

# 2024-25 State Budget Submission

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## A Changing Population – Key Facts About Victoria’s Unpaid Carers

### General

- › There are more than 700,000 carers in Victoria, and it is forecast this figure will exceed one million by 2025.
- › The number of Victorians who identified as unpaid carers grew by 22% between the 2016 and 2021 census – the most rapid growth of any jurisdiction.
- › Carers are of all ages, but are most likely to be aged 55-64, with 9% of all carers under the age of 25 and 15% of carers aged 75 years or older.
- › 70% of all primary carers are women, however, when those people in secondary caring roles are considered, there is a more even balance between male and female carers.
- › Approximately 30% of carers provide care to more than one person, and time spent providing care can be well above the requirements of a full-time job.

## Workforce participation and financial status of carers

- › The workforce participation rate for primary carers is 59%, significantly lower than non-primary carers (77%) and non-carers (82%). Data from the *2022 National Carer Survey* indicated that more than 60% of carers in paid employment had chosen their employer based on the offer of flexible working arrangements.
- › 37% of primary carers have a gross household income in the two lowest quintile levels, compared to only 23.5% of non-carers, with research suggesting that on average, primary carers miss out on more than \$500,000 in lost wages and superannuation over their lifetimes.

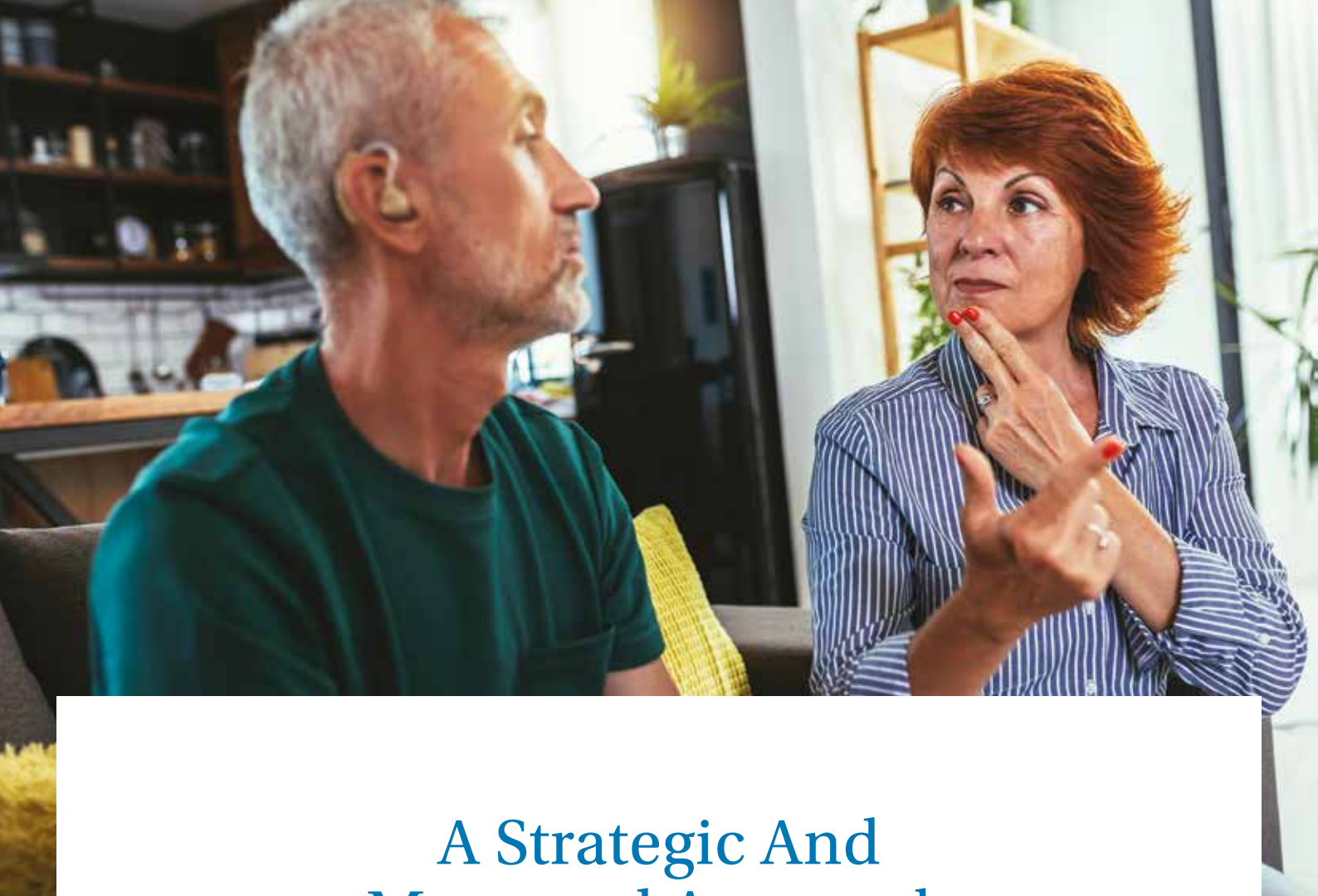
## Mental health of carers

- › One in two Victorian respondents to the *2022 National Carer Survey* reported high or very high psychological distress.
- › 59% of Victorian respondents to the *2023 National Carer Health and Wellbeing Survey* reported low wellbeing, with *2022 National Survey* data indicating carers were experiencing poor wellbeing at more than twice the rates of other Australians.
- › Carers also experience higher levels of loneliness than non-carers: 39% of carers compared with just 10% of Australians reported feeling lonely always or almost always in 2022.

## Carer Recognition

- › Despite the existence of both state and federal legislation, data from the *2022 National Carer Survey* indicates that less than 16% of Victorian carers agree their caring role is recognised and valued by the government.





## A Strategic And Measured Approach

It is a challenging time for Victoria's unpaid carers, with survey data showing the proportion of carers experiencing financial stress, low wellbeing and poorer health markedly increasing over the past 12-24 months.

Many of Victoria's unpaid carers are struggling and need help now. If we can't sustain them, they will be unable to continue vital support for the people in their care relationships. Not only will this negatively impact the lives of care recipients and carers, but it will also result in an unsustainable increased demand for, and cost of, support services.

However, we recognise it is also a challenging time for government, as it seeks to progress fiscal repair in an unprecedented economic environment. Resources are tight.

Carers Victoria's 2024-25 State Budget submission recognises both these factors. While there are a range of areas where investment could make a real difference to Victoria's unpaid carers, we understand the challenges in freeing up state government funds to do so. During such times, priority should be given to evidence-based and data-responsive measures which support the place-based needs of local carer communities.

As a result, our 2024-25 State Budget is carefully tailored to a small suite of investments that can lay the foundation for a future where there will be more than one million unpaid carers in Victoria alone, playing an even more critical role as our health and social care systems strain to meet future demand.

