

Carers *news*

2019 Edition 3

*Celebrating
Carers*

*The Power
of Connection*

*The Tapestry
of Care*

National Carers Week 2019

Taking Time for Yourself

Carer Story

What's inside

- 2 *CEO's Update*
- 3 *Updates to Public Transport Concessions for Victorian Carers*
- 4 *Support for Carers Program*
- 5 *Bridge to Cars*
- 6 *National Carers Week*
- 8 *Carer Story: The Tapestry of Care*
- 10 *Web of Information*
- 11 *NDIS — The Journey So Far*
- 12 *The Power of Connection*
- 14 *Update: Royal Commission into Disability*
- 15 *Update: Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety*
- 16 *10 Ways to Save Money During the Festive Season*
- 17 *Mingles 2019*
- 18 *Take a Break*
- 19 *Carer Support Groups*

Message from Scott

Welcome to the third edition of *Carers News* for 2019.

The theme for the final edition of *Carers News* magazine for 2019 is Connections. As the weather heats up, so has Carers Victoria's work in connecting the support needs of carers with our government relations advocacy work.

Since my last message we've had visits at our office from Luke Donnellan, Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, as well as a visit from Anthony Carbines, Parliamentary Secretary for Carers and Volunteers. The Minister's visit announced an increase in funding to support carers from diverse communities and the Parliamentary Secretary's visit announced additional funding for the Support for Carers Program. You can read more about the Program on page four.

In October we celebrated National Carers Week which recognises and celebrates the outstanding contribution unpaid carers make to our nation.

Carers Victoria, Tandem and Little Dreamers Australia came together to celebrate the huge contribution carers make at an event at Parliament House. The event was a standout for me because it was an opportunity to collaborate with our industry peers, 'mingle' with political leaders, and share the experience with carers.

It was also during National Carers Week, that Anthony Carbines announced that Victorian Carer Card holders can now get half price public transport on weekdays as well as free travel on weekends.



The Victorian Government also announced that from July 2019, Carer Card holders can enjoy the same directory benefits and discounts available to people with a Seniors Card.

Through our advocacy work, Carers Victoria continues to play a pivotal role in keeping the needs of carers on the government agenda.

As we approach 2020, I'd like to thank and acknowledge all our readers for their ongoing contributions and support.

Happy reading,



Scott Walker
Chief Executive Officer, Carers Victoria

New number

Please note that Carers Victoria has a new phone number. Please call **1800 514 845**.

Updates to Public Transport Concessions for Victorian Carers

The cost of public transport can really add up, particularly if you use it regularly. The 2018–2022 Victorian Carer Strategy highlighted the value that carers place on affordable public transport.



In response to this, the Victorian Government is now delivering half-price public transport to carers all year round.

Victorians holding a Victorian Carer Card and concession Myki will be able to obtain:

- a 50 per cent discount on trains, trams and buses, including V/Line trains and coaches
- free weekend travel in any two consecutive zones and on regional town buses, and
- free travel during National Carers Week (13–19 October).

Victorian carers can now attend a staffed station with their concession card to obtain a Victorian Carer Myki card and access these travel benefits.

For regional town buses which do not have Myki, carers can show their Victorian Carer Card for free weekend travel within the area.

To be eligible you must have a Victorian Carer Card issued by the Department of Health and Human Services.

To obtain a Carer Card you must be a resident of Victoria and either:

- the primary carer of a person with a disability, severe medical condition or mental illness, or someone who is frail aged or in need of palliative care
- or a foster, kinship or respite carer.

Apply

To apply, visit: carercard.vic.gov.au/apply-card

Making the most of public transport this summer

Taking public transport is not only a more sustainable option than driving, but also allows you to sit back, enjoy the ride and take in the passing scenery. Here are some ideas to make the most of the public transport system and take a break this summer.

Visit somewhere you've never been:

If you feel like taking a break, why not hop on a train or bus and visit one of Victoria's regional towns. We are lucky to have a huge diversity of landscapes, flora and fauna in Victoria and there is sure to be a destination for you. Towns like Bendigo, Lorne, Geelong and Cowes are just some of the places you could visit.

Take the kids on an outing:

Normally drive your kids everywhere? Instead of driving to the local pool, beach or movie theatre during the school holidays, take the bus, train or tram instead. If you have young kids, this can also be an opportunity to start teaching them how to navigate the public transport system. It will also be an adventure for them!

Enjoy the cooling:

Even if you don't have time to take a proper break, taking a moment to appreciate the air-conditioning can be a game-changer on a day where the temperature is edging towards 40 degrees. Enjoy the quiet moment out of your busy schedule.

