

## The ACT needs to better support carers moving out of the caring role

### We believe that Canberrans should be able to:

- Feel supported as they navigate the emotional challenges of leaving their caring role.
- Have a say in the choices that affect them, with their experiences and emotions validated throughout and after the caring journey.
- Receive specialised support that acknowledges the emotional toll of caring and bereavement, especially in the context of Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD).



In the ACT more than 58,000 people provide care. Carers provide an important role in the family and in the broader community, supporting the quality of life of the person they care for.

Carers are at increased risk of developing mental ill health, including prolonged grief disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation, depression and anxiety following the death of a care-recipient.

## The Problem

- Caring is an emotionally demanding role, with carers often experiencing loneliness and a lack of social support, especially when their caring responsibilities are high.
- Upon the death of the person they care for, carers frequently experience complicated feelings of guilt, grief, and loss. Many lose their sense of identity, having dedicated themselves entirely to their caring role.
- Despite these risks, carers in the ACT currently have access to carer counselling services only within the first six months of bereavement through the National Carer Gateway, often leaving them with unresolved grief and inadequate support.
- The introduction of Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) in the ACT highlights the unique psychological challenges faced by carers involved in such decisions, increasing their risk of complex grief and mental ill health.



## The Solution

We want investment in specific bereavement counselling for carers exiting their role, independent of Federal Carer Gateway funding. This will ensure that carers, even those identified or self-identifying late in the palliative process, can access the support they need. We also envisage integrating carer counselling specific to VAD and VAD bereavement into the legislated Care Navigator Service.

As one of the last places to implement Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD), the ACT has a unique opportunity to learn from the experiences of other jurisdictions and set a new standard for carer support. We want an ACT where carers receive the recognition and support they deserve as they transition out of their caring role. By offering specialised bereavement counselling, especially for those involved in VAD, the ACT can lead the way in ensuring carers' emotional wellbeing is prioritised during this critical period.

## Legislative and Policy Frameworks

- **Carers Recognition Act 2021 (ACT)** – Carers should have their social wellbeing and health recognised in matters relating to the care relationship. The proposed bereavement counselling aligns with this by providing timely, responsive, appropriate, respectful, and accessible support during and after the caring role ends.
- **ACT Wellbeing Framework** – The proposed bereavement counselling program supports key domains including Health, by addressing the mental health challenges that carers face during and after their caring role; Social Connection, by helping carers maintain or rebuild their social networks and reducing isolation during a critical transition period; and Access and connectivity, by providing targeted support that acknowledges the deep emotional impact of caring and bereavement.
- **Inquiry into the Recognition of Unpaid Carers in Australia** – The final report recommends that the Australian Government examine how to increase access to high-quality counselling and mental health support options for a diverse range of carers. The inquiry also suggests further work to ensure carers' health and wellbeing are supported holistically, with carers being prioritised in the healthcare system and other settings. This proposed program directly addresses these recommendations by offering tailored support to carers, especially those involved in VAD processes.