintenance of our aged, disability, health, mental health, and palliative care systems.

Some important facts about carers include:

- There are currently 2.65 million unpaid carers in Australia.
- There are more than 320,000 people in a caring role in Western Australia.
- The replacement value of unpaid care, according to a report undertaken by Deloitte, Access Economics, "The economic value of unpaid care in Australia in 2020" is estimated at \$77.9 billion per annum.

### Enquiries

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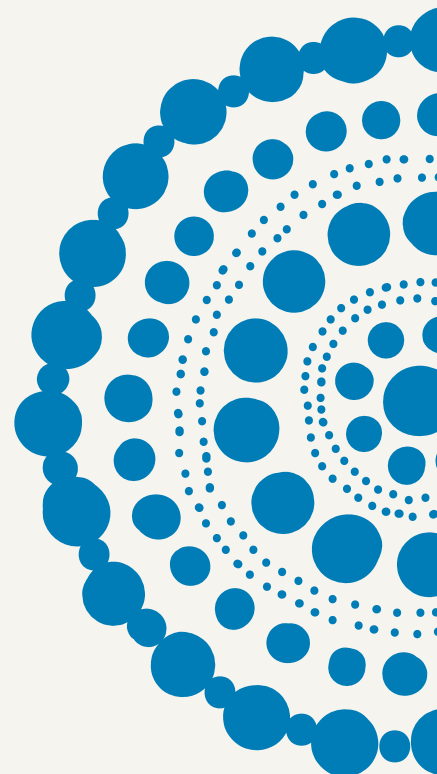
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### Acknowledgement of Country

Carers WA acknowledges the Wadjuk Noongar Nation's lands, water, customs, and culture of which the Carers WA Head Office is located. Carers WA recognises our services reach beyond the Perth (Boorlo) region, and so we also acknowledge the cultural diversity of First Nations Peoples across our state and throughout Australia.



# About Carers in Western Australia



## Who is a carer?

A carer is a person who provides care and assistance to a person with disability, a chronic illness, mental ill health, alcohol or drug dependency or who requires assistance with everyday tasks due to frailty.<sup>3</sup>

This care is unpaid and does not form part of a volunteer or work arrangement.<sup>4</sup>

The care which carers provide is valued at **\$77.9 billion** per year and amounts to **2.2 billion** hours of unpaid care per year. This invaluable care supports WA's already strained health system, and assists many people to retain their independence at home, outside of services such as residential aged care.

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

This represents a total shortfall by 2030 of:



**22,400**  
carers in WA



**\$623 million**  
annual replacement cost in waged workers

**10.7%**  
(320,000 people)

of Western Australians are carers.



**24%**  
of carers in WA are in **crisis**.<sup>6</sup>

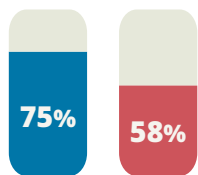


**27%** of WA carers cannot raise **\$2K** when needed.



**1 in 2** carers experience financial **stress**.<sup>7</sup>

## Personal Wellbeing Index Score<sup>7</sup>



General Population Carers



**47%** provide care to someone aged 65+.<sup>7</sup>



**49%** of carers provide 24/7 care.<sup>7</sup>



The average length of the caring role is **12.9** years.<sup>7</sup>

**90%** of these carers live with disproportionately lower protective factors of social support, self-efficacy, recognition and work-life balance.<sup>7</sup>

**1 in 5** carers in WA live outside the greater Perth area.<sup>7</sup>



## First Nations Carers

In the past 2 years, 1 in 5 identified carers had accessed emergency support.<sup>7</sup>



**1 in 3** say their home is not adequate for their caring role.<sup>7</sup>

**51.3%** have an annual income less than **\$50,000**.<sup>7</sup>



**2 in 5** are caring for more than 1 person.<sup>7</sup>

1. (ABS, 2022)  
2. (SAGE Design & Advisory, 2023)  
3. (Government of Western Australia, 2004)  
4. (Government of Western Australia, 2004)

5. (Deloitte Access Economics, 2020)  
6. (SAGE Design & Advisory, 2023)  
7. (National Carer Survey, 2022)  
8. (National Carer Survey, 2023)

# Executive Summary

Carers in regional areas experience ongoing substantial issues with access to services, especially disability services. They also experience higher distress, elevated social isolation and financial stress than the average Australian<sup>1</sup>.