Support for Carers Program

The Victorian Government's Support for Carers Program has recently been expanded by almost \$50 million to better meet the needs of Victorian carers.



Above // Anthony Carbines visited the Carers Victoria's Footscray Office in September.

The Support for Carers Program provides respite and other services and supports to Victorian carers. Previously restricted to carers of people over the age of 65, the Program has recently expanded its eligibility and is open to all carers.

In September, Parliamentary Secretary for Carers Anthony Carbines visited Carers Victoria to announce an additional \$1.25 million for Carers Victoria to deliver the Program in the Western Metropolitan Region. This includes the areas of Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton, Melbourne, Moonee Valley and Wyndham.

The expansion of the Program is in direct response to the Victorian Carer Strategy.

If you have respite needs but live outside of these areas, please call Carers Victoria to find out how to access your nearest Support for Carers Program provider.

What does this mean for me?

Through the Support for Carers Program, you can access:

- One-off or short-term support for carers, including goods and equipment, which can add to other services or fill service gaps.
- Support to people in a care relationship. If preferred, this can be provided at the same time and place as the person receiving care.
- Wellbeing support to improve your quality of life, physical and mental wellbeing and social connections.

Am I eligible?

The Program is open to all carers of someone who fits at least one of the following:

- Is older with care needs
- Has a mental illness
- Has a chronic illness
- Has a disability
- Has dementia (including younger-onset dementia).

Support for Carers Program

To find out more about the Support for Carers program call Carers Victoria on **1800 514 845** or visit: carersvictoria.org.au/carer-benefits/support-for-carers-program

To read the Support for Carers program guidelines, and find your regional support provider, visit: health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/policiesandguidelines/support-for-carers-program-guidelines

Thinking outside the Square



Inadequate transport and lack of funding for transport is a critical issue for carers and their families across Australia.

The “Bridge to Cars” pilot project in South Australia was set up to find a solution to these problems.

Observing the number of organisational fleet vehicles in the region which did not get regular use, the Pilot Project Group saw a potential solution to the lack of transport options: lending out unused fleet vehicles as a shared resource.

Fact Finding

In a partnership with the South Australian Don Dunstan Foundation’s Thinkers in Residence Program, Carers SA held round table discussions and workshops with transport providers, community services, business and government in an attempt to find out-of-the-box, social capital based solutions to the lack of supported transport for regional carers and their families.

In a 2018 survey of people who relied on supported transport across metro and regional communities, Carers SA found that respondents rated the lack of supported transport in their community as a very severe issue. A worrying 67 per cent of respondents in total reported that appointments and activities had been missed due to transport issues – with 22 per cent “not making it” to where

they were supposed to be, due to transport problems. An analysis of the survey data was sent to ministers, government departments and SA’s transport and human services organisations to shine a light on the severity of transport issues for carers and their families.

Bridge to Cars Pilot Project

A Pilot Project Group met to discuss options on how South Australian issues around transport could, or should be addressed. The Group was set up as a grassroots community initiative without funding support.

After many discussions, the South Australian regional city of Murray Bridge and surrounding region became the location and naming inspiration for the Bridge to Cars pilot. The group ascertained that some of their fleet vehicles cannot always be fully utilised and so have potential capacity to become a shared resource. Other organisations which may have additional needs at peak times, or those which do not have a vehicle at all, would benefit from a shared resource pool. Testing the possibility of sharing access to available vehicles with others to provide supported transport

to the community became the core purpose for the pilot.

Some of the pilot group organisations made fleet vehicles available for free hire to any Not-for-Profit organisation to deliver supported transport services. The vehicles could be hired via an online information and booking system and picked up from a central point in town.

Word of mouth across the service networks spread quickly and the ABC ran a segment about it on state and national television.

The Bridge to Cars project successfully improved transport options and provided a good example of what can be achieved when organisations with limited resources collaborate across sectors.

The details and results of the pilot have been presented at the October 2019 SAActa (SA Community Transport Association) bi-annual forum in Adelaide. If you’d like to find out more, the full evaluation report detailing decision rationales, resources, feedback from participants and next steps, is now available on the Carers SA website via: bit.ly/2Zdpj8u.

National Carers Week 2019

Carers Victoria was out and about for National Carers Week 2019.

