

Future for Carers - ACT Political Party Policy

Carers from all over Canberra have told Carers ACT that they, their families, and their friends, are all worried about the impact the provision of ongoing, unpaid care is having on their health and well-being. They are concerned that increasing economic pressures, such as rising fuel prices and housing costs, is diminishing their ability to pay their bills and leaving families torn between the need to provide care and the need to earn a living.

Carers responding to the 'Have Your Say' ACT Election Survey told us they need flexible and responsive services which meet their needs in an appropriate way. They need help with meeting the costs of providing care to loved ones, including the ongoing costs for medical supplies and special equipment. They also told us that they need services to be adequately funded to enable the delivery of quality services by well trained support workers.

Carers ACT has a mandate from our members to ensure fair representation of Carer concerns and needs to government, alongside our more visible role of providing direct services to Carers, such as

information, counselling, respite and specialist support.

Increasing awareness and understanding of Carer concerns is vital for moving the ACT into a



position where we can all better meet the growing need for care as the population ages. Sooner or later everyone in the ACT will either need to have care provided to them or will be called upon to provide that care for a loved one.

We have been working hard to ensure that recognition and support of Carers is a central issue of concern in the ACT Election campaign. Accordingly, every candidate standing for election to the ACT Legislative Assembly has been sent a summary of the find-

ings of the 'Have Your Say' Election Survey.

We are delighted to say that some candidates have taken the time not only to read the document, but have contacted us to offer their support, a few have even come to learn more about the needs of Carers so they can better represent you if elected.

Carers ACT also contacted every party registered with the ACT Electoral Office and asked them to provide a written policy response based around six key questions on core issues of recognition, health, services, concessions and subsidies, and workforce participation support for Carers. Those parties who responded are published here to better enable you to make an informed choice when it comes to casting your vote on 18th October 2008.

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ACT Labor Response

In the usual course of life, most people will provide care to other people and receive care themselves. Sometimes people need care that is unusually high or intense, continues over a long period of time or has a significant impact on themselves and others. Often it is families, friends and neighbours who respond to these needs.

ACT Labor in Government has prioritised the vital work carers do in our community, most notably by committing to our vision for the future of carers in the Caring for Carers policy. Caring for Carers acknowledges the efforts and sacrifices of the Territory's carers. This was followed by concrete actions to improve the quality of life for carers in the Caring for Carers Action Plan, which outlined 34 actions for the ACT Government to progress over three years.

The core principles of the Caring for Carers policy are:

1. Carers have the right to decide whether to take on or continue the role of care and are supported in their choices.
2. The health and well being of carers is supported through services and programs that are flexible and responsive to individual needs and circumstances.
3. Resources are available to provide timely and adequate assistance to carers.
4. Affordable services of a high standard are available to people who need care, complementing the role of the carer.
5. The critical contribution of carers is recognised, valued and promoted in the community.
6. The carer and the person receiving care are regarded as a partnership, in which each

person has rights and responsibilities.

7. Organisations welcome and support carer participation at all levels of decision making, with respect for the rights and choices of people receiving care.

The ACT Government undertook an independent evaluation of Caring for Carers which included consultation with peak bodies and individual carers.

As part of the Caring for Carers vision, the ACT Government will continue to provide financial support through the Carer Recognition grants program. This \$200,000 per annum program provides grants to address the needs of carers. This is addressed by funding projects that provide support, respite, counselling, practical assistance, skill training, information, culturally appropriate information and programs, recreational activities and research into respite for young people and the establishment of a website for a community organisation for carers in the community.

The ACT Labor Government has secured 1200m² of community space to assist with the delivery of services by Carers ACT in the new community hub at Holt, this is only one way in which ACT Labor has demonstrated its commitment to carers in Canberra.

In addition, the ACT Government has supported those carers looking after people with a disability by:

- Providing an additional \$1.73 million for the mature carer programs
- Investing \$768,000 per year for respite services for older adults
- Delivered new child and young

adult initiatives, including post school options investment of \$1m additional each year for those young people who leave school every year and require some form of ongoing or transition support.

