



Carers WA



Young Carers Youth Advisory Group
Submission to the Australian Government
Department of Communities
WA Youth Action Plan Consultation Paper
March 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. A carer is someone who provides unpaid care and support to family members and friends with disability, mental health challenges, 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.

'Young carers' are carers aged 8-25yrs. They are currently one of the most underrepresented and at-risk groups of young people in Australia.

Some important facts about young carers include:

- Young carers are one of four most at-risk groups of young people in Australia.
- There are an estimated 2-3 young carers in every classroom.
- 1 in 10 children in Australia are providing care to a family member.
- 50% of young carers live in households that are close to, or below the poverty line.

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 region, and so we also acknowledge the cultural diversity of First Nation Peoples across our state and throughout Australia.



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Overview

The Carers WA Young Carers Advisory Group (YAG) comprises of eight individuals aged 15-24, with lived experience being a young carer. The Carers WA YAG offers a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing young carers in Western Australia (WA). This submission aims to articulate the goals, supportive factors, barriers, and desired outcomes as identified by the Carers WA YAG.

Question 1: What goals do you have for the future of young carers?

1.1 More Support in Regional Areas:

Increased support for young carers in regional areas to address unique challenges faced in these communities.

Rational: Regional young carers can often feel stuck, being unable to leave the person they're caring for to further their education and studies. Young carers from regional areas also have limited access to support and services for themselves and the person they're caring for due to their location.

1.2 Support in Educational Institutions:

Improved support and flexibility within schools, including the ability to be granted extensions, recognising that some young carers may face disengagement due to their caregiving responsibilities.

Rational: Many young carers struggle with balancing their education with their caring responsibilities. Having more recognition of young carers at schools, universities and other educational institutions, and increasing the support and flexibility in educational arrangements would allow young carers to confidently engage in education.

1.3 Safe and Positive Spaces:

Creation of safe and positive environments offering peer support, tutoring, and opportunities for young carers to engage as individuals.

Rational: Young carers don't have the opportunity to simply be a young person. Taking on a caring role as a young person can feel isolating and disempowering. Having a safe space with individuals who understand the caring role and are available to help, listen and relate is important in reducing personal stigma and isolation.

1.4 Financial Support:

Recognition of the need for financial support and academic payments, including allowances and accommodation for young carers.

Rational: Not all young carers are eligible or suitable for the current payment that Centrelink provides for carers. The extra hours and responsibilities that young carers are required to take on, take away from their ability to work. Many young carers undertake parenting duties, or support the adult in the family; yet go unrecognised or and uncompensated via the Carers Allowance or Carers Payment due to age and circumstance.

1.5 Public Awareness and Reduced Stigma:

Increased public awareness to reduce stigma associated with caregiving roles, emphasising the importance of raising self-esteem and confidence among young carers. Many young carers undertake parental duties or support an adult, yet are unrecognised for this work.

Rational: Young carers have reported feeling judged, misunderstood and underrepresented by the broader community due to a lack of public awareness and education on what being a young carer entails.

1.6 Training and Education:

Training programs to educate teachers, counsellors, support workers, university lecturers, and healthcare professionals about the role and challenges of young carers.

Rational: Young carers feel like when they do reach out for help, they are often misunderstood, as is their role as a carer. Educating key individuals who young carers engage with adds extra support and more advocates in the community, thereby reducing stigma and increasing recognition and understanding.

Question 2: What do you think is helping young carers to thrive and achieve their goals?

2.1 Quality Support Systems:

- Acknowledgment of the importance of quality support systems, which guide and understand young carers' needs.
- Positive experiences come from connecting with other young carers, support workers, and organisations like Carers WA that understand and validate the young carer role.

2.2 Effective Systems:

- Recognition of systems which work effectively to engage young carers to provide access to respite and support.
- The individuals who young carers care for being able to get easy access to adequate and high-quality healthcare and personal support to mitigate the reliance on young carers to navigate and access these services on their behalf.

Question 3: What are the obstacles for young carers achieving their goals?

3.1 Lack of Understanding:

- A lack of understanding and empathy for the challenges faced by young carers creates additional barriers.
- Recognition that many young carers don't know that they are a young carer, since the caring responsibilities have become their norm. Young carers require more support and awareness to recognise the role they are currently undertaking.
- Young carers also experience not having a 'before' as a point of reference to understand the significance and impact of their caring role on their lives, due to their age and corresponding lack of life experience.

3.2 Time Constraints and Responsibilities:

- Struggles with time management and commitments due to the caring role, including difficulties in accessing personal support services.
- Being a young carer and the responsibility that it comes with isn't a choice and gets in the way of young carers being able to be a young person and have goals for themselves.
- This can impact negatively on a young carer's other responsibilities, such as school attendance, school reports and perceptions of their punctuality and reliability.

