

# Local Government Supporting Carers Survey Report

2021

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The MAV is the statutory peak body for local government in Victoria. While this document aims to broadly reflect the activities of local government, it does not purport to reflect the breadth of views of individual councils across the state.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	4
Who is a Carer? .....	4
Why Support Carers? .....	4
Legislation and Policy Context .....	5
Local Government Activity Supporting Carers in Victoria .....	7
State-wide Snapshot .....	7
Findings from Survey Responses.....	11
National Carers Week .....	25
Conclusion .....	27



# INTRODUCTION

It is estimated there are over 700,000 carers living in Victorian communities. Supports to carers are provided by a wide range of organisations including government agencies, health practitioners and volunteer organisations

Victorian councils provide support to carers through a range of initiatives including programs, providing spaces to meet, directly supporting Neighbourhood Houses and carers groups. Some councils have established policies to guide their support to staff who are carers and to guide their support to carers and carers groups in the community.

This report provides an overview of council and broader policy settings, programs and other initiatives that support carers in local communities across the state. The research utilised a combination of desktop reviews of all 79 council websites and survey responses received from 27 councils.

## Who is a Carer?

A carer is someone who provides unpaid care and support to family members and friends with a disability, mental illness, chronic health issue or age-related condition. Carers come from all walks of life, all cultures, and all religions. Some are only 10 years old while others are nearing 90. They may be spouses, parents, sons or daughters, siblings, friends, nieces or nephews or neighbours (Carers Victoria).

## Why Support Carers?

Carers play a special role in our community providing much needed assistance and emotional support to the people they care for including help with physical tasks, healthcare (administering medication and managing appointments), education, recreation and transport and property maintenance. They also provide emotional, social and communication support to those they care for.

In addition, carers also make a positive contribution to the economy with an estimated annual cost of replacing the support provided by Victorian carers of around \$15 billion. Through their day to day roles, carers often contribute their skills in problem solving, multi-tasking and managing complex social and medical systems that people requiring care face.

# LEGISLATION & POLICY CONTEXT

A range of legislative and policy settings exist at the national, state, and local level to support carers.

## National Level

### ***Carer Recognition Act 2010***

The [Carer Recognition Act 2010](#) aims to increase recognition and awareness of the role carers play in providing daily care and support to people with a disability, medical conditions, mental illness or who are frail or aged.

## State Level

### ***Carers Recognition Act 2012***

The [Carers Recognition Act 2012](#) formally recognises and values the role of carers and the importance of care relationships in the Victorian community. It came into effect on 1 July 2012.

Overseen by the Department of Family, Fairness and Housing the Act has been developed to recognise, promote, and value the role of people in care relationships; recognise the different needs of persons in care relationships; support and recognise that care relationships bring benefits to people in care relationships and to the community; and enact care relationship principles to promote understanding of the significance of care relationships.

The Act specifies obligations for state government agencies, local government, and other organisations that interact with people in care relationships. It defines a carer as someone who provides care to another person and includes carers under the age of 18. Carers can provide care for a person who:

- has a disability
- has a mental illness
- has an ongoing medical condition or
- is an older person with care needs.

For more information read the factsheet [What the Carer Recognition Act 2012 Says](#) and Minister Wooldridge's [Second Reading Speech](#) 8 February 2012

### **Victorian Carer Strategy 2018-22**

[Recognising and supporting Victoria's carers: Victorian carer strategy 2018–22](#) is a whole-of-government strategy to support carers in their own right. It provides a framework for the state government to support carers, and addresses the unique and specific needs of carers across a wide range of areas including:

- employment,
- health,
- education and
- financial disadvantage.

## **Local Level**

As stated above local government has obligations under the *Carer Recognition Act 2012*. These include:

- Understanding and implementing the Care Relationship Principles outlined in Part 2 of the Act
- Meeting the obligations outlined in Part 3 of the Act
- Preparation of a report on compliance with the obligations in the Act to be included in council's annual report.

The Act has implications for council departments providing support or services to people being cared for or providing care; human resources managers responsible for staff training; managers of council services or facilities where council staff might interact with people being cared for and their carers.

Personal carers leave for local government employees is provided for in the [National Employment Standards](#) (NES). All 79 Victorian council Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBAs) include leave entitlements in line with the NES. These generally apply to immediate family and household members. Some councils extend this to include significant other persons. Family Violence clauses can allow for carers leave to support a person who is experiencing family violence.