- Developed Quality of Life grants of \$100,000 allocated to approx 35 people per year.
- Developed a specialist accommodation service for people who have an acquired brain injury for an additional \$440,000 per year
- Improved the ACT Taxi Subsidy Scheme, which has approximately 3,500 users:
 - 50% subsidy to all users
 - 75% subsidy for people who require wheelchair accessible taxis
- Provided \$1.3 million recurrently and \$1 million capital to match funding from the Commonwealth towards moving young people with a disability out of aged care accommodation and into more appropriate accommodation.
- Invested \$4 million in building a single therapy service including redeveloping existing Therapy ACT sites.
- Provided an additional \$600,000 for equipment in Therapy ACT to enhance the quality of life for children and young people.

ACT Labor is committed to increasing support for carers in the ACT. ACT Labor thanks Carers ACT for their work in surveying the thoughts of Carers on their areas of need, and suggesting corresponding solutions. We will be announcing policies aimed to assist those disadvantaged members of the community and their carers in the coming weeks, informed by the responses to the survey.

Canberra Liberals Response

Recognition of Carers

1. Will your party support a strengthening of ACT Government policy to enable a better system to support Carers in providing care?

The Canberra Liberals, in consultation with Carers ACT and other like minded organisations, will most certainly strengthen ACT Government policy to develop a better and more supportive system for Carers in the ACT upon winning Government.

2. Will your party support amendments to the Australian Capital Territory Mental Health (Treatment and Care) Act 1994 which provide better recognition for Carers?

Recognition for Carers nationally, let alone in the ACT, has occurred too slowly. The Canberra Liberals agree with community groups when they argue Carers are a group at risk, as they are more vulnerable to the impact of social and economic pressures than the non-carer population. As a result, a Canberra Liberal Government will revisit the Australian Capital Territory Mental Health (Treatment and Care) Act 1994 in consultation with Carers ACT, to better support the legislative underpinnings in the ACT that provide the rightful and necessary recognition for Carers.

Carers and the health system

3.. How will your party assist health professionals to better recognise and support the role of Carers in providing community-based care to people with special needs?

The Canberra Liberals acknowledge that Carers are among those with the lowest 'well-being scores' in Australia.

The Canberra Liberals in consultation with Carers ACT will investigate the implementation of a Territory

wide training and PR package for all health professionals to help them better understand the role Carers play in our community and the daily pressures Carers face. There is also an emerging issue with the ageing of carers. The Canberra Liberals believe that it is critical to constantly be assessing the state of ageing and provide sustainable policy settings with a view to the future.

Comprehensive quality services

4. What additional resources will your party provide to enable timely, appropriate and adequate assistance to Carers?

The Canberra Liberals have recently announced the establishment of 3 new bulk-billing GP clinics across Canberra. These clinics will be staffed by GP's and nurses – not just nurses as advocated by the Stanhope Government's nurse walk-in clinics. Our GP clinic policy will help Carers - and those they care for - access high quality primary health care services both during the day and after hours. The Canberra Liberals will also announce before the election a specific policy shake-up of Individual Support Packages (ISP's) in the ACT for those with a disability. By comparison to other States the ACT lags well behind on ISP's and our policy will certainly help many ACT Carers and those they care for. Stanhope Labor has released plans in relation to carers. We believe that planning is critical, however listening to the carer community should be constantly informing plans and allowing flexibility without losing focus.

Concessions and subsidies

5. What will your party do to improve Carer access to appropriate assessment, concessions and subsidies for ACT Government services?

The Canberra Liberals acknowledge that Carers needs vary according

to their individual situations, with many relying on income support as the sole source of household income. Carers therefore engaged in full-time care need a greater level of support and adequate financial compensation for the vital role they play in our community. While pressing the Federal Government to provide Carers more equitable financial and policy support, the Canberra Liberals will address some of these inequities at the ACT level. We will announce closer to the election more specific funding and policy initiatives that revolve around such issues as, public transport access and concessional arrangements, more flexible respite programs, mental health support programs and carer advocacy services.

