

Carers

ACT Labor recognises the vital work of carers in supporting our community's most vulnerable members.

According to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data in 2006 there were approximately 43,000 carers living in the ACT providing care to thousands of Canberrans.

Carers cover all age groups and relationships - from children caring for siblings and parents, parents caring for children, husbands caring for wives and vice versa, to friends and acquaintances caring for each other. All together, every day, carers provide thousands of hours of care and support to thousands of individuals.

In the usual course of life, most people will provide care to others and receive care themselves. Sometimes, however, people may have care needs that are unusually high or intense, continue over a long period of time, or that have a significant impact on themselves and others.

Carers may be family members, friends, neighbours or volunteers. Their work is rarely seen or acknowledged but each and every day carers across the ACT perform the silent tasks that keep our community functioning.

ACT Labor has sought to recognise the vital work that carers do in our community, most notably through our Caring for Carers policy and action plan which has outlined 34 actions for the ACT Government to progress over three years.

Whilst we have achieved a great deal working in partnership with individual carers, Carers ACT and other non-government organisations to support the work of carers, ACT Labor understands that there is more to be done.

The work of carers is complex and challenging. ACT Labor knows that whilst we cannot solve all the problems we can work together to share some of the responsibilities which carers carry.

In the next term of government we will build on these foundations, continue to consult with carers and work to provide effective support to make the roles of carers easier.

Jon Stanhope
Chief Minister

Katy Gallagher
Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for
Disability and Community Services

A Proud Record of Investment for ACT carers

ACT Labor has already delivered the following outcomes for ACT carers:

- \$830,000 over four years to implement the Caring for Carers Policy through Carer Recognition Grants to deliver support, respite, information, counselling, practical assistance, skills training, research. As well as providing opportunities for carers to develop skills, articulate their needs, problem solve and plan for the future;
- \$2.8 million over five years to provide a new 'on-demand' mini-bus service, administered by the Regional Community Services, ensuring additional support for carers and elderly people with limited mobility in the community;
- \$309,971 to support young carers through the Connecting Young Carers to Life Opportunities and Personalised Support (CYCLOPS) program;
- Established a new website to enhance communication and networking;
- Established a training kit for professionals and other service providers;
- Undertaken research on the needs of young carers;
- Implemented culturally appropriate support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers;
- Provided an additional \$1.73 million for mature carer programs;
- Increased payments to foster carers;
- \$768,000 per year for respite services for older adults; and
- Provided 1200 sqm of accommodation for Carers ACT in Holt, significantly reducing their commercial rental costs.

Moving Forward

A re-elected ACT Labor government will:

- Provide \$800,000 over four years for Carers Advocacy Service

ACT Labor understands the contribution made by carers every day whether it's through caring for elderly parents, a family member with a disability or chronic illness, or a friend.

There are a range of services available to support carers in the ACT but carers have told us that it is often difficult to navigate these services and understand the entitlements and eligibility arrangements that apply to these those services.

ACT Labor will establish a Carers Advocacy Service to provide a dedicated and specialist advocacy service that will help carers to make better use of the many services and programs available to them.

- Provide \$800,000 over four years for a grandparents' support service

ACT Labor knows that grandparents play a vital role in their grandchildren's upbringing and we are seeing more and more grandparents taking on primary care responsibilities for children.

According to ABS data in 2003 there were 22,500 Australian families in which grandparents were the guardians of their grandchildren, which included 31,100 children aged 0-17 years. This does not include the many grandparents providing informal or temporary care for grandchildren.

Whilst there are some programs funded to provide support to grandparents we believe a dedicated service run by a non-government organisation is needed to provide information, advice and support to grandparents and kinship carers who are caring for children. This new service will help grandparents navigate the service system across governments and across the community sector.

This funding is in addition to and complements the \$120,000 allocated to support Indigenous older Canberrans. In particular, grandmothers with primary care responsibilities.

- Redirect the \$2 million “contingency fund” straight to foster carers

Foster carers make a major contribution to caring for our community’s most vulnerable children and young people. Foster carers provide care for more than 200 children and young people in the territory and they do this every day of the year.

A re-elected ACT Labor Government will increase the base payments to our foster carers depending on the age of the child and their particular needs, to ease the financial burden of their important work. This increase seeks to recognise that there are costs in caring for children which are additional to the current base rate.

Currently, foster carers have to apply for extra financial support for special costs. ACT Labor will remove this red tape and redirect the current \$2 million contingency budget straight to carers.

This will ensure that every carer and every child in care receives a fair share of the \$2 million fund.

- Making life easier initiative – cutting red tape for carers

ACT Labor will commission a full review of administrative requirements for people caring for others.

Carers have told us that they often have to fill out repeated forms for the same service, and tell their stories on a number of occasions in order to gain access to services.

ACT Labor believes that there are ways to address these inefficiencies and we will establish a taskforce with carer representation to cut the red tape and consider new technologies available to assist making carers lives easier

This taskforce will report to government within the first year of the next term.

- Charter of Rights for carers

ACT Labor introduced Australia's first Human Rights Act to foster a culture of equality, tolerance and human rights in the ACT. Following the passage of this Act we have sought to foster this culture through a variety of means, including developing a Charter of Rights for the Homeless.

A re-elected Labor Government will build on this culture and introduce the ACT's first Charter of Rights for Carers. It will build on a similar charter developed in Western Australia, and adopted elsewhere, which enshrines a set of standards for agencies dealing with carers, which require that carers are consulted and involved in decision-making during the development of policies, programs and strategies related to care.

We will work with carers and key stakeholders, such Carers ACT and the ACT Human Rights Commission to develop this Charter, which will formally recognise the rights of carers.

- Provide an extra \$2.5 million to Canberra's volunteers and carers

ACT Labor is acutely conscious that many households are feeling the pinch as the result of rising petrol prices, inflation and interest rate rises. ACT Labor also knows, from conversations with welfare and charity groups, that some households are doing it much tougher than others.

ACT Labor will expand existing grants programs by \$2.5 million to acknowledge the contribution made by volunteers and carers. Eligibility criteria and the timing of applications will be available as part of the grants package. Peak representative organisations for volunteers and carers, arts, cultural and sporting groups and community services will be invited to apply for a share of the funding.

The funds will be distributed to volunteers, carers, foster carers and kinship carers in the form of petrol or bus vouchers to alleviate the increased costs associated with this important community work.