The [Local Government Act 2020](#) has a number of provisions to support Councillors who have a caring role, including leave and other entitlements.

Councils can participate in the [Victorian Support for Carers Program](#) which provides respite and other support to carers of people with care needs.

Councils traditionally have provided the bulk of their respite activities through the Home and Community Care Program (HACC) and Home and Community Care Program for Young People (HACCPYP). Recent changes announced by the Commonwealth to the funding model for HACC and HACCPYP have made ongoing involvement of councils in this program uncertain which may impact the carer support they provide in the future.

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY SUPPORTING CARERS IN VICTORIA

## State-wide Snapshot

A desktop review of all council websites undertaken in April/May 2021 provided information on council policy settings and programs to support carers in each municipality across Victoria. The data presented in this section is indicative only, as the website searches may not have captured the breadth of council policies, activities, or programs that councils are involved in to support carers.

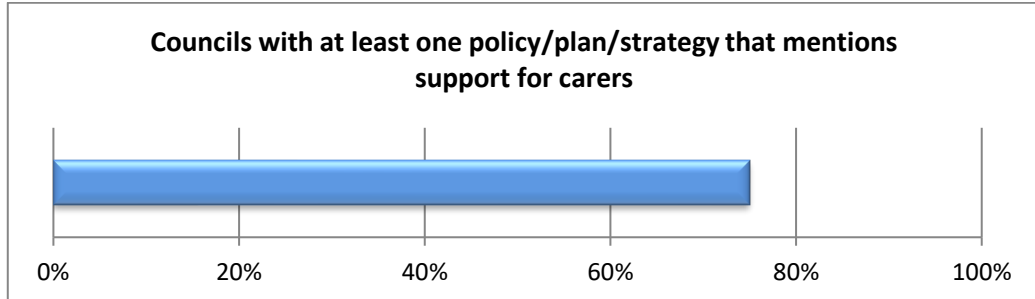
### **Council Policies and Plans Supporting Carers**

Three-quarters of Victorian councils (59 councils) have at least one strategy/plan or policy that mentions support for carers.

The majority of these are found in council disability access and inclusion plans (59% of councils), followed by active/positive ageing strategies (30% of councils). Some councils also mention supporting carers in their Municipal Early Years Strategies and youth strategies (16% and 8% of councils respectively); although it must be noted most youth strategies focus on supporting parents/carers of young people rather than young people as carers. A number of Council Plans and Health and Wellbeing Plans (14%) also acknowledge the important role of carers and providing support to them.

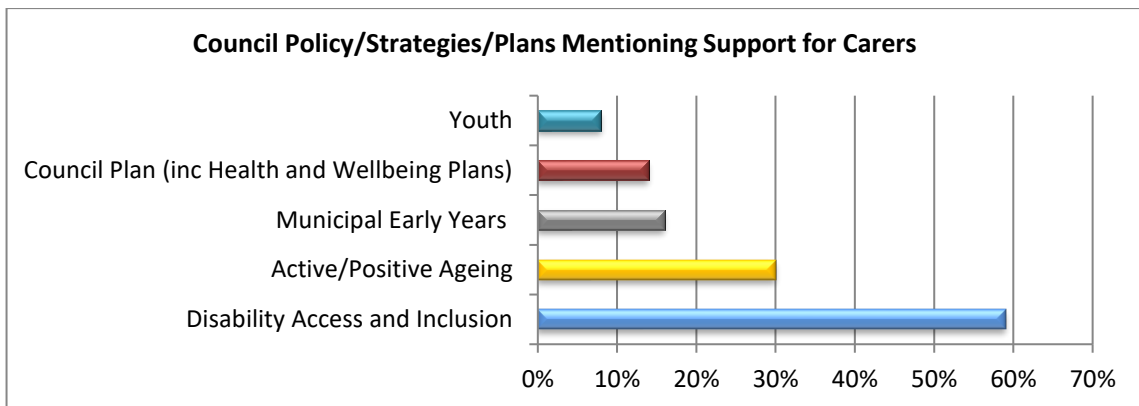
Note: The policy/strategy or plan had to do more than refer to a legislative requirement to be considered in these figures.