Choice for employment, education and training

6. What will your party do to enable greater workforce participation for Carers.

The Canberra Liberals will address three main areas relating to Carers accessing meaningful workforce opportunities. The first is access to the work force by Carers and the participation in what we like to view as meaningful employment and training opportunities. Carers should not be at a disadvantage just because they are Carers.

Secondly, those carers who are able to work require flexible employment arrangements. Flexibility is vital as it allows Carers to not only better manage their caring responsibilities but also earn vital income at the same time.

Thirdly, in securing meaningful employment and training opportunities Carers need to have available options for the quality care of their loved ones while they are away. Without this back-end support, Carers will not be able to take advantage of any employment opportunity, let alone the most appealing opportunities offered to them.

The Canberra Party Response

Recognition of Carers

1. Will your party support a strengthening of ACT Government policy to enable a better system to support Carers in providing care?

The Canberra Party recognises the enormous contribution that Carers make to the ACT community. We understand that undertaking a Carers role for a family member or friend places enormous demands on emotional and financial wellbeing. We also note the saving that Carers provide to the ACT economy. The Canberra Party is committed to reducing the tax burden on all residents. Specifically, we have highlighted the Utilities tax as an impost that should be abolished. This policy – and our commitment to reducing the tax burden overall – will be of benefit to Carers struggling to meet the increasing cost of living.

Many Carers receive income support or superannuation that increases according to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Changes made by the ACT Government in the 2006-07 Budget mean that all ACT Government charges – from vehicle registration through to household rates – increase at Wage Price Indexation (WPI), which is a much faster rate of increase. The Canberra Party opposes this covert increase to taxation levels. We will also press for a review of the funding process for equipment. Delays of up to a year for approval for funding are unacceptable and the Canberra Party will work to make this process more efficient and more responsive to the needs of Carers.

2. Will your party support amendments to the Australia Capital Territory Mental Health (Treatment and Care) Act 1994 which provide better recognition for Carers?

The Canberra Party will, in principle, support better recognition for Carers. It is our belief that all possible avenues to improve the sup-

port offered to Carers should be considered and debated.

Carers and the health system

3. How will your party assist health professionals to better recognise and support the role of Carers in providing community-based care to people with special needs?

This is a complex issue. The Leader of the Canberra Party, Richard Mulcahy MLA, recently supported a Bill in the Legislative Assembly to allow family members to give consent for medical treatment of their relatives. We would support expanding the principle of this support to facilitate better communication between the health system and Carers. This could include providing Government assistance in relation to obtaining Power of Attorney documents and other legal requirements to ensure that, for example, privacy issues do not prevent accurate communication between Carers and health professionals.

Comprehensive quality services

4. What additional resources will your party provide to enable timely, appropriate and adequate assistance to Carers?

The Canberra Party will review the current allocation available to Carers and consider any additional funding in light of the overall Budgetary position of the Territory. As discussed in more detail below, the provision of timely, appropriate and adequate assistance to Carers is not purely a resourcing issue. The Canberra Party believes that, as in all areas of Government, improvements can be made by looking for more efficient ways to administer the bureaucracy. Based on discussions with Carers ACT we are not convinced that the current assistance arrangements are as effective as they should be.

Concessions and subsidies

5. What will your party do to im-

prove Carer access to appropriate assessment, concessions and subsidies for ACT Government services?

The Canberra Party recognises that Carers cannot wait on hold for long periods to receive advice or assistance. We believe that it is important to address the responsiveness of the system to the needs of the Carers. We need to recognise that many Carers are not in a position to navigate the maze of bureaucracy that often accompanies requests for Government assistance.

It is important that processes are simple, easy to access, and that human advice is readily available to assist people in working with the system. This is not purely a resourcing issue. The Canberra Party will encourage the next ACT government to review all processes and streamline the way that help is provided to Carers. We support Carers ACT's position that a clear system of standards for minimum levels of service delivery and expected timeframes would assist in resolving many of the current issues.