Carers in regional areas of Western Australia (WA) in particular, experience ongoing and increased service challenges with NDIS, aged care and mental health services. They also experience higher volumes of unmet carer support needs, as well as poorer health and higher instances of major illnesses<sup>2</sup>. In short, a high proportion of WA regional carers are in crisis.

This situation became heightened over the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in increased levels of stress, burnout and isolation for WA regional carers<sup>3</sup>. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic may have passed, carers still experience the after effects.

This was indicated through past consultation with WA regional carers and service providers. In particular, these consultations indicated a severe lack of respite access; workforce shortages; a need for local community supports beyond those available through Carer Gateway; long wait times and high demand for services; a lack of awareness of regional challenges; and a need for increased funding for regional services to recognise and respond to stress in carers<sup>4</sup>.

In a move to reconnect with regional communities following COVID-19, and driven by these past consultations, Carers WA has committed to augment its existing service offerings with an enhanced focus on regional communities.

Moving forward, this will take the form of increased regional representation and consultations to identify region-specific issues – for a region-specific response, and where possible, place-based services in the region.

Carers WA visited the Geraldton and Midwest region in May 2024 as part of this commitment. We had the opportunity to meet with many different members of the community. During these meetings, we listened to the wisdom and knowledge that only a long-term regional community member can provide. We heard that the main issues of great concern to carers in the Midwest region were the need for respite and carer retreats; lack of awareness of carers and carer services; availability of carer services; and lack of services and connectivity between services.

This report not only summarises what we learnt during our visit to the region, it will act as a launching pad for future involvement in the region. We sincerely thank everyone who offered their time and advice. We look forward to seeing you again as we collaboratively work on solutions together.

Sincerely

**Richard Newman**  
**Carers WA - CEO**



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1. (Carers NSW, 2023)
  2. (SAGE Design & Advisory, 2023)
  3. (Carers WA, 2022)
  4. (Carers WA, 2022)



# Carers in WA's Regions

In Western Australia, 24% of carers are in crisis<sup>5</sup>.

This results in higher psychological distress, a greater impact of their caring role on work, more care tasks, lower social support, recognition, work-life balance and self-efficacy<sup>6</sup>.

This is particularly prevalent in WA regional areas<sup>7</sup>, in the midst of heightened and pronounced challenges which carers in regional areas have in accessing services and support for themselves and those they care for, along with issues with housing and transport.

## The Midwest Region

The Midwest Region is comprised of the local government areas of Carnamah, Chapman Valley, Coorow, Cue, Geraldton, Greenough, Irwin, Meekatharra, Mingenew, Morawa, Mount Magnet, Mullewa, Murchison, Northampton, Perenjori, Sandstone, Three Springs and Yalgoo<sup>8</sup>.

## Carers in the Midwest Region

There are an estimated 5,883 carers in the Geraldton and Midwest region<sup>9</sup>.

This estimate takes into account issues with low rates of carer self-identification.

## Population

In 2021, the estimated resident population of the Midwest region (SA3\*) was 54,981<sup>10</sup>.

\*SA3 refers to Statistical Areas Level 3 in the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS). It is a geographical area, creating a standard framework for regional data analysis<sup>11</sup>.

The median age in the Geraldton and Midwest region is 42, significantly higher than the WA median age of 38<sup>12</sup>.

This reflects the high proportion of people aged

55-64 years and 65+ in the region, than in WA – and indicates a high current and future demand for aged care services, in-home care and informal cares.