**Table 1: Policy/Plan/Strategy mentioning support for carers**

# of Councils | 59 (75%)



**Table 2: Council Policy/Strategies/Plans Mentioning Support for Carers**

	Disability Access and Inclusion Policy	Older Person/Age Friendly Policy	Youth Policy	Municipal Early Years Plan	Council Plan
Councils	47 (59%)	24 (30%)	6 (8%)	13 (16%)	11 (14%)



## Information for Carers

At least 28 per cent of councils (22 councils) have easily accessible information for carers on their websites. Information is generally made available as links to external organisations and supports.

(NB: This information had to be easily found through a search on a council website for it to be included in the figures.)

## Programs Supporting Carers

At least 81 per cent of councils provide programs or activities to support carers. The bulk of this activity is in the form of respite services delivered through Home and Community Care (HACC) and HACCPYP (Program for Young People).

Other programs and supports provided by councils include provision of spaces for carers to meet, counselling services (such as those provided by Youth Services), library programs, book clubs, exercise programs, programs through Men's Sheds and senior citizen centres and accessible events (i.e., events that are accessible to carers and the person they care for so they can enjoy activities together – e.g. disability access, spaces for people with autism etc). Carers also had greater opportunity to be involved in a wide range of council programs as they moved online as a result of the Chief Health Officer Directions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

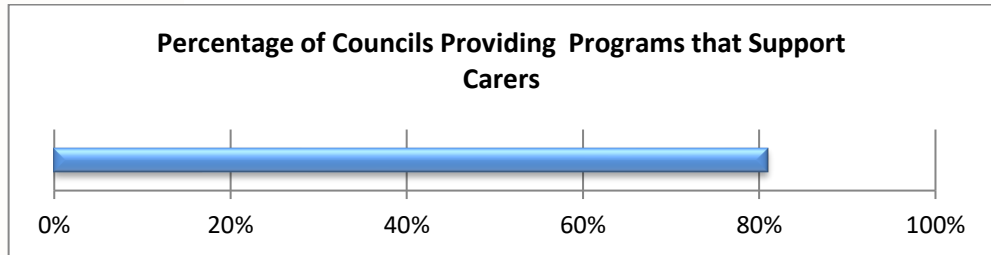
## Companion and Care Cards

The vast majority of councils (95%) support the use of companion cards and carer cards in their municipalities. The cards can provide the recipient with a range of discounts and other benefits when accessing council services, such as council facilities and events.

## Victorian Support for Carers Program

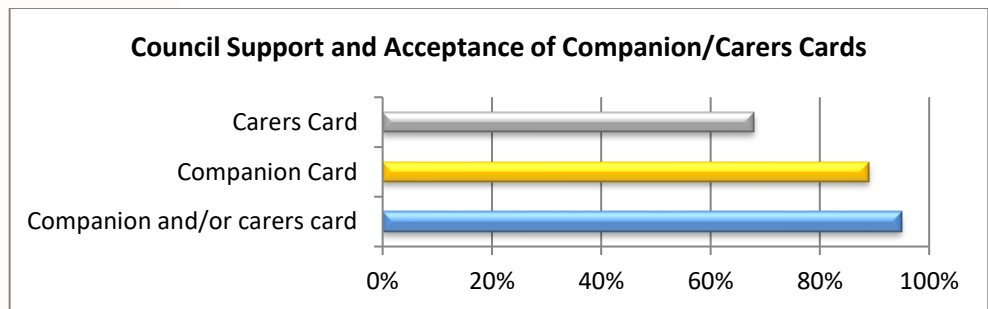
Sixteen councils are service providers through the Victorian Support for Carers Program. The Program provides respite, other services and supports for all Victorian carers.

**Graphs and Tables: Websites, Programs and Companion/Carers Cards**



**Table 4: Programs that Support Carers**

# of Councils	64 (81%)
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**Table 5: Council Support and Acceptance of Companion/Carers Card**

	Companion Card	Carers Card	One or Both Cards
Councils	69 (89%)	54 (68%)	74 (95%)

## Findings from Survey Responses

The MAV sent the Local Government Supporting Carers Survey to all councils in April/May 2021 to better understand how local government in Victoria supports carers. The survey considered policy settings, council delivered programs and activities and local government involvement in National Carer's Week. Just over one-third of Victorian councils (34% - 27 councils) responded to the survey. The responses included a cross section of council types from metropolitan to interface and rural/regional councils.

### **Council Policy/Plans/Strategies Supporting Carers**

The majority of responding councils (85%) have at least one council plan/strategy or policy that mentions carers and support for them.

