

What is a carer?

You or someone you know may be a carer

A carer is someone who helps and supports a family member or friend who needs assistance. This may be a frail older person, an adult or child with a disability, a person with a chronic or mental illness or someone recovering after a long illness or accident.

Carers come from all walks of life - all cultures and all religions. Some are only 10 years of age while others are nearing 90. They may be spouses, parents, sons or daughters, siblings, friends, nieces or nephews or neighbours.

Some are 'full-time' carers while others balance both a job and caring responsibilities. Most live with the person they care for although some live nearby or are caring from a distance. More carers are women but there are many men who are carers too.

It can be difficult to identify a carer because some don't use this word to describe themselves - many do not receive a Carer Payment or Carer Allowance from Centrelink. Nevertheless, they are still carers.

*"Once I was acknowledged as a carer
I felt better about myself and what I was doing."*

What do carers do?

The role of each carer is different depending on the needs of the person they care for. Carers may help with some or all of the following:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> shopping | <input type="checkbox"/> walking | <input type="checkbox"/> bathing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> banking | <input type="checkbox"/> sitting and rising | <input type="checkbox"/> dressing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> housework | <input type="checkbox"/> organising appointments | <input type="checkbox"/> grooming |
| <input type="checkbox"/> gardening | <input type="checkbox"/> transporting | <input type="checkbox"/> toileting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> preparing meals | <input type="checkbox"/> reminding | <input type="checkbox"/> putting to bed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> eating | <input type="checkbox"/> communicating | <input type="checkbox"/> getting up |
| <input type="checkbox"/> medications | <input type="checkbox"/> therapy. | |

*"Caring for my wife is far more time consuming than I expected.
I'm 24-hours on call."*

Of course there are many things that carers do which are not listed here including comforting, encouraging and reassuring their family member, closely monitoring their safety, helping their family member to maintain as much independence as possible and overseeing their health and wellbeing.

It's very important that carers look after their own health too.

How and why do people become carers?

People become carers in different ways. This may happen:

- gradually - by helping out more and more over time; or
- suddenly - after a health crisis (for example, a stroke).

It's not uncommon for carers to feel that they didn't really have a choice about taking on a caring role. This is particularly so for spouses, who often see caring as a natural extension of their relationship. Many feel it is what they 'should' do.



The expectations of family and others can also weigh heavily. Even in large families the responsibility of providing care is often left to one person rather than being shared. As caring can be a challenging and all-consuming role, carers need the support of family and friends.

*"Caring has been left to me - because I live near Dad.
I accept this, but would welcome help sometimes."*

Many carers say that despite the challenges (for example tiredness, conflicting emotions, less opportunities to socialise or work and minimal family support) they would do it all again.

Caring can bring a great sense of satisfaction. It may allow carers to prove themselves, strengthen their relationship with the person they care for and gain their appreciation - these can be strong incentives for taking on a caring role.

When do carers stop being carers?

In most situations caring does not cease - it simply changes.

Even when caring at home is no longer possible carers may continue this role with their family member in residential care - that is, in low or high level care which used to be called hostels or nursing homes.

Further information:

- ▣ [Gradually becoming a carer](#) - information sheet.
- ▣ [Suddenly becoming a carer](#) - information sheet.
- ▣ [Things to consider when taking on a caring role](#) - information sheet.

Contact the [Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre](#) on 1800 242 636* to request the above information sheets be sent to you - or to find out about other information sheets in this series.

*Free call except from mobile phones. Mobile calls at mobile rates.

We do our best to keep these links up to date, but the internet changes all the time. If you can no longer access any of the above resources, please go to our [Internet Troubleshooting Guide](#), or email us at website@carersvic.org.au