In the Midwest region, 9.5% of people identify as being from a First Nations background<sup>13</sup>.

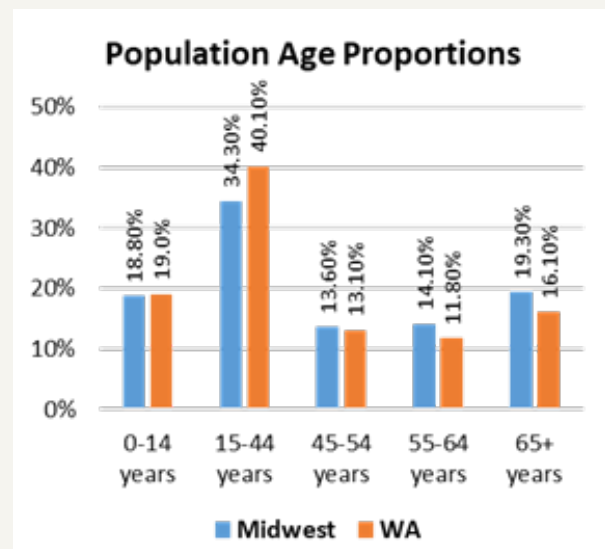


Figure 1 Population Demographics for WA and the Geraldton and Midwest region<sup>15</sup>

## Health

In the Midwest region, over 1 in 5 or 28.3% of people report having one or more long term health conditions – amounting to 15,535 people<sup>15</sup>.

5. (SAGE Design & Advisory, 2023)
6. (SAGE Design & Advisory, 2023)
7. (SAGE Design & Advisory, 2023)
8. (Government of Western Australia, 2020)
9. Derived figures based on proportion of WA population who are carers and estimated resident population of the Geraldton and Midwest region.
10. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021)
11. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016)
12. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021)
13. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021)
14. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021)
15. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021)

# Carers in WA's Regions

The top five specified long-term health conditions in the region are arthritis (8.8% of the population); mental health conditions (including depression or anxiety) (8.3%); asthma (8.1%); diabetes (excluding gestational diabetes) (5.7%); and heart disease (including heart attack and angina) (4.3%)<sup>16</sup>.

## Housing and Income

In the Midwest region, 27.9% of the population rent their homes (compared to 27.3% in WA). An additional 31.4% own their home on a mortgage (40.0% in WA) and 35.1% own their house outright (39.2% in WA)<sup>17</sup>.

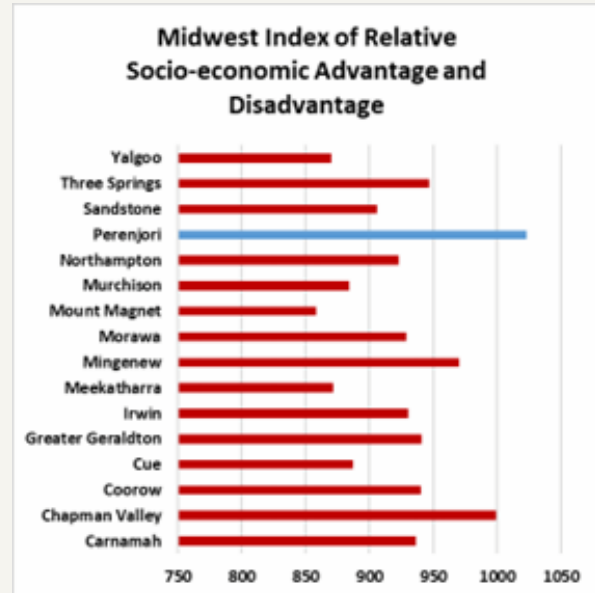
As at April 2024, the Shire of Geraldton had a vacancy rate of 0.9%, down from 1.1% in April 2022. This is compared to rental vacancy rates in Perth (0.5%) and other regional centres in WA such as Kalgoorlie (1.8%)<sup>18</sup>.

