



2010 Federal Election: Don't Wait – Our Future is Now!

A guide to getting involved in our election campaign

On 17 July 2010 Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced that the next Federal Election was to take place on 21 August 2010. The five-week election campaign has begun and the parties will be competing for your vote.

Carers have a significant role to play in the future of our country and they must be better looked after. Their vote is important and we would ask you to consider how parties and candidates will support family carers if elected. The implications for our health and community care systems if carers are not supported are as serious as any predicted climate change impacts and require a nationally coordinated approach.

Getting to the polls on Election Day is important, but there are also additional steps you can take to make sure your voice is heard this election.

What has happened since the last federal election?

There have been some important developments in government policy for carers since the 2007 election, many of these will lead to positive outcomes but there's still more work that needs to be done.

- The government increased the base rate of Carer Payment and other Centrelink pensions with a focus on single pension recipients.
- The government introduced legislation to ensure the one-off annual 'Carer Bonus' payment, for carers who receive Carer Payment and/or Carer Allowance, will be paid every year in July as a 'Carer Supplement' at a rate of \$600. The Carer Supplement is now guaranteed in law.
- The *Inquiry into Better Support for Carers* was held and the government provided their response. Carers Australia was disappointed that many recommendations were not supported.
- The government announced its commitment to the development of National Carer Recognition Framework at the Carers Week 2009 launch in October. This broader national government framework for carers that was to include national legislation, a national strategy and a national action plan, providing guidelines for government services and public servants.

The legislation— the National Carer Recognition Bill, was introduced to parliament but did not pass through both houses and has now lapsed. Carers Australia wants assurance any elected government will recommit to this legislation.

- Improvements have been made to the application and qualification process for Carer Payment (child). Carers Australia are asking for similar improvements to Carer Payment (adult).
- Improvements have been made to the taxation laws regarding Special Disability Trusts.
- Carers have been recognised under the government's Social Inclusion Agenda under one of the six priority areas for social inclusion. Young carers were also recognised as being at risk of social exclusion.
- Changes have been introduced to the Fair Work legislation, granting carers of a child with a disability under the age of 16 the right to request flexible work arrangements.
- Young carers have been included under the government's National Youth Strategy.
- The government has announced two Productivity Commission inquiries into
 - the feasibility of a Long-term Care and Support Scheme
 - Caring for Older Australians.

These inquiries are to be carried out the Productivity Commission and are currently underway.

What is Carers Australia doing?

Carers Australia has produced a comprehensive campaign package to encourage politicians, parliamentarians and the general public, to think seriously about the needs of carers and how they can be better supported. We will also be looking for the support of all carers to ensure that politicians hear the concerns of family carers loud and clear.

To raise public awareness of the politicians that support family carers, and those that do not, Carers Australia will be sending our comprehensive campaign package to politicians. This package will include postcards that ask them to indicate their support across our three key areas. We will then reveal their responses for the public to view on our election website www.carersaustraliaelection2010.com.au

More information on our election package is available at the election website. We would encourage you to follow the progress of the campaign online.

What are our main election messages?

Carers Australia's campaign for this election is based on the theme **Don't Wait – Our Future is Now!**

This slogan is designed to alert politicians and the community to the need to urgently support carers, that carers of all ages are concerned their voice is not being heard and that there is an expectation that they will simply keep caring.

Until now, successive governments have taken an "all talk and little action" approach, with much rhetoric instead of real support. We now need concrete measures that meet carers' needs and provide them with choice.

We are asking that politicians voice their support for action under **three key areas**

- supporting carers now and into the future
- supporting carers' long-term financial security
- supporting young carers

We are putting forward the following **actions** to address these issues

- increased investment in a range of carer support programs including counselling, education and training, respite and advocacy – to ensure a nationally consistent approach
- a serious commitment to a long-term care and support scheme to increase quality consumer-directed services, packages of care with individualised budgets that support both the carer and the person needing care
- the acknowledgment of the role and skills of carers in any reforms of the health, disability, aged care and mental health systems
- a trial and evaluation of a carer identification field in primary health care provider software
- the recognition of the specific groups of carers requiring support and the development of resources and health programs for these groups
- a commitment for increased and ongoing Commonwealth Government investment in social housing that meets the needs of people with disabilities, mental illness and is affordable, accessible and addresses the concerns of families
- a commitment to the introduction of National Carer Recognition legislation
- an urgent and comprehensive review of the cost of caring with a view to developing a strategy and scheme to better support families with the additional costs they face
- the introduction of a Carers Superannuation Scheme for carers receiving Carer Payment and sole parent carers on Centrelink income support funded by the Federal Government of at least 9 per cent equivalent of the federal minimum wage for eligible carers
- a greater government investment in affordable, accessible, quality and flexible 'day care' to allow carers to participate in the workforce
- an amendment to the Fair Work Act to allow all carers the right to request flexible working arrangements
- the introduction of programs specifically designed for carers to assist them re-enter the workforce if that is their choice.
- a family approach to service delivery and support for young carers
- an urgent review of the '25 hour rule' eligibility criteria for carer payment for young carers in full time study
- a broad-ranging national awareness campaign aimed at assisting young carers identify and ensuring professionals are aware of the support they need
- an immediate and substantial increase in funding for the Young Carers Respite and Information Services Program.