In collaboration with City of Melbourne and Switchboard Victoria, Carers Victoria celebrated the Melbourne launch of “Mr Velvet Ears”, a film about the difficult decision to send a loved one to an aged care facility and the joys that a support dog can bring in times of emotional distress. On the Thursday, carers mingled at Parliament House and had the chance to speak

directly with Parliamentary Secretary for Carers, Anthony Carbines while enjoying a delicious morning tea. An exciting week was capped off by the Young Carers Festival at Scienceworks on Friday night, a Little Dreamers event supported by Carers Victoria. Young carers and their family members enjoyed the latest interactive exhibits at the museum and mingled with other young carers over dinner.

Carers Victoria also awarded 57 National Carers Week Activity Grants to Carer Support Groups across Victoria. This allowed the groups to celebrate National Carers Week by hosting an event of their choice. Events ranged from lunches to garden tours and wellness events.



Above // Members of Parliament and carers attended the special event at Parliament House in Melbourne.



Above // Carers gathered for a screening of Mr Velvet Ears in Melbourne.



Above // Carers enjoyed Ride Like a Girl in Devonport.



Above // Carers SA Port Augusta held a bbq lunch to celebrate National Carers Week and carer Cecil Scholar did the honours cutting the cake.



Above // Staff at the Carers Victoria Footscray office gathered for afternoon tea.



Above // Mr Velvet Ears screening in Melbourne.



Above // The Hon Minister Roger Jaensch MP launches Carers Week in Tasmania.



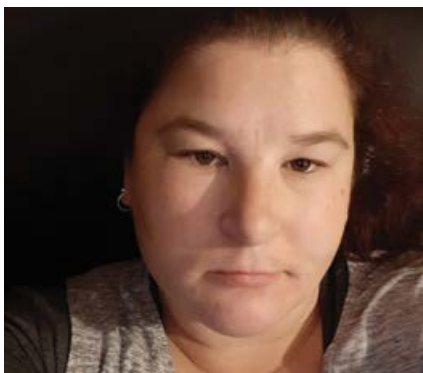
Above // Carers SA Western Metro held a Carers Week lunch at for 36 carers at the Tiros @ Regency restaurant.



Above // Carers SA Riverland hosted a thank you to carers lunch for approximately 20 carers in Berri.

The tapestry of care

Amanda Barton is parked at the front of the TAFE where she is studying a Community Services diploma and crying in her car. She's aware her class will start any minute now but can't contain her emotions. Severe anxiety has her mind racing with crippling thoughts of "what am I doing?" Conscious she's having a panic attack, Amanda's worry switches to the question "who do I call?" As a mum and carer to three autistic children, sons Seth 16 and Titan 6, and daughter Faith 12, Amanda is used to being the one everyone else calls in times of need. Now she's the one who needs help.



Above // Amanda Barton.

She rings her therapist whose first piece of advice is to breathe. Amanda calms down enough to continue with her day, but her therapist's advice resonates with the busy mother.

"If I could give any new carer some advice it would be to remember to take care of yourself," says Amanda. "I'm a giver and still struggle with this. But I'm slowly learning that before I can care for the kids, I need to care for myself."

As with most carers who are busy parents, Amanda's time is precious and there's never enough hours to get everything done. She juggles study, household chores and dropping off each child to a separate school with taking her children to nine different service appointments every fortnight. Her children also receive NDIS support, which is additional time spent on the road travelling between appointments.

Distance can be a challenge for the family, who are based in the regional Victorian town of Mildura. "There are a lot of services that are covered by NDIS but it doesn't cover transport. Some Occupational Therapists come to the house but it means the other kids can't go anywhere and I need to find a way to entertain them so they don't disrupt a session." With the nearest family member two hours away, Amanda is not able to rely on loved ones for support. While she and her partner Ben do have friends, Amanda admits, "It's hard for people to understand the world I live in."

With all three children diagnosed with autism, Amanda has learnt that the signs don't always look the same.

"As a baby, Seth didn't like physical contact — you couldn't cuddle or hold him to sleep, or even touch him when breastfeeding. He hated messy hands and would always throw his plate of food until one day I put it in a divider to separate everything and he suddenly liked it. Titan was the same."

Faith presented differently to her brothers and, like many other females with a developmental disability, slipped under the radar by learning to mimic her surroundings in order to blend in. Her diagnosis explained other behaviours — such as lining things up in order from a young age — and that's when the penny dropped for Amanda about her own diagnosis of autism.

"It was a massive discovery for the both of us," she says.

As Faith moves on to high school next year, Amanda feels she is going to be needed more than ever to help Faith navigate her new world and advocate for her needs.