Over half of all responding councils (56%) had support for carers mentioned in their Access and Inclusion Plans and Older Person/Age Friendly Plans. Over one third of councils (37%) mention carers in their Disability Access Plans (beyond explaining legislative responsibilities). Thirty per cent of Municipal Early Years Plans and 11 per cent of Youth Strategies include supporting carers. Almost a quarter of responding councils (22%) mentioned carers in other strategies/plans/policies including Council Plans and Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plans.

Graphs and Tables: Responses by Type, Programs and Policies/Plans and Strategies

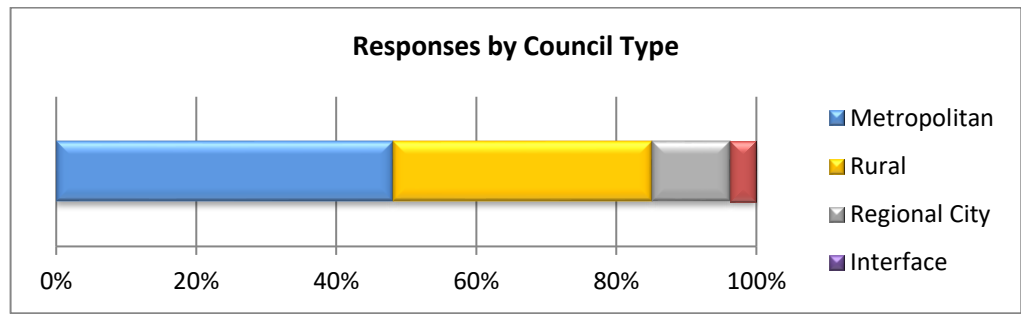


Table 6: Responses by council type

	Metropolitan	Interface	Rural	Regional City
Councils	13 (48%)	1 (4%)	10 (37%)	3 (11%)

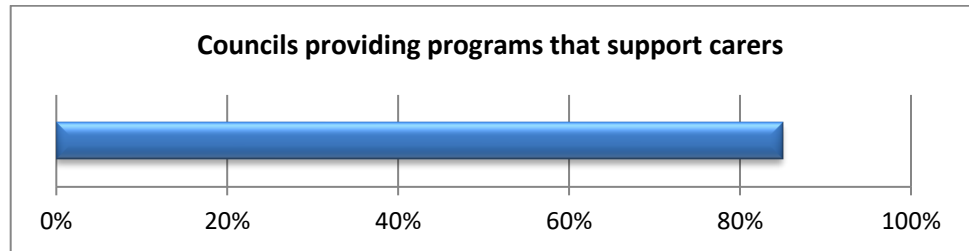


Table 7: Programs that Support Carers

# of Councils	23 (85%)
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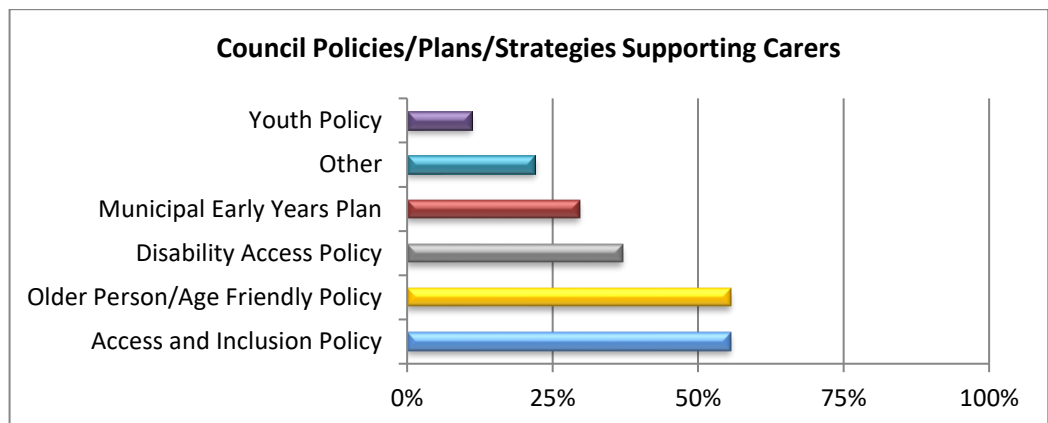


Table 8: Council Policies/Plans/Strategies Supporting Carers

	Disability Access	Access and Inclusion	Older Person/Age Friendly	Youth	Municipal Early Years	Other
Council	10 (37%)	15 (56%)	15 (56%)	3 (11%)	8 (30%)	6 (22%)

