

No other group works as hard or contributes as much to the economy yet receives as little recognition or financial reward as Australia's carers. Our society owes a profound debt to those who care for others day-to-day and we must do all we can to lessen the burdens placed on them.

Young carers face significant barriers to employment, education and training, and even to participating in community life. Young carers require targeted assistance to ensure the risks of isolation, stress, depression, poverty and reduced opportunities they experience are minimised.

As our population ages, so too do our carers, with many continuing their physically and mentally challenging work well into later years. As they capacity to continue caring diminishes, specific strategies are essential to ensure support, respite and appropriate accommodation options are available.

The Democrats strongly support a better deal for people with disability and their carers.

In 2009 the government asked the Productivity Commission to conduct a feasibility study into a *National Long-term Care and Support Scheme*, due in July 2011. We call for this to be fast-tracked – such schemes are in use in other countries and, bearing in mind the fact that the work of carers is estimated to be \$17b, a scheme here is surely justified.

Our Plan

- Introduce a national disability insurance scheme
- Establish a **National Office for Carers** with responsibility to develop a national carer framework and advise on the impact of new policies on carers

..... caring for our **Carers**

- Increase the rate of **carer payment** to 75% of the standard minimum wage and double the rate of the **carer allowance**
- Extend the eligibility for the carer bonus to other carers who receive the Carer Allowance and who also receive Centrelink income support, particularly carers who are recipients of the Aged Pension and sole parent benefits
- Introduce simplified, **less invasive eligibility** assessments
- Explore the introduction of a Carer **Superannuation Scheme**
- Fund a carer **health** program
- Increase tax concessions for carering-related **expenses**
- Increase access to **employment, education and training** without fear of losing financial assistance
- Support the right to **flexible work hours** and part time work for carers
- Establish a national one-stop carer **workforce participation gateway**, an Employers for Carers program, provide financial and other incentives to encourage employers to participate
- Set up a uniform system in states and territories with reciprocal and transferable arrangements for **concessions** afforded to carers accompanying people with disabilities
- Additional support to carers providing in home care through **30% higher Home & Community Care** funding, abolishing HACC charges, increased and more flexible access to respite care
- Have a prioritised focus on the unique needs of both **older and younger carers** and those in rural and regional areas
- A nationally coordinated response to unmet need in **accommodation**, respite and personal attendant services with population-based benchmark funding
- Increase funding for **carer advocacy** and support organisations and programs that aim to reduce isolation and represent carer needs to government policy makers
- Fund a specific national carer **research** program