Faith's diagnosis has shown Amanda just how broad the autism spectrum can be. It has also highlighted the general lack of awareness around the condition.

"A lot of people aren't understanding of autism and their perceptions of what it looks like are often inaccurate. My kids are all verbal and because of this people don't realise that [they have autism] when they're having a conversation with them."

Navigating communication and social settings is all the more complicated with a teenager. "Seth goes through the usual teenage attitudes but this is exacerbated by the fact he doesn't understand why others can do things he can't. There's a lack of social understanding." Amanda recalls how all but two of Seth's friends cancelled for his recent birthday party. Following this experience, Amanda says, "I'm more mindful he doesn't have a massive friendship circle."

She also admits her struggle in striking a balance between being a parent and carer to Seth. "Learning when to take a step back and let him do things independently is a judgement call. Sometimes they need to learn things for themselves," says Amanda. With Seth attending TAFE now, Amanda has to learn how to put those boundaries in place.

Amanda's voice fills with pride when she reflects on Seth's academic progress after overcoming low grades and continuous bullying at his mainstream school. With the support of Amanda and his teachers, Seth achieved the necessary marks to enrol in TAFE. It's special milestones like these which make the caring role worthwhile for Amanda. "Being a carer is stressful, however when your kid makes a significant achievement that's payment enough," she says.

Amanda describes her diploma study as her "me time" but knows she must strike a better balance for her own wellbeing. With daylight hours consumed by errands and the kids in therapy three out of the five weekdays, she often waits until everyone is in bed to sneak in a few hours of study. A lack of time in the day has seen her TAFE friends become her surrogate Carer Support Groups.

"They support me more emotionally than educationally," she admits. Weekends operate at a much slower pace. They are a no-therapy zone and strictly reserved for family relaxation time, primarily "sitting and vegetating or going down to the river." These short moments of respite are a positive sign the tide is turning for this busy mum and carer.

"A lot of people aren't understanding of autism and their perceptions of what it looks like are often inaccurate. My kids are all verbal and because of this people don't realise that [they have autism] when they're having a conversation with them."

– Amanda Barton



Above // Amanda and son Titan.



Web of information

The internet is a great place to keep in touch with family, friends and what's happening in your local community. Social media is one way of staying in touch, but if you're not drawn to platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, there are still a number of websites and apps outside of the social media realm which may help you in your daily life. We look at four websites and apps below which will keep you informed and connected in your caring role.



Clickability

This Australian disability services directory is an online platform for people to share their experiences of different services. Labelled as "the TripAdvisor of disability services", Clickability enables users to read and write consumer reviews of disability services operating in Australia. Service providers can also list their business on the website.

clickability.com.au

SANE AUSTRALIA

SANE forums

An anonymous online support forum for carers, families and friends of people with a mental illness. There is a lived experience forum and a forum for carers, both of which are moderated 24 hours a day by mental health professionals. The forums cover a range of topics including looking after yourself, staying social and coping when something is not right. They are safe spaces to ask questions, socialise and ask for help when you need it.

saneforums.org/t5/Carers-Forum/ct-p/carers-forum



Gather My Crew

Needing some extra help managing through an illness, unexpected caring needs or just to get through a tough patch? Call on your local community, friends or regular support network to step in to give you that extra help you need. List what you need done, schedule when and where and get a crew together who know exactly how they can help.

gathermycrew.org.au



WhatsApp

WhatsApp is a secure instant messaging app which allows you to share text, photos, video and voice memos. It uses your internet connection, not your mobile phone credit, so is much more cost effective. The app was originally just for mobile phones, but has recently expanded to desktop. Turn to page 19 to find out how WhatsApp has been used to help a Carer Support Group stay connected.

whatsapp.com



In with the new NDIS

The announcement of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) presented a new way of thinking about the delivery of disability services. The model represented a shift away from problem-solution focused models of disability service delivery and put the focus on the individual participants of the Scheme. As the full rollout of the NDIS nears completion, we reflect on how far it has come, and what needs to improve.

The NDIS is an insurance scheme. This means rather than providing welfare services, the participant's goals are considered. After registering for the Scheme, the participant is supported to develop a plan and can prioritise the spending of funds. These funds can pay for a range of supports, including daily personal activities, therapeutic supports, transport to daily activities, mobility equipment and vehicle modifications. The NDIS can also pay for assistive technologies, such as advanced quality hearing aids, which can enable people to work.

By directly investing in people with disability, it is expected the NDIS would help participants to increase their independence and participation in the community and workforce, ultimately leading to reduced long-term costs.