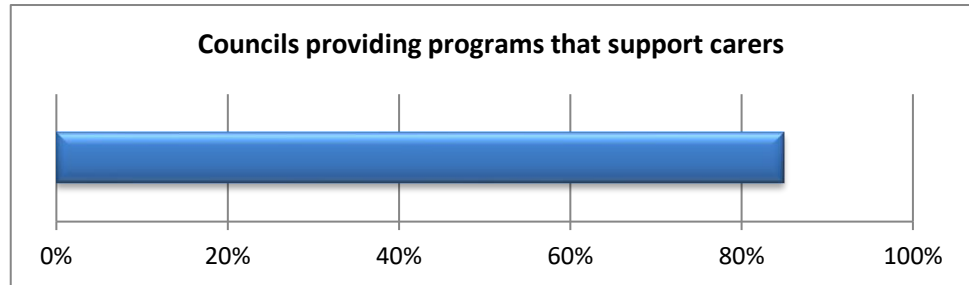
## Programs

The majority of responding councils (85%) provide program/s to support carers.

The supports offered by councils are targeted at a range of carer groups in the community including:

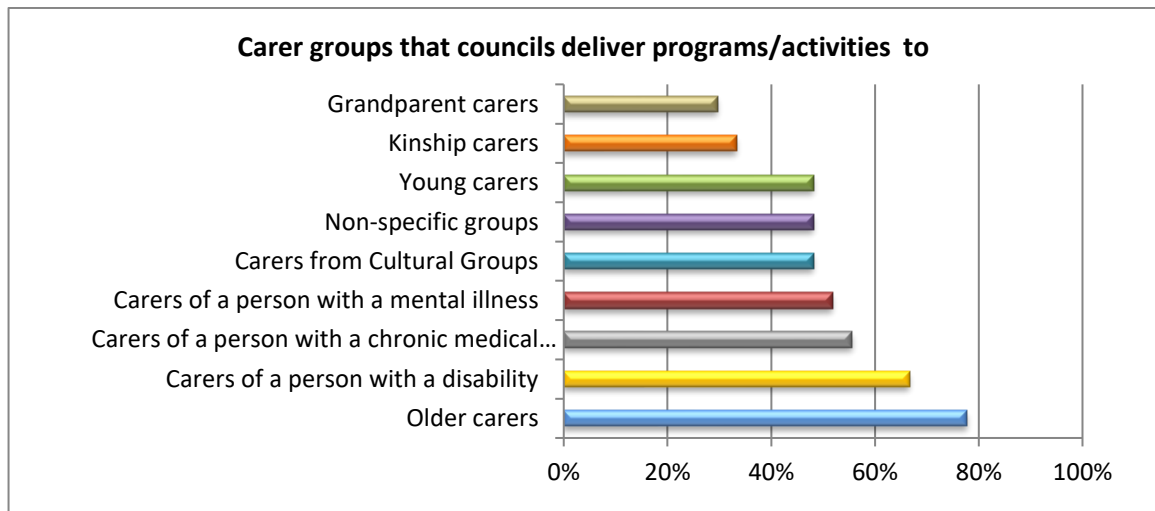
- Older carers (78%)
- Carers of a person with a disability (67%)
- Carers of a person with a chronic medical condition (56%)
- Carers of a person with a mental illness (52%)
- Cultural Groups (48%)
- General/non-targeted programs (48%)
- Young carers (48%)
- Kinship carers (33%)
- Grandparent carers (30%)

The programs and activities provided by councils to these groups is further explored in the following pages.



**Table 9: Programs that Support Carers**

Councils | 23 (85%)



**Table 10: Carer Groups that Councils Deliver Programs/Activities to**

	Older carers	Carers for person with a disability	Carers for Person with chronic medical condition	Carers for Person with a mental illness	Carers from Cultural Groups	Non-specific groups	Young carers	Kinship carers	Grandparent carers
Councils	21(78%)	18 (67%)	15 (56%)	14 (52%)	13 (48%)	13 (48%)	13 (48%)	9 (33%)	8 (30%)

## **Programs for Older Carers**

Over three quarters of responding councils (78%) provide at least one program for older carers in their municipality. Of these the majority of programs (86%) are in the form of regular/occasional information provision. Two-thirds (67%) provide ongoing respite services to older carers. Over half (57%) of these councils regularly or occasionally partner with another organisation to deliver programs.