What can you do?

We need your support for our campaign. We would like all carers across the country to get behind the messages we will be taking to government to make this election and the upcoming term of a new government a milestone in the pursuit of better outcomes for carers.

Many carers are natural lobbyists, and already have a clear idea about what is missing and what would make their lives better or have clearly experienced the need for better support in their own lives. When lobbying, it's important to think about your own experience and what you need to improve things – what things are important to you?

Everyone has their own style and their own set of circumstances to consider when lobbying for change. We would encourage you to get as involved as you feel you can, in a way that suits you.

You could take some of the following steps to express your support and ideas on the issues.

- Get in touch with your local MP – write a letter or email expressing your thoughts on how carers can be better supported, what they need and why. You may be able to meet with them and can often request this in writing.
- Talk to the media – there may be a radio show about carer issues or the election, call in and put forward your opinion.
- Talk to the people you know – just discussing the issues with others can get people thinking and supporting carers, this could include telling other carers you know about the campaign.
- Send Carers Australia your thoughts – write or email, we want to know what you think about the issues, we can then take these comments directly to Federal ministers and politicians. You can also send us your comments on our election website www.carersaustraliaelection2010.com.au
- Get in touch with your local Carers Association– call or email and ask if there are ways you can get involved at a local level. They may be planning interviews with the media or other events and need carer participants.

Remember your lobbying doesn't have to take place only during the election. Even after the election has passed, talking to your local representative about carer issues or writing a letter can lead to action

Where to find out about your parliamentary candidates

Information about your local member and which electorate you belong to can be found on the Australian Electoral Commission website www.aec.gov.au or by calling the electoral commission on **13 23 26**.

You can also contact any of party's head offices for advice on the candidates that are standing for election in your electorate. They should also be able to provide you with contact details. Website addresses for the three major parties are included at the end of this document.

Once you know who they are, many candidates have their own websites that provide their contact details.

Campaigning advice from a politician

Recently, Annette Ellis MP attended a meeting to teach our Carer Ambassadors about ways to improve their lobbying skills

If you do write to, or meet with a parliamentarian, you may want to consider the following hints provided by Annette Ellis MP.

- There is no added value in contacting anyone who isn't your local representative if you're an individual. (Carers Australia can contact federal ministers about broader issues).
- If you meet with an MP do your research – The Parliament of Australia website (www.aph.gov.au) has archives of political speeches where you can learn of your local MP's interests.
- If you meet with an MP leave something with them – something like a document with key information that you can use to start a discussion.
- Humanise your approach, try to connect directly with them and relate your points to the local community if possible.
- Work out the most important thing that you want them to understand – keep it simple.
- If you have demands, make them concise. It's also important to acknowledge any good work already done by government and balance this against your demands.

Tell us about your experiences

Let us know the outcomes of your campaigning and lobbying, particularly if you have a very positive or negative experience. This information can help us in our campaigning work and let us advise other carers about successful ways to campaign. You can write to Carers Australia by email at caa@carersaustralia.com.au or write to our postal address.

Media release

Media releases are another good way to show your support for the *Don't Wait – Our Future is Now* campaign. If you or your group or organisation would like to write a media release in support of the campaign, template has been included on the next page to assist you

Useful websites

Carers Australia
www.carersaustralia.com.au

Labor Party Website
www.alp.org.au

Carers Australia Election 2010 Campaign
www.carersaustraliaelection2010.com.au

Liberal Party Website
www.liberal.org.au

The Australian Electoral Commission
www.aec.gov.au

The Australian Greens Website
www.greens.org.au

Australian Parliament House
www.aph.gov.au

You can find out what positions the different parties take on carers by reading their **party platforms** and **election strategies** – these can be found at the party websites above.

Media Release

[date]

Don't Wait – Our Future is Now! Family carers need real support this election

[Insert name of your organisation/your name] is part of the voice calling on political parties and leaders to commit to better support for carers this election by supporting *Don't Wait – Our Future is Now!*, the election campaign of Carers Australia.*

Over the years, successive governments have not fully addressed the crucial need to provide support to meet the needs of the diversity of family carers. Carers are tired of rhetoric and promises.

Don't Wait – Our Future is Now! outlines realistic and achievable actions across three key areas

- Supporting family carers now and into the future
- Supporting family carers' long-term financial security
- Supporting young carers

"[If organisation insert name of organisation publishing the media release, is proud/if an individual insert I am proud] to support this election campaign and its actions. It is essential that every candidate in the Federal Election clearly states their stance on supporting carers and the actions they will take on carer issues," said [insert name of representative].

"Carers Australia's election campaign provides candidates with a clear direction on how to better support carers and [I/we] would encourage politicians to take account of it."

Carers are a vital part of our aged, community care, health and mental health sectors and the support they provide is essential to the people they care for and our communities.

2.6 million family carers will take their views to the polls and that can mean the difference between winning or losing a seat in many electorates. Candidates need their votes.

For media enquiries contact [insert relevant name and contact number]

* Carers Australia is the national peak body representing the diversity of Australia's unpaid family carers. More information about their campaign *Don't Wait – Our Future is Now* is available at www.carersaustraliaelection2010.com.au

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