By 2020, the NDIS will spend \$22b annually and should create 90,000 jobs in the disability sector. The NDIS is also a national scheme. This means that someone moving from South Australia to Tasmania, for example, can tailor services to their existing program rather than having to fit in

with a different system. One economic estimate is Australia will be \$12.7b better off by having more people in the workforce and not reliant on Disability Support Pensions¹.

The NDIS is due to be fully rolled out across the country by 2020. By this time, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) expect to have 460,000 participants enrolled. The most recent figures state almost 300,000 people are currently enrolled in the NDIS: 6,831 are Tasmanians, 29,034 are South Australians and 79,089 are Victorians. Nearly 100,000 Australians are receiving support for the first time.

The NDIS is an improvement for many and satisfaction rates of those who have NDIS plans is 90%², but there are some problems. There is a shortage of skilled disability staff and planners; processes are slowed down due to a staffing cap at the NDIA; contracting out services to external providers means participants can have a fragmented experience; and the NDIS has all the problems of a new bureaucracy. To increase the unpredictability, established service companies are changing their operations and new companies are coming into existence.

While carers are mentioned in the NDIS Act, engaging carers in the NDIS is difficult. The participant-first focus means carers can be on the outer. Some carers report they doubt their carer statement has been read by the NDIA. The NDIS allows for funding for carers to improve their care skills through training and resourcing, but this is almost never discussed when a plan is being developed.

To reduce wait times and simplify procedures, the Federal government is holding a review into the NDIS. The final report is due by the end of 2019 and the new service guarantee is to start on 1 July 2020.

¹ Deloitte Access Economics 2019 *The economic benefits of improving social inclusion* deloitte.com/au/en/pages/economics/articles/economic-benefits-improving-social-inclusion.html

² ndis.gov.au/news/1001-ndis-participant-satisfaction-hits-93-cent

The Power of Connection

How connecting with yourself can enhance your wellbeing.



Work, caring responsibilities, family, housework and chores, appointments, social activities; carers lead such busy lives that it's easy to lose track of what is most important.

It's common for carers to feel guilty about taking time out of their caring role to focus on themselves. If you feel this way, remember that in order to continue providing care, you too need to be cared for.

Mindfulness is a tool which can be used as a coping strategy or an ongoing wellness exercise. Put simply, mindfulness is about understanding how you are feeling in the present

moment by connecting with your physical and emotional self.

The benefits of mindfulness can be felt most prominently when it is practiced regularly; however you will still notice a difference in your stress levels and outlook by taking a few minutes out of your day.

Connecting in this way is not only a self-care exercise, but a way of taking a step back from your crowded to-do list and finding clarity. Practicing mindfulness can help you feel calmer and more in control of your life.

The good news is that it can be practiced just about anywhere. Next time you are eating a meal, take the time to appreciate the flavour and texture of your food. Or as you drift off to sleep, focus on feeling your breath in your chest and abdomen, and count your breaths.

Having a better understanding of how you are feeling emotionally and physically can help you to better understand yourself: what you enjoy or don't enjoy, what you are capable of and the aspects of your life you should be focusing your time and energy on. An added benefit of this is having the clarity of mind to focus on the social relationships which matter most to you.

Exercise One:

Check in with your emotional self

Checking in with yourself only requires a few minutes. Find a place which is free from distraction where you feel comfortable and relaxed – this may be your living room, a quiet room at work or your bedroom.

Take a few deep breaths, focusing on filling your belly and ask yourself “How am I feeling right now?”

Recognise the thoughts that come up for you, both positive and negative, but don't get distracted by them. Label your emotions, for example, “I am feeling anxious about taking my son to the doctor”, or, “I feel grateful for taking these few moments out of my day to focus on myself”.

Labelling your emotions is an important aspect of mindfulness, and allows you to understand why you are feeling the way you do.

Once you have addressed these feelings, spend as much time as you can allow by focussing on your breath again. If you struggle with a busy mind, count your breaths. Remember, it is natural for the mind to drift.



Exercise Two:

Check in with your physical self

Often your body will give you a physical cue that something is not right before it registers in your mind.

Close your eyes and scan your body from your toes to the crown of your head. By focusing your attention on each area of your body for a short amount of time, you are scanning for areas where you may be feeling pain or discomfort, or areas where your muscles feel tight.

These physical symptoms can be emotional signals. For example, experiencing tight or sore shoulders is a common symptom of stress. If you experience consistent shoulder pain, it may indicate that you need to take some time out.