Public housing wait times for the Midwest and Gascoyne regions, as at 31 July 2023, averaged 2.6 years across the board, with an average of 1.25 years wait time for the priority housing list<sup>19</sup>.

## Disadvantage

The Socio-Economic Indexes For Areas (SEIFA) ranks areas in Australia according to their relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage<sup>20</sup>.

The index uses 1,000 as a baseline, with a score above 1,000 representing an area of socio-economic advantage, and a score below 1,000 showing an area of socio-economic disadvantage<sup>21</sup>.



In the Midwest, all local government areas for which an index score was available, scored below 1,000 – except Perenjori, which had a score just above this number (1,023). This indicates that the Midwest is an area experiencing socio-economic disadvantage<sup>22</sup>.

A lower SIEFA score for an area has been shown to correlate with a poorer health status and higher ill health risk factors<sup>23</sup>.

16. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021)
17. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021)
18. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021)
19. (Parliament of Western Australia, 2023)
20. (Rural Health West, 2016)
21. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023)
22. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023)
23. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023)



# Carers in WA's Regions

## Projected demand for informal care

While the demand for informal carers in Australia is predicted to increase 23% by 2030, driven in part by Australia's aging population; the number of informal carers is only projected to increase by 16% over this timeframe<sup>24</sup>.

Holding population levels steady, this represents a shortfall of 412 carers in the Midwest region by 2030 (7,236 carers needed by 2030; compared to a projected 6,824 carers by 2030 in the region). At a minimum, this is 412 people who have need of a carer, who will instead require support through the WA health system.

The average value to replace the informal care undertaken by one carer is \$27,821 in wages per year (2020 figures) – amounting to a **minimum cost of \$11.457 million in wages per year for formal carers** to cover this shortfall of 412 carers (not adjusted for CPI or wage increases).



Figure 2 Projected shortfall of carers in the Geraldton and Midwest by 2030



Figure 3 Indicative costs of alternate care arrangements<sup>25,26,27</sup>

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

As demonstrated in Figure 3, the indicative costs of alternate care arrangements for a person who does not have an informal carer, can be high. When considered on an annual basis, the value of carers becomes even more clear, especially in the case of a long stay patient. Recently, the WA Office of the Auditor General estimated 486 patients waiting for NDIS or aged care services had spent about 40,000 days extra in hospital over a 13-month period, with the cost of care for this being approximately \$71.8 million.

Being a carer currently means being invisible. This needs to change, through tangible and practical recognition of carers, as well as improving access to services in WA's regions, in recognition of what a carer's true value is.

24. (Deloitte Access Economics, 2020)  
 25. (Office of the Auditor General Western Australia, 2022)  
 26. (Gnanamanickam, et al., 2018)  
 27. (Hicks, et al., 2019)

# Summary

## Introduction

In May 2024, Carers WA spent four days in Geraldton, increasing its organisational presence in the region and connecting with carers and service providers.

Nine staff members from a range of different positions within the organisation spent this time connecting with carers, service providers and the broader community. This included a movie night, evening wellness workshops, a Through The Maze service provider event, and a pop-up at Geraldton Dome. Carers WA also conducted pop-ups in Coorow, Perenjori, Morawa, Mingenew and Dandaragan.

## Carers WA's objectives for the trip were also to consult with the community on:

- What was and wasn't working for carers in the region;
- Identify unmet needs for carers;
- Identify short- and longer-term opportunities for improvement; and
- Collate recommendations from the community to enable these improvements.

Over the week, Carers WA engaged with a broad range of service providers, government representatives, carers, people who receive care and other community members.

This included organisations from many sectors, such as government, disability services, aged care services, and other community services.

## The overarching themes from this community consultation included issues with:

- Need for respite and carer retreats;
- Awareness of carers and carer services;
- Availability of carer services; and
- Lack of services and connectivity between services.

