

CarersACT



Carers ACT 2026-2027
ACT Budget Submission

January 2026



Acknowledgement of Country

Carers ACT operates on Ngunnawal and Dharawal Country. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of these lands and recognise any other people or families with connection to them. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of the cities and regions in which we work and care.

About Carers ACT

Carers ACT is the leading body for carers in the ACT. We work to ensure that carers enjoy improved outcomes in health, wellbeing, resilience, and financial security. We also work to ensure that caring is acknowledged and recognised as a shared responsibility of family, community, and government.

Our purpose is to support, connect and empower carers to maintain their caring role and personal wellbeing. The *Carers Recognition Act 2021* (ACT) recognises the value of carers and the care relationship and defines carers in the following way:

“A person is in a care relationship with another person if the first person (the carer) provides care to the other person for 1 or more of the following reasons:

- (a) the other person has a disability;
- (b) the other person has a mental disorder or mental illness;
- (c) the other person has an ongoing medical condition;
- (d) the other person is aged and frail;
- (e) the other person is a child or young person, and the carer is a kinship carer or a foster carer for the child or young person.”¹

Carers include family members, friends, relatives, siblings or neighbours and in the ACT more than 58,000 people provide care. Carers provide an important role in families and in the broader community, supporting the quality of life of the person they care for. A carer’s role can include help with daily living activities such as personal care, medication management, health care, transport, shopping, meals, reading and writing, and emotional support.

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Executive Summary

Carers ACT welcomes the opportunity to participate in the 2026-2027 ACT Budget consultation and acknowledges the commitment of the ACT Government to improving outcomes for carers. Ongoing investment is essential to address the longstanding challenges carers face, both through targeted carer-focused initiatives and through broader programs that naturally impact carers.

The 58,000 carers living in the ACT contribute across all areas of community life, from health and disability services to education and municipal services. Therefore, it is vital that Budget decisions align with the principles of the *Carers Recognition Act 2021*² and support the implementation of the ACT Carers Strategy 2018–2028,³ embedding carer wellbeing across the community in line with the ACT Wellbeing Framework.⁴

This submission identifies three urgent priorities that require focused investment to support the ongoing implementation of these key legislative and strategic frameworks.

These priorities are not new, and the ACT Budget provides an opportunity for the ACT Government to take visible action to address these important community issues.

Of critical importance is **addressing current pressures on high and complex-care respite**. Demand in the ACT continues to far exceed capacity, placing significant strain on carers, affecting their health, wellbeing and ability to sustain the caring role.

Building on the need to support carers under increasing pressure, now is the opportune time to allocate funding for the implementation of a **Carers Recognition Card program**, providing clear and consistent recognition of carers across government and community systems.

Investment is also required to develop a **Young Carer Mentoring Program**. Young carers are often overlooked and often receive little support for their education while caring. Targeted investment is needed to ensure young carers are supported to balance their education with their caring role and achieve positive outcomes.

Finally, we encourage the ACT Government to use this consultation process to begin forward-planning future budgets to reflect the full range of commitments made to carers by ACT Labor in the lead-up to the 2024 local election.⁵

Summary of Recommendations

1. Prioritise immediate investment in high and complex care respite to urgently address critical gaps that place carers and the people they support at risk.

2. Provide funding for the timely development and rollout of a non-means-tested, government-endorsed Carers Recognition Card program.

3. Invest in the development of a Young Carer Mentoring Program for improved young carer outcomes.

Funding Proposals

Addressing the ACT respite crisis

Recommendation

1. Prioritise immediate investment in high and complex care respite to urgently address critical gaps that place carers and the people they support at risk.

Timely access to respite is an essential support, providing carers with the opportunity to rest, recover and maintain their own health alongside their caring responsibilities.⁶ However, **carers in the ACT are the least likely in the country to access respite services.**⁷ This is not for a lack of want or need, but due to the profound shortage of respite in the Capital Region. For example, Carers ACT, we understand, is the only Commonwealth Home Support Package (CHSP) funded respite provider in the ACT, and **we have just one bed per 5,200 carers.**

While investment across a range of respite options is needed to reflect the diversity of care relationships, the most acute and unmet need is for clinical or complex respite care. Other respite options such as social or day programs, are highly valued and necessary but are not equipped to provide the nursing care, medication management or specialist oversight required by people with complex health needs or behaviours.

In the ACT, even with a federally funded and approved respite package, it is not unusual for the lack of available beds in the ACT to result in waits spanning many months. For carers supporting someone with complex behaviours, psychosocial disability or requiring specialised care, this wait can become indefinite.

