

6/03/2026

Carers Strategy Action Plan Consultation
Ministry of Social Development
PO Box 1556
Wellington 6140

Submission on the Draft Carers' Strategy Action Plan

Tēnā koutou

Age Concern New Zealand He Manaakitanga Kaumātua Aotearoa welcomes the opportunity to submit comments on the *Draft Carers' Strategy Action Plan: Discussion Document*,

Age Concern New Zealand is a member of the New Zealand Carers Alliance and supports the collaborative approach taken across this partnership of 61 not-for-profit organisations with a specific interest in the needs, wellbeing and contribution of carers across Aotearoa. As a member of the Carers Alliance, we support their submission.

We make comment in our submission specifically from the perspective of our mahi with older New Zealanders.

Who we are

Age Concern is a trusted charity working in local communities throughout Aotearoa to support older people, their friends and whānau. Our values – Dignity, Wellbeing, Equity, and Respect for older people are our guiding lights and underpin everything we do. We aim to ensure older New Zealanders get the best advice and support no matter where they live in Aotearoa. With a network of 28 local Age Concerns operating in 38 locations, and a national office based in Wellington, we are the place to go for services and information about issues for older New Zealanders.

We are proud of our heritage in standing up for the rights of older New Zealanders for more than 75 years. As an organisation, our focus is contributing to the overall health and wellbeing of older New Zealanders. We work to prevent the abuse and neglect of older adults; improve their health and wellbeing; reduce loneliness and social isolation; and provide advocacy for older people's rights.

Background

In Aotearoa one in ten New Zealanders are carers looking after someone close to them who needs help with everyday living.¹ The need for a carer may be due to a disability, injury, health condition, mental illness, alcohol or drug issue, illness or frailty.

Being a carer can limit a person's ability to be in the paid workforce, participate in education or training, spend time with friends or take part in social activities in their community. This can lead to social isolation and loneliness.² Carers fulfil a valuable and compassionate role and deserve support to enable them to thrive.

Older adults may require a carer themselves or be the carer for their partner, adult child, grandchild, other family member or friend.

A 2022 survey found that almost 65% of carers were 65+, with almost half caring for another older person.³ The 2023 Census found that women and members of Māori and Pacific communities make up most of the 500,000 unpaid, informal carers in Aotearoa. Carers provide a valuable role enabling others to live their daily lives at home and in the community. They enhance the quality of life of those they care for and contribute significantly to the country's economy through providing unpaid care,

Being a carer is demanding as well as rewarding. Carers need easy and timely access to support such as respite, financial allowances, information and advice.

With Aotearoa's ageing population and people living longer, the demand for informal, unpaid carers will only increase. Initiatives such as the Draft Carer's Action Plan are essential to support carers in the valuable role they play. It is important that actions are implemented, monitored and reviewed so that support is tangible and helpful from a carer's perspective, not just good intentions.

We recognise that not all people caring for a partner, family member or friend would describe themselves as a carer preferring terms such a supporter, support network or provider of manaaki.

Our Responses

Question 1: What do you think of the change to a 'rolling' Action Plan to improve outcomes for carers over the short- and long-term?

¹ <https://www.health.govt.nz/strategies-initiatives/programmes-and-initiatives/carers-in-new-zealand#>:

² <https://www.healthnz.govt.nz/health-topics/conditions-treatments/older-peoples-health/mental-wellbeing-loneliness>

³ <https://carers.net.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/State-of-Caring-Report-Aug2022.pdf>

ACNZ is generally **supportive** of a rolling action plan as many actions and issues are complex and will take multiple years to address and will be ongoing.

Recommendation: A hybrid model may be the best option as some actions lend themselves readily to having an identifiable completion date. This would bring a level of security to the sector where there is some concern that a rolling action plan will reduce organisations' accountability for results.

For example, in the Draft Action Plan in the '*Financial Security* Action Area (Pg 16), the Immediate deliverable of 'Develop a picture of available financial assistance for carers, focusing on levels of support and coverage and including analysis on any gaps and inconsistencies' could readily have a completion date. The deliverable could be broken down into several parts to make realistic dates for components of the task more identifiable. The same would apply to 'Developing a monitoring and reporting framework' under the *Data and Information Action Area* (Pg 17).

Recommendation: It would be useful to add a column to the Action Plan table to indicate who is responsible for the actions. This would add transparency to the plan as well as accountability.