Choice for employment, education and training

6. What will your party do to enable greater workforce participation for Carers?

Employment levels in the ACT remain very high. This has created a demand for workers that should facilitate the re-entry of Carers into the workforce. The Canberra Party believes that within the ACT Public Service – the only area of employment that the ACT Government has direct control over – there should be scope for flexibility in the workplace. The Leader of the Canberra Party, Richard Mulcahy MLA, supported, for example, ACT Government initiatives to allow grandparents and older people to remain in the workforce for longer. We would consider supporting similar proposals aimed at allowing Carers to balance their responsibilities with employment.

ACT Greens Response

Recognition of Carers

1. Will your party support a strengthening of ACT Government policy to enable a better system to support Carers in providing care?

The Greens support the need for further reform (building on the ACT Government's Caring for Carers Policy (2003) and Caring for Carers Policy – A Plan for Action 2004-2007)

to strengthen the rights of carers, drawing on work done in other jurisdictions and examining the potential benefits and development of a Carers Charter.

2. Will your party support amendments to the Australian Capital Territory Mental Health (Treatment and Care) Act 1994 which provide better recognition for Carers?

Yes, the Greens support amendments to the Act that seek to embed in legislation the recognition of the role and importance of carers as the day to day care givers and experts in their cared ones' lives.

Carers and the health system

3. How will your party assist health professionals to better recognise and support the role of Carers in providing community-based care to people with special needs?

The ACT Greens want increased recognition and respect for carers; supporting their health and well-being. There needs to be a coordinated, well-resourced and strategic response to meet the needs of carers, and the people they care for. We support initiatives for health and welfare services to review and improve how they work with carers, particularly at

key transition points such as intake and discharge. This would include training and development for professionals in relevant service sectors.



Comprehensive quality services

4. What additional resources will your party provide to enable timely, appropriate and adequate assistance to Carers?

We support increasing services that directly support carers including:

- Information and advisory services
- Counselling and emotional support
- Systemic and individual advocacy
- Training in life and work skills

Also addressing the unmet needs for services in the areas of:

- Early intervention, education, respite and holiday programs for children with a disability
- Accommodation support, respite, day programs and employment programs for adults with a disability
- Residential and community based aged care services, including day programs and home help
- Residential and community-based services for health, mental health and problematic drug use

Concessions and subsidies

5. What will your party do to improve Carer access to appropriate assessment, concessions and subsidies for ACT Government services?

The ACT Greens support working with Carers ACT, and other groups representing the diverse needs and interests of carers, to inform government decision making. We support the coordination of different policy areas to respond to the needs of carers, including the specific needs of young carers, mature carers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and carers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Unfortunately many carers miss out on much needed resources and support as eligibility guidelines for programs can be far too rigid. Flexibility is essential if carers are to receive the vital assistance they need to continue as carers. Programs should place carers at the centre and work out plans and supports that benefit them and their families rather than forcing a diverse range of carer needs and situations into narrow program guidelines.

Accurate information and assistance that can be provided by community organisations such as Carers ACT to carers so that they access government programs and subsidies they are eligible for is a high priority and has to be properly resourced.

Choice for employment, education and training

6. What will your party do to enable greater workforce participation for Carers

ACT Greens believe carers have the right to equity in opportunity, particularly in relation to participation in education, employment and community activities. Programs that offer flexible and accessible respite, ongoing day programs and home help are important to enable carers to pursue educational, employment and other activities that underpin their financial and emotional/social well being.

Community Alliance Party

Recognition of Carers

Will your party support a strengthening of ACT Government policy to enable a better system to support Carers in providing care?

The Community Alliance Party (CAP) will promote the strengthening of ACT Government policy to enable a better system to support Carers. CAP adopted a principle in developing Party policy of applying any proposed policy to a variety of demographics, to evaluate the impact on or benefit to all in the community. Carers have been one of these demographics, and the CAP will continue to apply such a principle when evaluating ACT Government policy.

CAP will ensure proper consultation with Carers about all ACT Government policy changes that affect them and the people for whom they care. CAP recognises that Carers of all ages need more support services to reduce the emotional and financial burdens of caring, with carers choosing the type and level of support that suits their needs. The CAP will ensure that ACT Government policy reflects this.