## 1.0 Need for respite and carer retreats



# Findings

Need for respite and carer retreats was raised as the most significant issue in the Midwest region, which also impacted on carers' abilities to access services.

Carers WA had received feedback on past visits to Geraldton around the lack of respite in the region, with past consultation revealing only one high-level respite bed and limited low level or flexible respite. Availability for these services is impacted by extensive waitlists and staff availability. On this visit, the community raised that there were no respite beds, with current facilities not having taken on new people since November 2023 and not anticipated to open for new people again until July 2024. Aged care facilities in the region were running at 98%, with little domestic assistance. The cottage respite available was CHSP (Commonwealth Home Support Programme) funded, meaning those that need extra care do not meet eligibility, but have nowhere else to go.

Carers indicated they were not able to take a break or attend scheduled carer events due to a lack of respite and support workers in the region. Family friendly, evening events or ones which the person being cared for can also attend, were recommended as good options in the midst of this substantial lack of respite issue.

This is concerning as informal carers experience increased and heightened levels of social isolation, loneliness, psychological distress, as well as ill health and low wellbeing. The impacts of caring have increased during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in remote and regional areas, as well as for people who provide care for or are part of high-risk groups – such as carers of autistic people<sup>28</sup>.

Access to respite for an informal carer can help carers to have a healthy level of wellbeing<sup>29</sup>, and better maintain and thrive in their caring role.

While in Geraldton, Carers WA met with representatives from the Department of Health and Aged Care, who were working to map respite services in the region. Carers WA will keep in touch with these representatives in the future and their work on respite in the region.

## **2.0 Awareness of carers and carer services**

The majority of feedback from carers regarding their experiences with Carers WA services was positive. Carers also appreciated the events held during the regional visit.

Conversations with community members revealed some confusion about the partnership between Helping Minds and Carers WA in the regions. It was raised that there was a need for greater availability in the carer support role to cover the needs of carers in the Midwest, with some calling for a Carers WA regional coordinator to be placed in the region. Other community members also called for a full-time position in this carer support role.

Helping Minds is Carers WA's consortium partner for delivery of Carer Gateway services in the Midwest (Geraldton), Kimberley (Broome) and South West (Bunbury).

Many carers also stated there were only peer support groups or counselling available in the region for carers, with this perception dissuading some carers from making contact with the Helping Minds representative in the region, as they reasoned they could arrange these services themselves. In actuality, a much greater suite of services is available to carers in this region.

These findings indicated a need for greater

28. (Schirmer, Mylek, & Miranti, 2022)

29. (Schirmer, Mylek, & Miranti, 2022)

# Findings

awareness of the partnership between Helping Minds and Carers WA, the Carer Gateway and of services available to carers in the Midwest. The level of feedback received in support of a full-time equivalent role for carers in the region indicated that this also requires further exploration.

### **3.0 Availability of carer services**

The community raised concerns about the availability of carer services in Geraldton and the Midwest. It was raised that there was a need for greater availability in a carer support role to cover the needs of carers in the Midwest, with some calling for a Carers WA regional coordinator to be placed in the region.

Carers raised that they felt there was a need for more services beyond social catchups or counselling, which they said they could organise themselves and do. Carers also felt that counselling didn't help without practical supports like respite to accompany it.

Due to limited respite and support workers in the region, carers also raised that they found it difficult to engage in activities where they could not bring their families or the person they cared for as well. Carers were supportive of more family focused and evening events for carers.

The community also identified a lack of culturally appropriate supports for First Nations carers in town, and that First Nations carers do not necessarily want to attend a standard support group.

The wellness workshops provided as part of Carers WA's regional visit were well received, particularly as they were held in the evening. Several carers indicated that they often couldn't afford to attend these kind of events.