Other common signs of stress can include a fast heart rate, tight hips and stomach discomfort.

Checking in with your physical body on a regular basis is important, as it allows you to gain a deeper understanding of how you are coping.

Seek professional medical advice if you are experiencing persistent or unusual pain or discomfort.

Stronger social connections

By connecting with yourself on a regular basis, you may see a difference in your social relationships.

Mindfulness allows you to gain a deeper insight into what drives you, what you don't enjoy or agree with, and how you would like to present yourself to the world.

Understanding these things about yourself allows you to connect with people you feel will have a positive influence on your life. It can also better inform you which relationships you prioritise.

There are no hard or fast rules for mindfulness, so give it a try next time you have a spare moment and see how it can influence the way you see yourself.

Top tips:

Be kind

Cut yourself some slack. Showing self-compassion is difficult for many people, but it is an important part of wellbeing. Acknowledge that you are only human, and you are doing the best you can.

Be grateful

Before you finish your practice, take a moment to feel grateful for the time you took out of your day to focus on yourself. Even if you feel there is no solution to the problems you are facing, practicing mindfulness is a chance to place those problems aside, even if just for a few minutes, and focus on your own wellbeing.

Tune out

If you can, put your phone aside while you take some time out for yourself. Turn off the television and the lights, put on some relaxing music or light a candle if it helps you to relax.

Stay grounded

Immerse yourself in the present moment as much as possible. Take in the sounds and smells around you before returning to focus on your breath.

Download a guide

There are a number of free guided meditation apps available to download on your phone. Apps like Headspace and Smiling Mind have a good reputation.

Opportunity Knocks

–Disability Royal Commission

After dedicated campaigning from disability advocacy organisations around the country, in April this year the Prime Minister announced a Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, known as the Disability Royal Commission. Royal Commissions are Australia's highest form of inquiry.

Hearings for the Disability Royal Commission are currently underway. The Commission wants to hear from people with disability and their carers about the problems they have experienced and how to prevent, and better protect, people with disability. The stories of people using the current system are invaluable and support is available to assist you to give feedback to the Commission if needed.

The Disability Royal Commission came about after the publication of numerous inquiries and reports highlighting that people with disability were more likely to experience violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation than people without disability. It will consider the critical role families and carers play in providing support to people with disability.

This is a significant step towards ensuring the human rights of people with disability. While the recent Banking Royal Commission had one Commissioner, the Disability Royal Commission has six. With a budget

of \$527 million, service providers are aware this is not business as usual. The Royal Commission has already motivated many disability service providers to update their practices.

The Royal Commission will likely lead to improved government standards and funding. The changes, along with improved NDIS service provision (see page 11), mean the service environment for people with disability and their carers should be better in the future.

Caring organisations around Australia will be strongly representing carer interests, but it is the stories of people with disability and their carers which bring these issues to life. This is your opportunity to make a difference.

The final report for the Disability Royal Commission is due in April 2022.

More information

To find out more about how you can share your experience, visit: **disability.royalcommission.gov.au**.

Free supports

There are a number of free supports for people engaging with or affected by the Disability Royal Commission:

National Counselling and Referral Service:

Blue Knot Foundation

Call **1800 421 468**

Advocacy Support:

National Disability Advocacy Program

To find a provider visit **disabilityadvocacyfinder.dss.gov.au/disability/ndap**

Legal and Financial Support:

National Legal Aid

Call **1800 117 995**

¹ From pwd.org.au/royal-commission-now

Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety Updates



There have been a number of changes to the Royal Commission in the past few months. In September, the Governor-General announced the appointment of an additional Commissioner, Tony Pagone QC, and extended the time to complete the inquiry to 12 November 2020.

At its Melbourne hearing on Monday 14 October, the Royal Commission marked the passing of the Hon. Richard Tracey AM RFD QC who died on 11 October after a short illness. He was 71.

Commissioners Briggs and Tracey worked together to complete the interim report to the Australian Government on 31 October 2019.

Hearings

Hearings conducted between July and November focused on carers for older Australians; younger people in residential aged care; diversity in aged care; the aged care workforce; and aged care in regional and remote areas.

The hearing for carers inquired into the extent to which current arrangements

meet carer needs and how services and supports for carers could be improved.

Research into residential aged care staffing levels

The Commission recently published research by the Australian Health Services Research Institute at the University of Wollongong on how Australian residential aged care staffing levels compare with international and national benchmarks.