Recommendation: We also would like to see review dates established for the Action Plan and proactive communication on progress identified for transparency.

Question 2: Do you think the set of immediate deliverables are an appropriate first step towards achieving the Action Plan outcomes? How could we make this more effective for you?

We **agree** with the three priority areas in the Draft Action Plan: Recognition and Appreciation; Health and Wellbeing; and Financial Security

We **support** having immediate deliverables identified in the plan but carers and organisations working directly with carers are better placed to assess if the immediate deliverables in the plan are the right ones.

It is always challenging to balance what you want to achieve with the realities of the capacity to deliver those actions and aspirations.

It would be useful for the Ministry of Social Development to confirm that there will be detailed project plans that sit underneath each action plan area.

Question 3: How can government work with communities to implement the Action Plan in the short, medium and long term?

Government will need to be realistic in their expectations of working with communities to implement the Carers' Action Plan.

Recommendation: That Government focuses on working with organisations such as the Carers Alliance and other agencies and key stakeholders that have a focus on carers. Carers themselves are clearly a key stakeholder and can play an important role in shaping how the Actions are achieved.

We express caution about the capacity for communities and carers to contribute further as they already have multiple demands on their time - and in some instances are overwhelmed with the challenge of day-to-day life. Cost of living challenges, access to and availability of local services, and weather events are placing additional strain on communities throughout Aotearoa.

Carers will appreciate they have been consulted about the action plan and will want to be kept informed about progress and be able to shape how the plan continues to unfold.

Recommendation: That Government focuses on achieving actions that will make real and tangible differences for carers before expecting more from them. For example, by ensuring respite care is available when and how carers need it, making it easier for carers to identify and access the financial assistance available to them and the provision of meaningful wellbeing programmes for carers. These tangible results will likely mean more to carers than initiatives such as a National Carer's Appreciation Day even though that may also have value.

Recommendation: That there are transparent and regular communications out to carers and the sector on progress with the Action Plan and any emerging issues.

Question 4: is there anything else that agencies should consider when implementing current actions to ensure what is delivered meets the needs of family, whanau, aiga and individual carers?

The current actions in the Draft Action Plan as they stand do not specify who is responsible for what under each of the Priority Areas. We note too that it is a Government Action Plan. We are keen to work collaboratively across Government and Non-Government sectors. Carers Alliance members can play a role in potentially providing feedback from their mahi with carers to help inform whether what is delivered meets the needs of family, whānau, aiga and individual carers.

Recommendation: That agencies use the feedback received from carers as part of this consultation to identify what will best meet carers' needs. We understand that carers have provided feedback to Government on what their needs are and what would be most beneficial for them.

Recommendation: That agencies find ways to regularly gather input from carers, for example, through a national working group or annual surveys. These initiatives must not be onerous for carers and will need to lead to positive and timely supports that benefit carers and those receiving their care.

Question 5: Many of these actions are intended to form the basis for future actions. What should we consider as we review and form future actions?

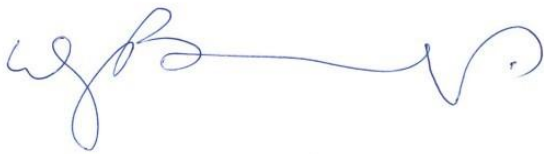
Recommendation: The following issues are important considerations to inform future actions:

- The impact of climate change and severe weather events and any additional supports carers and those they care for may need.
- How technology and access to digital devices and Wi-Fi could be used to support carers. For example, how it could be used to provide wellbeing programmes for carers, information and advice.
- How respite could be provided in more diverse and flexible ways that carers can readily access. Respite options could be co-designed with carers.
- Professional development for GPs, pharmacists, other health professionals and social services so that carers can be advised promptly about the supports available to them and referral pathways enacted.
- How data and information could be shared in easily accessible ways and formats with carers and the sector. For example, with proposed changes to the Census, are updates going to be available more regularly?
- The new Census approach will target various priority populations and find ways to engage with them to ensure their situations are well understood with the aim of informing planning. Carers are a vulnerable group that could be targeted in this way.

Closing comment

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide our submission on the *Draft Carers' Strategy Action Plan*. We are very interested in the outcome of the consultation and look forward to hearing about the themes that come through in the feedback. We look forward to working with the Carers Alliance and Government to ensure carers are valued and supported.

Nāku noa, nā,



Karen Billings-Jensen
Chief Executive
Age Concern New Zealand