**Three key carer initiatives are proposed for investment in the 2024-25 State Budget that combine a short-term focus on relieving immediate pressure points with progressing longer term system reform:**

- › A one-off financial relief package for Carer Card recipients to give them some practical financial assistance in the short term (\$4.81 million over one year).
- › Development and piloting of an early intervention program, that aims to better equip carers to sustain themselves in a longer term caring role, rather than waiting until they are in crisis and need immediate help (\$2.48 million over four years).
- › Modest growth in funded respite, the thing carers most frequently say they need, but that they also struggle to access (\$6.43 million over four years).

This package totalling \$13.72 million over four years (\$6.03 million in 2024-25), forms part of a broader program of development and reform that Carers Victoria sees as important to better include, support and recognise the mission-critical role that unpaid carers play in our community into the future (see overleaf).

Investment in our proposals will help the Allan Labor Government continue its commitment to equity and ensure no Victorian carer is left behind.

**For more information**

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## The Longer-Term Plan For A Sustainable Future

There is an urgent need to relieve the current pressure on at-risk, unpaid carers, providing vital support and assistance to Victorians who live with additional needs. It is also essential that we act now to lay the foundation for a future system responsive to the projected growth and increasing demands of caring roles in Victoria.

Carers Victoria has identified a systemwide program of work required to better equip, recognise and support carers in the future. It recognises that a systems approach is needed to leverage existing social infrastructure to enhance local responses; support earlier intervention approaches to carer assistance; embed carers across the health, disability, aged care and other service sectors; and enhance the assistance available to carers who may be struggling.

In 2024-25, three evidence-based initiatives have been prioritised to address immediate pressures and start early work that will transform the future system.

Improving Assistance For Carers	Supporting Better Health And Wellbeing	Empowering Carers To Thrive	Embedding Carer Recognition, Insights And Expertise
Financial relief packages(s), for Carers Card Holders.	Providing grant funding to allow local councils to develop local initiatives that will result in stronger connections between carers.	Program for newer carers to build their long-term capacity and resilience.	Embed carers into key health service planning and discharge processes to streamline care and reduce readmissions.
Staged growth in state-funded respite and support for carers.	Strengthen carer pathways within the mental health and wellbeing locals.	Build a carer-specific toolkit that helps carers make future plans.	Formalise role for carers in key governance, policy and program review functions through changes to disability and health services legislation.
Tailor support for carers from diverse communities.		Establish a dedicated carer crisis line to assist carers during emergencies.	Improve identification of 'hidden carers' through enhanced data collection.
Community grant rounds to enhance local identification, support and connections for carers.		Require funded service providers to supply information that supports integrated approaches to carer navigation.	Support development of the carer lived experience workforce in health and community settings.