Based on the USA Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Nursing Home Compare system:

- 1 or 2 stars represent unacceptable levels of staffing
- 3 stars is acceptable
- 4 stars is good, and
- 5 stars is best practice.

More than half of all Australian aged care residents (57.6 per cent) are in homes with 1- or 2-star staffing levels; 27.0 per cent are in homes with 3 stars; 14.1 per cent receive 4 stars; and 1.3 per cent are in homes with 5 stars.

To raise the standard so all residents receive at least a 3-star level of staffing requires an average increase of 37.3 per cent in total care staffing in those aged care homes currently rated 1 or 2 stars, and an overall increase of 20% in total care staffing across Australia.

The Royal Commission is continuing to receive submissions until the end of April 2020. These can be made public or kept private. Individual carer submissions are keenly sought by the Commission. You can make a submission through the Commission's website: agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au.

The website also includes:

- Information translated into 31 different languages
- A plain English description about the Royal Commission
- Information about engagement by the Royal Commission
- Information about a range of support services
- An easy to use submissions page.

Follow the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety on [facebook.com/agedcareroyalcommission](https://www.facebook.com/agedcareroyalcommission) to keep up with the latest information about hearings and community forums.

Carer Advisory Line

Anyone supporting a person using aged care services can contact the Carer Advisory Line on **1800 514 845** for information, support and referral to counselling.



10 Ways to Save money during the Festive Season

It's that time of year again. While the holiday season brings excitement for some; expensive gifts, catch ups with people you haven't seen all year and extravagant family lunches mean that December can be a time of great financial burden and stress for many people. Just because our social lives get busier, it doesn't mean that our wallet has to suffer. Here are ten tips to keep you on track financially this festive season.

1 Set a budget (and stick to it)

Budgeting is your best friend. Think of all the events you have coming up and the gifts you need to buy and set out a clear budget for the season. Shop at discount stores where you can or try some of our DIY ideas below to make sure you don't go over budget.

2 You're not Santa Claus

Believe it or not, not everybody in your life needs to receive a present from you. Make a list of people you would like to buy gifts for and set a clear budget for each one. Kris Kringle can be a great (and hilarious) idea for families or workplaces trying to be budget-savvy. Just remember to set a spending cap.

3 DIY wherever you can

DIY gifts don't have to be hard. Head online and learn how to make a macramé wall hanging or bake a jar of biscuits. If you're not so creatively inclined, a small plant in a simple pot also makes a lovely and cost-effective gift.

4 Get outside

Our Australian summers are world famous for a reason. Instead of meeting friends at a restaurant or bar, have a picnic in the local park or an afternoon at the beach. Just remember to be sunsmart!

5 Stay in

If it's too hot to go out, invite friends over for a coffee rather than going to a local café. You can put those pennies back in your budget and splurge somewhere else.

6 Market yourself

Summer is prime-time for outdoor events. While they are not strictly free, there are many night markets and festivals where you will not be required to pay an entry fee. Just bring some spending money for food and drink once you're inside.

7 Potluck dinner

Potluck dinners are an excellent substitute for an extravagant dinner party. Everyone is expected to bring a course of their choosing. Set a theme if you want to kick things up a notch.

8 Shop the sales

If you can, save your Christmas shopping for the Boxing Day sales. By waiting just that bit longer, you'll score some great bargains.

9 Book yourself in

Check out what's happening at your local library and book yourself (or your kids) in. Whether it's a free class for you or a storytelling session for the kids, libraries are a great source of free entertainment for the family. The best bit? There's air-conditioning!

10 Treat yourself

Whether it's big or small, try to set aside some money to do something nice for yourself this Festive season. It has been a big year, and you've earned it.

Mingles in 2019

Carers Victoria hosts Mingles as an opportunity for carers to take a break, socialise and meet with other carers in their area. Carers also have the opportunity to meet local service providers to get information and supports.

This year's Mingle theme was "Find Your Rhythm" and events were held in Sunbury, Caroline Springs, Dingley, Geelong, Manningham, Bendigo and Springvale. Carers were invited to explore the power of music as an outlet, mood lifter and a means to connect with others.

Throughout the day, audience members were taken on a musical journey through the 60s, 70s and 80s, thanks to special musical guest Benn Bennett. A musical quiz brought out the competitive streaks of some audience members. Amongst the singing and excellent dance moves, carers enjoyed a delicious lunch and found out more about local carer services at a number of information stalls.

In addition to acknowledging the role music can play in someone's life, this year's Mingles were also about acknowledging the different journey each carer takes, and the importance of understanding and appreciating the rhythm of their own life.