## **Programs for Carers of a person with a disability**

Two thirds of responding councils (67%) provide programs for carers of a person with a disability. Of these almost all (94%) provide regular/occasional information to carers. More than half (55%) provide ongoing/occasional respite care. Sixty-one per cent partner with another provider to deliver programs and 39% of councils providing programs to carers of a person with a disability facilitate/convene group activities to support them.

Graphs and Tables: Programs for Older Carers and Carers of a Person with a Disability

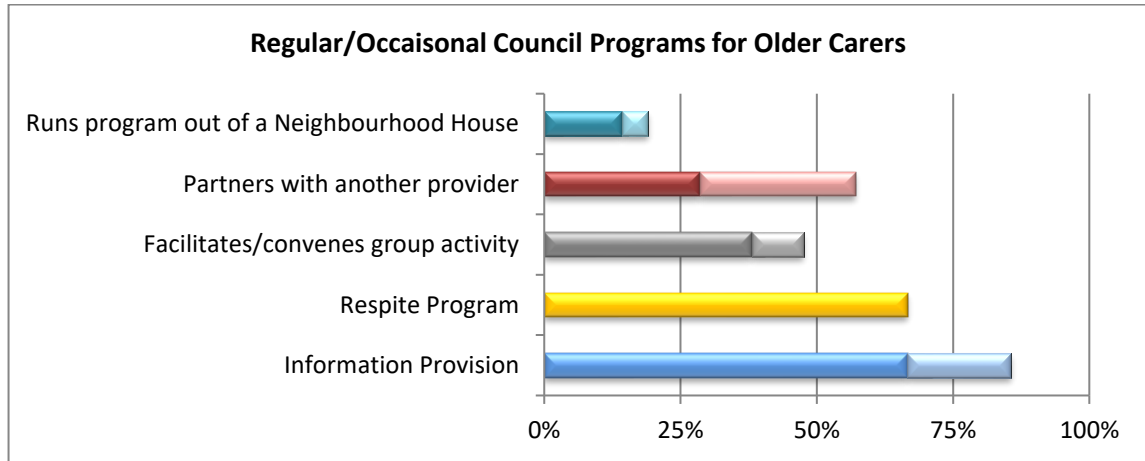


Table 11: Council Programs for Older Carers (21 councils)

	Information provision	Respite Programs	Facilitates/convenes group activity	Neighbourhood House	Partners
ongoing/regular	14 (67%)	14 (14%)	8 (38%)	3 (14%)	6 (29%)
occasional	4 (19%)	0	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	6 (29%)

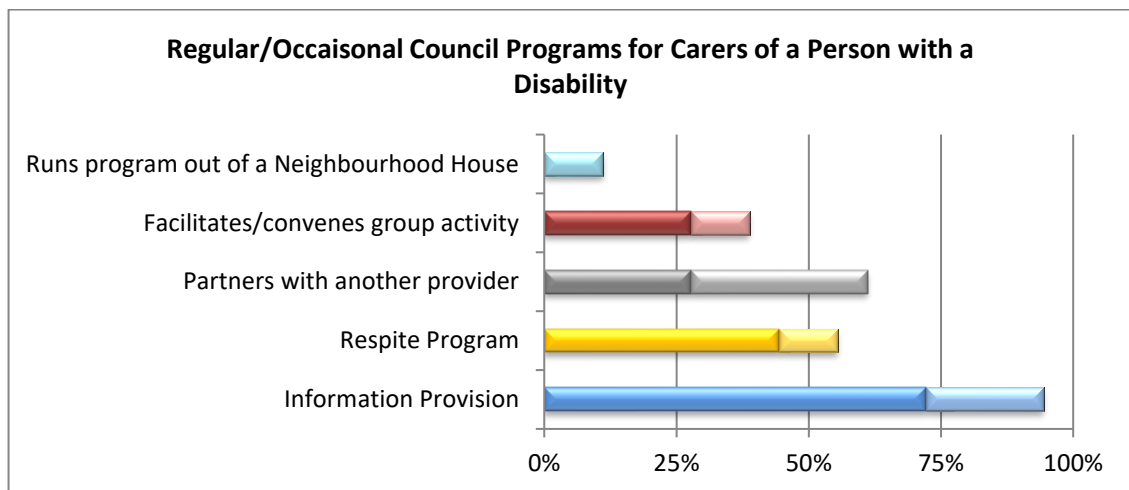


Table 12: Council Programs for Carers of a person with a disability (18 councils)