# BUDGET PROPOSAL ONE

## Cost Of Living Relief For Carers

Unpaid carers are doing it tough in the current economic environment.

Many carers were already financial challenged before inflation started rising, and in the past 12 months alone, we have seen a more than 80% increase in the number of carers reaching out to Carers Victoria for financial support.

This is echoed in data from the *2023 Carer Health and Wellbeing Survey* which found that the number of Victorian respondents experiencing financial stress had increased from 53% to 62% in a single year. The pressures are particularly acute for those carers whose caring role means they have limited capacity to participate in paid employment yet often incur additional costs because of their caring role.

A one-year package of financial relief for carer card holders will help provide some relief to carers who are really struggling to make ends meet.

Drawing on the approach adopted for the Victorian Veterans Card, introduced to support veterans with cost-of-living relief budget package, this would combine reductions on car registration and the Victorian Parks Fee to provide short term relief for up to 26,000 unpaid carers in 2024-25.

In addition, Carers Victoria encourages the Victorian Government to consider incorporating Carer Card holders as a target group for other financial relief packages that may be under consideration for the 2024-25 budget.

**Budget impact: \$4.81 million for up-to 26,000 carers in FY 2024-25.**





## The Carer's Perspective

"I'm a financial hermit," said the father who, along with his wife, financially care for their adult son with complex disabilities and behaviours.

"I can't afford to leave the house anymore."

## BUDGET PROPOSAL TWO

# Intervening Early – A Program For New Carers

Few people plan to become unpaid carers, and there is no training manual. New carers are often so busy trying to figure out how to best support their loved ones that the things they need to sustain themselves, and their caring role, are overlooked.

As a result, by the time carers seek support for themselves they can be near breaking point: overworked, overwhelmed, and often reporting poor health and wellbeing.

We want to change that by piloting a locally-responsive ‘new carer’ program that provides practical skills and knowledge that can help sustain them in a caring role over the long term. With the number of Victoria’s carers growing some 22% in the past four plus years alone, a rate of growth projected to further increase over the coming four years, we need to find new ways of supporting unpaid carers (and through them, their care recipients) into the future.

Drawing on elements of the successful online InTouch program, which utilises trained counsellors and other staff, the “Care for You” program will draw upon recent evidence and be co-designed with carers to ensure its content and delivery equips newer carers for their caring role, addressing the “I wish I’d known that” issues that exist for some many carers when they reflect on their own caring journeys.

An initial cohort of 1,600 carers will participate in the program over the funding period, enabling solid evaluation of how the program can best be tailored to different segments of carers and different geographies.

**Budget impact: \$0.62 million in 2024-25, \$2.48 million over four years, benefiting 1,600 carers.**





## The Carer's Perspective

"I was swamped, and then when I thought it couldn't get worse, in came another tidal wave. Even though I knew it was the worst thing I should be doing, even looking after my own well being was pushed off the to do list. End result: my own health declined, my ability to care was compromised."

## BUDGET PROPOSAL THREE

# Expand Access To Carer Respite

Providing direct support to carers is critical to sustaining them in their caring role.

Respite care allows carers to have a break from the everyday demands of their role. Carers who access respite say their stress levels are reduced and they experience greater social connection, with accessing respite care one of the six main factors associated with higher wellbeing for carers (*Carer Wellbeing Survey 2023*).