Will your party support amendments to the Australian Capital Territory Mental Health (Treatment and Care) Act 1994 which provide better recognition for Carers?

CAP supports a better recognition of Carers. Amendment to any ACT legislation which achieves a better recognition of Carers will be supported by CAP. CAP has previously stated on numerous occasions that good policy will be supported regardless of its source; our focus is on the outcome.

Carers and the health system

How will your party assist health professionals to better recognise and support the role of Carers in providing community-based care to people with special needs?

CAP supports greater cooperation and coordination among carer organisations rather than government-mandated economic competition. CAP seeks to introduce local, community-driven holistic health and wellness clinics backed by community organisations and volunteer support. Part of any holistic view of an individual's health has to include those they care for, or are cared for by. Such issues as stress-induced conditions due to a caring role may be better identified and treated. These clinics will serve to provide a resource to support the role of Carers and improve the social inclusion of Carers. CAP will support programs which better educate both health professionals and the general public on the important role of carers.

Comprehensive quality services

What additional resources will your party provide to enable timely, appropriate and adequate assistance to Carers?

CAP will lobby the Federal Government to increase investment in emergency, short-term, and long-term respite care, including day care centres for the aged and holiday programs for children with disabilities. CAP will investigate the provision of integrated supported accommodation for high dependency care so that carers can continue living with their ageing or disabled family members when they require full-time formal care. CAP supports the development of community centres that build community cohesion by offering a range of socially inclusive services for all ages.

CAP seeks to foster stronger partnerships between voluntary organisations and government. This is intended to improve communication and streamline the provision of resources enabling timely, appropriate and adequate assistance to Carers. CAP will provide improved public transport options

and adequate disabled parking to assist Carers.

Concessions and subsidies

What will your party do to improve Carer access to appropriate assessment, concessions and subsidies for ACT Government services?

CAP supports the introduction of a National Carers' Card, with eligibility linked to the recipients' level of need. Such a card will provide similar benefits to those currently provided by the Seniors' Card. Recognising that for many Carers public transport is not a viable option and a private motor vehicle is required as part of the caring role, the CAP will support concessional motor vehicle registration costs for holders of a Carers' Card.

CAP proposes to consult with Carers on strategies to implement concessions to recognised carers. Recognising that household utilities expenditure can increase as a direct result of fulfilling a caring role, this may be in the form of a rebate on electricity charges for a carer who is required to operate air-conditioning or heating for the benefit of their care recipient.

Choice for employment, education and training

What will your party do to enable greater workforce participation for Carers?

CAP believes that carers deserve support so they can maintain and update their job skills to remain in or re-enter the workforce if desired. CAP will encourage employers to provide flexible working conditions to for carers. CAP believes that the ACT Government should subsidise training in the caring industry to attract and retain staff, especially in areas of growing need. CAP supports the provision of free training and peer support programs for carers so that they can help the people they care for become as independent as possible.

Pangallo Independents Response

Recognition of Carers

1. Will your party support a strengthening of ACT Government policy to enable a better system to support Carers in providing care?

I would support any move to strengthen the ACT Government Policy to enable a better system of support for carers in providing care.

2. Will you support amendments to the Australia Capital Territory Mental Health (Treatment and Care) Act 1994 which provide better recognition for Carers?

I will support any amendments that improve and provide better recognition of Carers

Carers and the health system

3. How will your party assist health professionals to better recognise and support the role

of Carers in providing community-based care to people with special needs?

I would assist professionals to better assist and recognise the support and role of carers in providing care to all sections of our community and, in particular, those people with special needs.

Comprehensive quality services

4. What additional resources will your party provide to enable timely, appropriate and adequate assistance to Carers?

If elected, I would support any move to provide proper and adequate assistance to carers including a community based support organisation to provide supporting assistance, training and other resources to carers.

Concessions and subsidies

5. What will your party do to improve Carer access to appropriate assessment, concessions and subsidies for ACT Government services?

I would seek to make access to timely assessment and examine, as matter of urgency what concessions and subsidies are available for any ACT Government services.