	Information provision	Respite Programs	Facilitates/convenes group activity	Neighbourhood House	Partners
ongoing/regular	13 (72%)	8 (44%)	5 (28%)	0	5 (28%)
occasional	4 (22%)	2 (11%)	2 (11%)	2 (11%)	6 (33%)



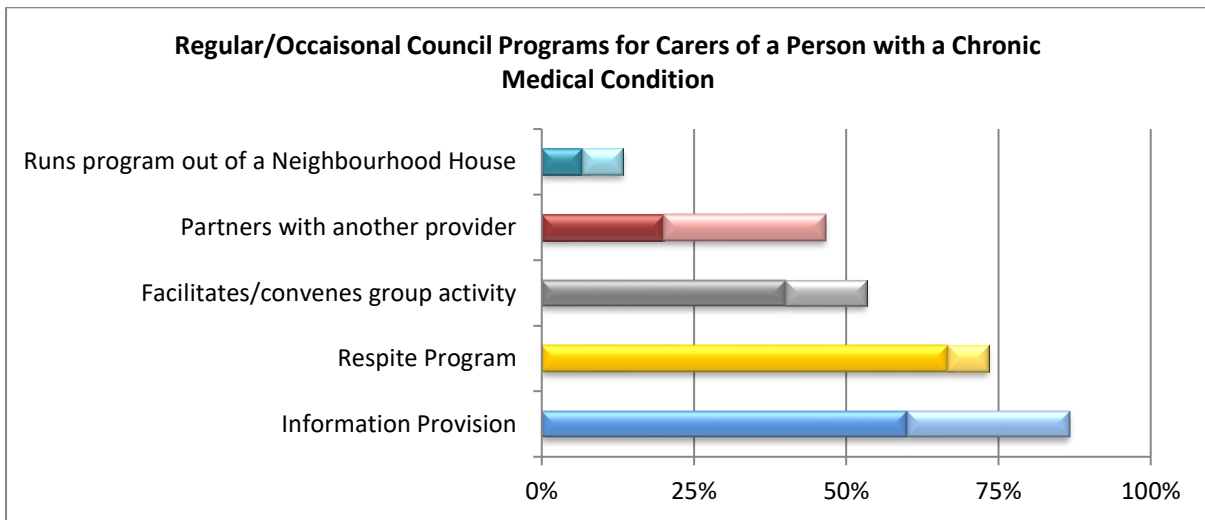
### **Carers of a person with a chronic medical condition**

Over half of responding councils (57%) deliver regular/occasional programs to support carers of a person with a chronic medical condition. The majority of these councils (87%) provide information to carers on a regular/occasional basis. Around three quarters (74%) of these councils provide regular/occasional respite to carers; and just over half (53%) facilitate/convene group activities on a regular/occasional basis.

### **Carers of a person with a mental illness**

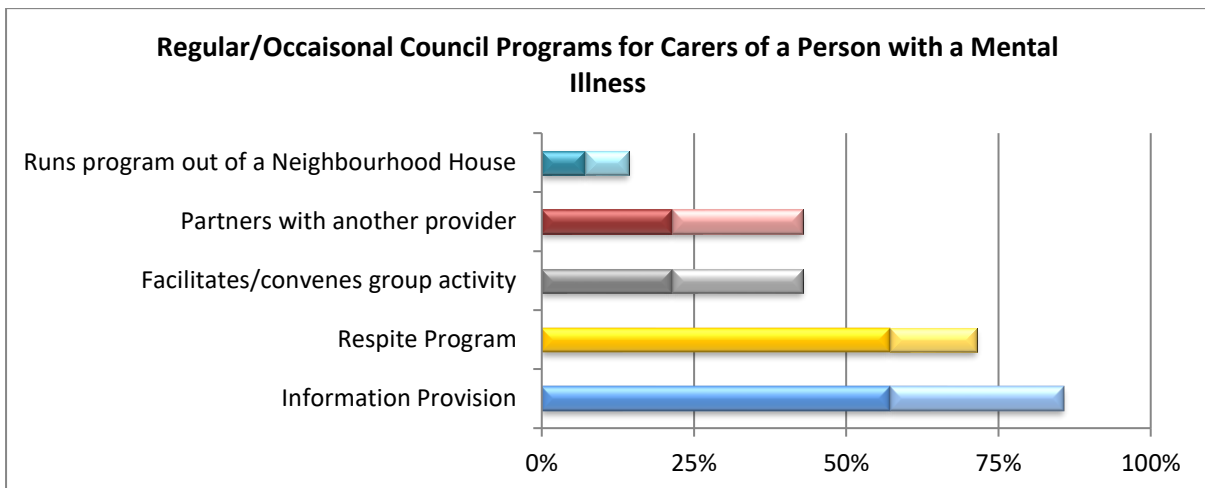
Around half of responding councils (52%) deliver regular/occasional programs to support carers of a person with a mental illness. The majority of these councils (86%) provide information to these carers on a regular/occasional basis. Seventy-one per cent of these councils provide regular/occasional respite services; and 44 percent facilitate group activities and partner with other providers