3.3 Personal Identity Challenges:

- Challenges in understanding one's identity outside the caregiving role, leading to under-exploration of personal goals.
- "We don't have goals" - direct quote from a YAG member, in relation to being so focused on the person they care for, that they don't have the time, finances or energy to consider their own personal goals or futures.
- Lack of representation of young carers: including not being able to see themselves or their personal circumstances on forms. Whether it be not having space to identify as a young carer or not having the tick box that explains their current family situation.

3.4 Lack of Appropriate Services:

- Being rejected from services, for being too serious for some places, but not serious enough for others. Young carers also have the additional barrier of finding an appropriate service that can fit around the times of their caring responsibilities, especially when balancing caring duties and educational requirements.
- A lack of understanding from services and service staff about the unique challenges and needs of young carers. This often means that young carers may not get the support they need even if they have the time, energy and knowledge to reach out for help.

3.5 Lack of access to transport:

- Young carers struggle getting transport to the essentials like school, work, support services and the supermarket due to their parent being unwell themselves or being busy providing care for whomever in their household has additional support needs. This issue is more apparent in regional areas where public transport is limited.

3.6 Not being taken seriously:

- Young carers have reported feeling undermined and undervalued, as well as not being taken seriously by healthcare professionals and service providers while advocating for the person they're caring for. Young carers are often the experts in the lives of the people they care for and regularly feel like they're being undermined because of their age and perceived intelligence.
- Workplaces and schools usually don't understand the extent of the caring role and assume because they're a young person, that by default they don't take on many caring responsibilities at home, whereas in most cases the opposite is the case.

3.7 Personal impact of the caring role:

- The support provided by all carers comes at a great cost to their own wellbeing, as well as their economic and financial security.¹
- Carers experience higher rates of psychological stress, as well as poor wellbeing and health.²
- Young carers report that the circumstances leading up to a person needing care, the experience cumulatively over time of the caring journey, and the perpetual strain on all members of the family – creates an unacknowledged and increasing level of responsibilities being delegated to others within the family. This contributes to multiple members of the family being at increased risk of mental and physical health issues.

¹ (Furnival & Cullen, 2022)

² (Furnival & Cullen, 2022)

Question 4: What do you think would be the most positive outcome or change the action plan could make for young carers in WA over the next 3 years?

4.1 Increased Awareness and Understanding:

- More public awareness and education about young carers to foster greater understanding amongst the community and young carers themselves.

Examples:

- a) Young carer awareness and training for health professionals and teachers.
- b) Talks or programs in schools to educate young people directly about what a young carer is.
- c) What a carer actually does and some of the roles carers undertake.

4.2 Recognition and Allowances:

- Recognition and allowances, both in terms of time and money, to support young carers.

Examples:

- a) Additional ATAR points accredited for young carers.
- b) The ability for young carers to receive extensions on assignments across educational institutions (e.g. high school, Tafe, and University) as sometimes young carers may not be able to finish assignments on time due to their lifestyle and caring responsibly.
- c) Financial aid for young carers.
- d) A young carer allowance and/or concession.
- e) Recognition that a young carer role covers health, allied health, pharmacy, behavioural support and financial management.

4.3 Commitment and Acknowledgment:

- Inclusion and acknowledgment through allowances, young carers being recognised as a priority group and active involvement in decision-making processes that affect young carers.

Examples:

- a) Acknowledgement of young carers in the WA Youth Action Plan.
- b) Commitment to supporting young people in schools by recognising young carers in the Department of Education's policies and procedures, and "people of risk and disadvantage".
- c) Better recognition of Carers' Leave by the Fair Work Commission and workplaces/employers.

4.4 Advisory Opportunities:

- Establishment of more advisory spaces and opportunities, that recognise and consider the diversity of caring experiences among young carers and their lived experience.

Examples:

- a) A dedicated position for a young carer on the WA Ministerial Carer Advisory Council.
- b) Existing Youth Advisory Groups and to ensure a focus on ensuring young carers' voices are represented.

4.5 More support:

- More support for young carers. Whether this be a physical safe place outside of school for young carers to go, young carer peer support groups or services that understand and can support young people in the caring role.

Examples:

- a) More developed tele-services or outreach for regional young carers.
- b) More mentorship and peer support opportunities for young carers.
- c) Young carers recognised as "experts in care" and so are identified and represented in mental health, aged care and disability legislation.

Summary

"A positive outcome would be change happening" - direct quote from a YAG member.

The YAG overwhelmingly felt as though a positive outcome would be the realisation of tangible changes and improvements for young carers in WA to lead to happier and healthier young people.

This submission reflects the voices of the Carers WA Youth Advisory Group and their vision for a more supportive and inclusive environment for current and future young carers in Western Australia