There are numerous reports of providers prioritising individuals with “simpler” support needs, with some admitting that they do this because funding is the same, regardless of the level of skill or work required. As a result, **carers supporting those with the highest care needs are unable to source replacement care**, leaving them to continue in situations that are unsafe or unsustainable, or to admit the person they care for to hospital or to permanent residential care.

We have heard from carers in the ACT, who in desperate situations, have sought to have themselves admitted to hospital or mental health unit to obtain emergency respite as their only option for rest.

In 2024, the final committee reports on the ACT Government’s Inquiry into both [Loneliness and Social Isolation](#) and [Unpaid Work](#) acknowledged the worsening respite situation in the

ACT and recommended increasing respite availability, particularly for carers supporting people with high and complex needs.

In 2025, the depth of unmet need for clinical respite was further demonstrated by the strong community response to the announcement of the closure of the Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre. The grassroots action group and widespread community mobilisation resulted in an Inquiry that saw Burrangiri able to continue for another two years.⁸

Our [submission](#) to this Inquiry highlighted the impact the severe shortage of clinical respite was having on carers and called on the ACT Government to conduct an audit of respite services while investing in increasing respite capacity, now and into the future. The final [committee report](#) acknowledged that the **current supply of respite services in the ACT does not meet demand** and made various recommendations to address this shortfall. These can ultimately be distilled to Recommendation 6, *“that the ACT Government take proactive steps to increase aged care respite beds.”*⁹

Carers report concern that Burrangiri’s extension of operation, there is an incorrect assumption that respite shortages have been resolved. However, the fundamental shortage remains and is worsening. Increasingly, carers report that federally funded respite beds in residential facilities are only offered when they explicitly say they are considering a permanent placement at the facility. Others go through long onboarding processes, believing they will be accessing a break soon, only to be told they are on an indefinite waitlist.

Carers also express frustration with claims that new residential aged care facilities are addressing shortages, noting that few offer short-term respite and many existing facilities have stopped offering this service. Several facilities have advised Carers ACT that they no longer provide short-term stays, while others have simply ceased responding to requests. As at January 2026, **there is no short stay residential respite available in the ACT**, and this has been the case for well beyond several months. Wait lists are now so extensive that services have stopped providing estimated wait times, and this is not a temporary service gap, but a sustained crisis for carers.

Funding respite services appropriately would likely be cost-neutral for the budget, as each night in respite rather than hospital saves the health budget approximately \$1,800 per night.¹⁰

Noting ACT Labor’s request in May 2025 that the Federal Labor Government expedite its \$10 million commitment to increase respite beds in the ACT,¹¹ this funding should be reflected in the 2026-27 Budget. While respite funding is a federal responsibility, ACT residents in need of respite are suffering now. Should federal funds be delayed, territory funding must be allocated in this Budget to stem the worsening crisis.

Progressing the Carers Recognition Card

Recommendations

2. Provide funding for the timely development and rollout of a non-means-tested, government-endorsed Carers Recognition Card program.

Although many carers describe a strong sense of purpose and fulfilment through caring, much of their contribution continues to go unnoticed and unrecognised. Carers continue to report being regularly dismissed by professionals across government systems, healthcare, and education settings, due to a lack of carer awareness and recognition of their role. This impacts their wellbeing and self-worth and hinders access to services and care for the people they support, as carer expertise and practical knowledge are overlooked.¹² In public, carers have reported feeling anxious and unsupported when caring for someone, particularly in situations where the person they support is distressed or agitated.

There have been situations where well-meaning community members have intervened, mistaking disability or dementia related outbursts as domestic violence, and carers have had no tangible evidence to clarify their role. Additionally, many carers who do not meet eligibility requirements for carer payments, often due to means testing, assume they are not considered carers, that supports are unavailable to them, and that their role is unimportant.

Existing identification measures, such as the Companion Card, are **not designed for carers**; they are specifically for the care recipient. This is mirrored in the ACT Government's online information which states *"The card is for people with disability who need attendant care to participate in events or activities."*

Similarly, our own historical attempts to improve recognition through a Carers ACT card were discussed with carers. They explained that as it was not government-issued, it lacked legitimacy and was seen externally as simply a membership card. **Carers emphasised the need for a non-means-tested Carers Recognition Card that is government endorsed** and features its official logo.

Several Australian states and territories have already adopted or are in the process of rolling out carer card programs, demonstrating growing national momentum and the need for improved carer recognition mechanisms when interacting with government systems.