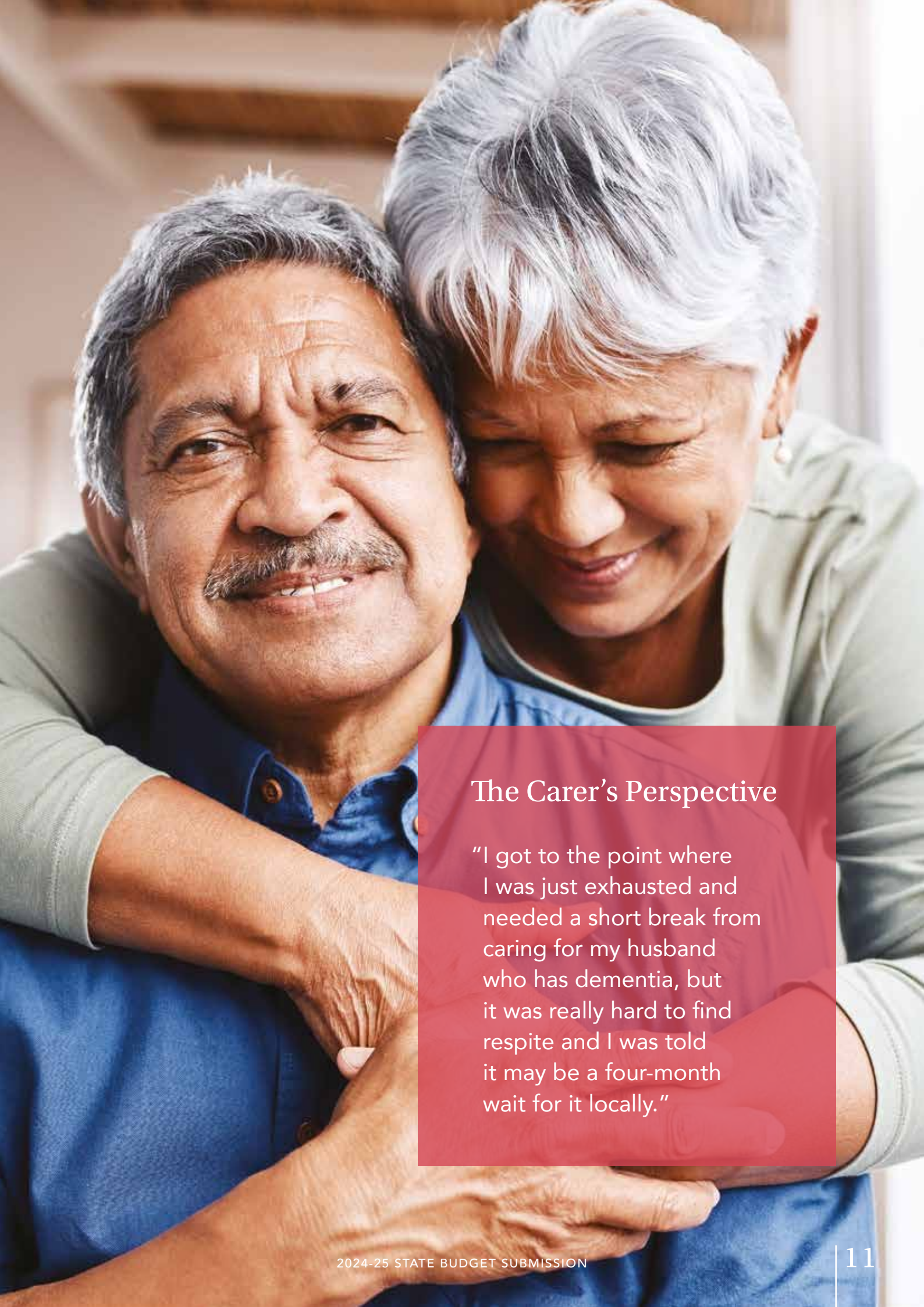
Despite these benefits, many carers experience barriers to accessing funded respite. The *Carer Wellbeing Survey 2023* found more than 40% of unpaid carers report difficulty finding and accessing high quality local respite services.

On current data, there will be more than one million carers in our state alone by 2025, a significant number of them assisting the expanding population of older Victorians aged 75+.

Expanding investment in respite is needed now to start building future capacity and addressing current gaps. This investment will ensure more carers are supported sooner within their local communities, which in turn will improve carer health and wellbeing while making care relationships more sustainable.

**Budget impact: \$0.6 million in 2024-25, \$6.43 million over four years, benefiting 3,235 carers.**





## The Carer's Perspective

"I got to the point where I was just exhausted and needed a short break from caring for my husband who has dementia, but it was really hard to find respite and I was told it may be a four-month wait for it locally."

# Doing Our Part To Change The Future For Carers

This ask is just one piece of a broader plan Carers Victoria is seeking to progress to improve our collective understanding of unpaid carers and their access to assistance. There is a range of other work that Carers Victoria is progressing, or has planned, to improve outcomes for Victorian carers.

For example, Carers Victoria is:

- › building technology-enabled systems that will allow carers across the state to readily get information about what support is available locally, and help them in navigating systems and supports;
- › exploring models to strengthen carer connections to local activities that can help enhance their social connection and health and wellbeing;
- › testing different kinds of local projects and approaches to measure what makes the biggest difference to carers;
- › building the evidence base around who Victoria's carers are, how their characteristics are changing, and what they need both now and into the future – including current 'hidden' carers; and
- › working with private donors and corporate and philanthropic partners to make funded activities and scholarships available in an environment where so many families are struggling.

**By working together, we can move towards a future where supporting unpaid carers is everybody's business and carers are recognised and celebrated as an integral part of the fabric of our society.**







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Carers Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work, the Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nation, and pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge the continuing connection to land and waters. Sovereignty was never ceded.