Carers WA staff members involved in the wellness workshops provided some feedback on the experiences of carers:

*'An aboriginal carer told me that her grandmother painted in watercolour and the activity made her feel connected to her, the colours she used in her art to connect to country.'*

*'A mother and daughter attended the wellness workshops. They lived out of Geraldton and rarely did any wellness activities. They stayed after the art workshop for the meditation/chair yoga even though the daughter had one arm in a sling/ and the other hand was injured she still participated. This I felt showed the perseverance of carers and the importance for self-care.'*

### **4.0 Lack of services and connectivity between services**

Community members raised concerns about a lack of services in the region, particularly with the availability of aged care services.

#### **4.1 Aged Care Services**

On past visits to the region, the community raised that only three nursing homes were available in Geraldton, all of which had extensive waiting lists – averaging around 48+ applicants waiting for a bed.

# Findings

As a result, families who are under significant carer stress may bring their loved one to the hospital as a last resort, where they are often admitted as a Care Awaiting Placement (CAP) patient, where they may wait in hospital for an extensive period of time (weeks/months) waiting for a bed to become available at a nursing home. During this time, their health may deteriorate, decondition and mental health decline, as they are limited in how much they do while on the ward.

On this trip, the community reported continued limited access to aged care services, with aged care facilities running at 98% capacity and little domestic assistance. Strict eligibility criteria were also reported for some aged care services, which made access difficult for the high (19.1%) proportion of the Midwest's population aged over 65.

## 4.2 Connectivity between services

Conversations with community members revealed opportunities for improvement in connections between services.

Some service providers spoke of a Facebook page which helped to keep some service providers connected, although other service providers were not aware of it.

The local community were advocating for an 'aged care hub' – a one-stop-shop for direction on how to locate providers and navigate the aged care system in Geraldton.

## 5.0 Action Plan

In response to the findings outlined within this report, Carers WA has included a range of actions that could be taken to improve areas of need for carers in the Midwest region.

These actions have been aligned to the key focus areas and to specific levers, which are described below<sup>30</sup>:

### **Policy controls and Information development:**

What policy measures and/or information can be used to incentivize and remove barriers to development of this action?

**Enabling infrastructure:** What key infrastructure can be delivered, and in what timeframe, to encourage investment in this action?

**Direct investment:** What direct investment or partnership is needed to achieve this action?

**Incentives/Subsidies:** What incentives or subsidies can be applied to encourage investment in this action?

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30. Adapted from - (Urbis, 2022)

# Action Plan

<b>Focus area</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Intervention Type</b>	<b>Carers WA Role</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Priority</b>
1.0 Need for respite and carer retreats	Investigate options for the establishment of a respite house/carers retreat in the Midwest.	Direct Investment	Deliver	Medium-term	High
1.0 Need for respite and carer retreats	Support initiatives which provide increased and affordable access to quality respite services in the region.	Policy Controls and Information Development	Advocate	Long-term	High
2.0 Awareness of carers and carer services	Increased awareness raising and information on carers, Carers WA, the Carer Gateway, how processes work and who to contact. Increased awareness raising on Carers WA and Helping Minds consortium relationship.	Policy Controls and Information Development	Deliver	Short-term	High
2.0 Awareness of carers and carer services	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.	Direct Investment	Partner	Long-term	High
3.0 Availability of carer services	Investigate options for increased availability of carer supports in the Midwest.	Direct Investment	Partner	Long-term	High
3.0 Availability of carer services	Investigate options for expansion of Carers WA's Aboriginal Healing Program to the Midwest.	Direct Investment	Deliver	Medium-term	Medium

# Action Plan

3.0 Availability of carer services	Investigate options for more events for carers in Geraldton which are family friendly, allow for the person being cared for to also attend, or which are at varying times i.e. evening event options.	Direct Investment	Partner	Long-term	High
4.1 Lack of services and connectivity between services	Support initiatives which provide increased access to quality aged care services in the Midwest.	Policy Controls and Information Development	Advocate	Long-term	Medium
4.1 Lack of services and connectivity between services	Investigate options for navigator or one-stop hub services and partnerships in the Midwest.	Direct Investment	Partner	Long-term	Medium

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