We look forward to another season of Mingles in 2020! Visit our website to keep up to date with the latest Mingles news.

What guests said

Mingle was an opportunity to have a break and enjoy the company of other carers. Also enjoyed a meal I didn't have to cook myself! It gave the feeling of being accepted, appreciated and wanted.

The entertainment and dancing made people forget about responsibility and have fun and be silly!

*Beautiful day!
Enjoyed venue and the relaxing program.
Appreciate your hard work!*



Take a Break

Sudoku

					2	6	5	7
	4						8	9
	2				8			
8					4		6	2
4								5
9	3		5					1
			6				9	
6	7						2	
1	9	8	3					

Sudoku Answers:

6	7	4	7	6	1	9	8	3	2	5	4	7	6
3	2	5	2	3	6	7	4	8	1	9	5	2	3
8	9	1	9	8	2	5	3	6	4	7	1	9	8
1	4	8	6	9	3	2	5	7	6	8	4	1	9
5	3	6	9	3	4	7	6	2	8	1	9	3	5
2	6	7	2	8	1	9	3	5	4	6	7	2	8
7	6	2	8	1	9	3	4	7	6	2	8	1	9
4	1	9	3	5	8	1	5	9	3	4	7	6	2
9	8	9	7	6	8	3	1	4	5	2	9	7	6
7	4	6	1	5	3	2	8	9	7	4	6	1	5
3	8	1	4	9	2	6	5	7	3	8	1	4	9

Source: www.sudokuoftheday.com



Recipe – Tutti Fruity Popsicles

Ingredients

- 1 mango
- 1 banana, peeled
- 200 g low-fat mango yoghurt
- 24 raspberries, fresh or frozen

Instructions

1. Place mango, banana and yoghurt into a blender and blend until smooth.
2. Put 6 raspberries into each cup and top with mango mix.
3. Secure lids on moulds or insert popsicle sticks and freeze for 4–6 hours or overnight until solid.
4. Stand at room temperature for a few minutes before removing from mould.

Variations

Place any combination of finely diced fruit into mould including: blueberries, strawberries, seedless watermelon, rockmelon, kiwifruit, drained canned peaches, apricots or pineapple in natural juice, and passionfruit pulp. Top with an unsweetened fruit juice such as orange, pineapple or apple and blackcurrant.

For stripes of colour half fill moulds with one fruit, freeze for 4 hours or overnight then fill with a different flavour or colour of fruit or fruit yoghurt before freezing.

Recipe sourced from and reproduced with permission from Livelighter. For more recipes see livelighter.com.au.

Staying Connected: Carer Support Groups



Carer Support Groups are made up of varying sizes, set-ups and distinctions. The key they all have in common is the people involved have shared experiences or challenges which bring them together. Support groups are an opportunity to de-brief and share knowledge with people who understand what it's like to be in your position. This can help alleviate feelings of isolation and help you find meaningful social connections in the community.

Carers Victoria currently has almost 400 support groups listed on our website, meaning there could be a support group near you which suits your circumstances. In this edition, we highlight two very different groups currently running in Victoria.

WhatsApp Carer Support Group: Online

Founder of the WhatsApp Carer Support Group, Shek Kao frequently used the messaging app WhatsApp to share information about being a carer with friends, and often found herself sending the exact same details to each contact. One day she thought of combining all these connections and messages, and took the next step by bringing together all these connections and inviting her carer contacts to join a WhatsApp group, which has now been running since 2017.

As it's an online group, members can keep in touch 24 hours a day with people able to post or check in at any time that suits them. Easy access to the free app means carers have no costs and anyone can join and be part of the group at any time.

Carer Links Men's Group: Footscray

The Carer Links Men's Group Inc is a support group for male carers of older people to share their stories and support each other, especially in times of stress. The group has been running for 25 years and has a comprehensive pool of knowledge. All 90-minute meetings are free and confidential and are held on the first Monday of every month from February to November at the Carers Victoria office located at 37 Albert Street in Footscray. This is followed by a group lunch offsite.

To find out more or join the next meeting call Richard on **(03) 9310 8445**.

"There is no judgement between the members, only plenty of love, respect and understanding! It is a good place to de-stress, keep up-to-date on NDIS info and share what works and what doesn't, such as our NDIS plan, cooking and good diet tips as well as many other benefits."

— Shek Kao, WhatsApp Carer Support Group Facilitator

*Lunch must be paid for by the carer



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Carers Victoria acknowledges the traditional owners of this land and pays respect to elders both past and present