Internationally, many jurisdictions have implemented similar initiatives. The United Kingdom is the standout example, with local and nationally recognised programs such as the Carers ID card and the National Carer's Card supporting visibility, access, and recognition for carers.¹³

We urge the ACT Government to uphold its 2024 election commitment **to explore a Carers Recognition Card program in the ACT.**^{14 15} We acknowledge the ongoing developments, including Chief Minister, Andrew Barr’s costing proposal for a full-time position within Health and Community Service Directorate to support the development of the program.¹⁶

Carers ACT has developed a detailed proposed implementation plan to support timely rollout, with recommendations informed by consultation with carers and evidence-based national and international models to streamline delivery.

We therefore recommend the ACT Government build on the significant groundwork already undertaken and include funding to support the development of the Carers Recognition Card program in this Budget.

Strengthening carer recognition and ensuring it is embedded across all domains of government and policy decision making aligns with the *Carers Recognition Act 2021 (ACT)*, the ACT Carers Strategy 2018–2028 and ACT Wellbeing Framework.

The Carers Recognition Card will be an **inexpensive and invaluable tool** in recognising the critical role that carers play in our community, providing them with the acknowledgment and practical support they deserve.

Growing need for Young Carer Mentoring

Recommendations

3. Invest in the development of a Young Carer Mentoring Program for improved young carer outcomes.

The ACT Government's 2024 Election Platform made a number of strong and welcome commitments to carers.¹⁷ Building on this leadership, it is essential that current and future Budgets demonstrate the Government's intent to follow through on its promises. The commitment to support a Young Carer Mentor Program in the ACT is of increasing importance and requires prioritisation in the 2026-27 ACT Budget.

Young carers are children and young people aged under 25 years who provide unpaid care. They are covered by both ACT and Commonwealth carer legislation. In 2018, 11.7% of carers in Australia were reported to be under 25;¹⁸ however this number grew to 12.9% in the Australian Bureau of Statistics latest 2022 findings.¹⁹ Even these figures are likely to be significantly underestimated, as **many young carers remain 'hidden'** due to stigma, lack of self-identification or awareness, and societal misconceptions about the care young people can provide.²⁰

While young carers report that their caring role is meaningful and important to them, caring can mean school disruption, poorer academic outcomes and diminished long-term career prospects.²¹ Young carers can struggle to balance school with caring, leading to withdrawal from education altogether, with young carers far less likely to complete year 12.²²

Additionally, employment opportunities are limited as young carers are often seen as unreliable due to their caring duties. This can result in job loss, fewer career progression opportunities, and long-term dependence on government support.²³

Finally, low community awareness and self-identification rates, in addition to high absenteeism from school, means young carers are seldom offered adequate support to remain engaged with education or to pursue meaningful employment.²⁴

Carers ACT believes that **caring should never cost a child their future**, and no young person should have to sacrifice their education, wellbeing, or aspirations because of the care they provide. With the number of young carers growing steadily, now is the time to invest in the development of a young mentoring program to support their education and employment.

Similar young carer education and employment mentoring programs have been successfully implemented across other jurisdictions, including Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales.²⁵ Internationally, the United States,²⁶ United Kingdom²⁷ and New Zealand²⁸ serve as strong models for young carer mentorship programs.

Carers ACT is committed to working collaboratively with the ACT Government to develop and implement a mentoring program that supports young carers to thrive while balancing their education, caring and employment aspirations.

As part of the first Action Plan under the *ACT Carers Strategy 2018–2028*, the ACT Government and Carers ACT successfully collaborated to include a question about young carer status on ACT public school enrolment forms.²⁹ While use of this information remains at each school's discretion, it could serve as a starting point for this program, identifying students who may like to be involved in developing or participating in the program.

The program aligns with the *Carers Recognition Act 2021 (ACT)*, which sets out clear principles to ensure young carers receive the necessary support to reach their potential. Alongside this, the ACT Carers Strategy 2018-2028, identifies education as a key priority, where young carers are supported to complete their education and achieve their aspirations. The program further aligns with several domains of the ACT Wellbeing Framework contributing to improved outcomes across Learning and Development, Health, Social Connectedness, Community Participation, and Economic Participation.

Conclusion

Our submission highlights a small number of well understood priorities that would materially improve recognition and practical support for carers in the ACT, while delivering on existing ACT Government commitments. Investment in high and complex care respite, a Carers Recognition Card, completion of the ACT Carers Strategy Action Plan, and the establishment of a Young Carer Mentoring Program would translate existing legislative commitments into tangible outcomes for carers.


The 2026-2027 Budget provides a critical opportunity for the ACT Government to prioritise improved outcomes for carers and progress key 2024 Election commitments. By investing in the recommendations outlined in this submission, the ACT can set a new standard for how we care for those who care for others in our community. We welcome the opportunity to provide further information and to continue working closely with the ACT Government to ensure carers feel recognised, valued, included and supported.


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