Choice for employment, education and training

6. What will your party do to enable greater workforce participation for Carers?

I have always been a supporter, through Queanbeyan City Council, in providing flexibility in the workplace to enable those caring for others to have appropriate time away from work in times of need whilst they are caring for others.

What else can you do to raise awareness?

1. Visit your local member and tell your story; talk about what would make a difference in your life
2. Contact candidates and discuss your issues with them
3. Telephone talk back radio stations and tell them why it is important that you provide care, and what caring is like for you
4. Write letters to the local newspaper; saying how you would like things to change to help you to keep providing care.

The Points you can make:

- In the ACT there are 43,000 family carers, including 8,600 primary carers, looking after a relative, partner or friend.
- Carers provide care for the frail aged, the chronically ill or people with disabilities, mental illness or palliative care needs.
- Family carers do the bulk of caring work in our communities. Two thirds of all care and support is unpaid.
- Unpaid care saves the government over \$526 million every year.

- Caring work may be often taken on suddenly; requiring family carers to radically alter their lifestyle. Caring affects careers, finances, leisure time and other family relationships.
- Caring can affect a carer's own health
- A caring role can place high physical, emotional, mental, financial and time demands on a carer.
- Respite from caring can be hard to find and may be expensive.
- Further work is required to address key issues of concern arising from consultation around the Carers Recognition Legislation Amendment Act 2006
- Write your own perception of what your needs will be over the next four years. Are these needs currently being met?
- What can the ACT Government do to help you as a carer?

These are points you may wish to draw on when writing or talking with people about your own caring situation. Use your own words because it is important that what you say is based on your individual story or situation

Carers Need Quality Support

Real issues need realistic solutions. Based on information from the 'Have Your Say' ACT Election Survey, the following solutions and strategies have been identified as a priority for the ACT:

Financial Support for the Costs of Care

1. extend the existing pensioner discount on utilities to all low income Carers where the care-recipient is co-resident
2. introduce a Carer Card offering discounts on public transport and other ACT government services, and encourage recognition of the card by ACT businesses
3. provide a medical supplies service to offer consumable medical supplies for Carers of people with disabilities/chronic health needs to purchase at minimum possible cost
4. increase subsidies for essential equipment and home modifications
5. offer a low or no-interest loan scheme to help Carers on low incomes to get out of debt and/or to pay for unfunded portions of equipment or home modification costs

Health and Wellbeing Supports

1. recognise Carers as an 'at-risk' population group and commit to appropriate health promotion

programs

2. support greater access to specialist counselling by extending new initiatives in mental health support to benefit all Carers across the community
3. develop specific programs to help Carers manage sleep deprivation; ensure their own personal safety; manage challenging behaviours; and implement occupational health and safety practices in the home
4. fund advocacy services for Carers to create a 'mesh' or 'web' of support, improve access and help resolve problems

Improved Respite Services

1. increase flexibility of the current respite system to meet a diversity of need
2. improve affordability of respite services
3. provide more respite cottages to offer a safe, harmonious and healthy 'home away from home' environment for care-recipients

Post School Options

1. provide additional opportunities for meaningful training, supported employment, and inclusive social programs for adults with disabilities
2. improve support for families experiencing difficulty accessing existing programs

Workforce Support

1. invest in Carer skills development and expand workplace support programs for Carers
2. encourage the ACT business community to adopt flexible work practices
3. ensure appropriate and affordable care alternatives for working Carers

Supported Accommodation

1. develop a range of supported accommodation options to better meet the needs of people with disabilities and people with mental illness

Future Planning

1. assist Carers to develop emergency care plans
2. provide support for future planning, including transition to permanent care options
3. help Carers access financial and legal advice, especially for wills and special disability trusts

Where's the evidence?

Find the Have Your Say ACT Election Survey full report and the Carers ACT submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Housing and Youth Inquiry into Better Support for Carers at <http://www.carersact.asn.au/publications.html> on the Carers ACT website.

IF UNDELIVERED PLEASE RETURN TO:

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