Graphs and Tables: Programs for Carers of Person with a Chronic Medical Condition and Mental Illness



**Table 13: Council Programs for Carers of a person with a chronic medical condition (15 Councils)**

	Information provision	Respite Programs	Facilitates/convenes group activity	Neighbourhood House	Partners
ongoing/regular	9 (60%)	10 (67%)	6 (40%)	1 (7%)	3 (20%)
occasional	4 (27%)	1 (7%)	2 (13%)	1 (7%)	4 (27%)



**Table 14: Council Programs for Carers of a person with a mental illness (14 Councils)**

	Information provision	Respite Programs	Facilitates/convenes group activity	Neighbourhood House	Partners
ongoing/regular	8 (57%)	8 (57%)	3 (21%)	1 (7%)	3 (21%)
occasional	4 (29%)	2 (14%)	3 (21%)	1 (7%)	3 (21%)

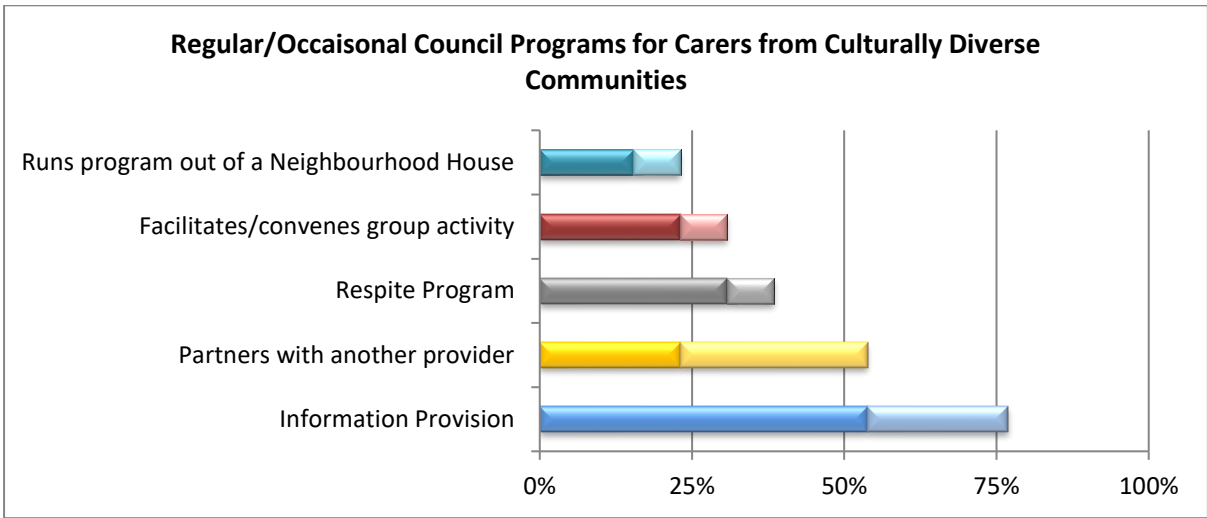
## **Carers from Culturally Diverse Communities**

Around half of responding councils (48%) deliver regular/occasional programs to carers from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Over three-quarters (77%) of these councils provide information to these carers on a regular/occasional basis. More than half of these councils (54%) partner with other organisations to provide ongoing/occasional programs to these groups. Regular and occasional respite services are provided by 39 per cent of these councils.

## **Non-specific Carer Groups**

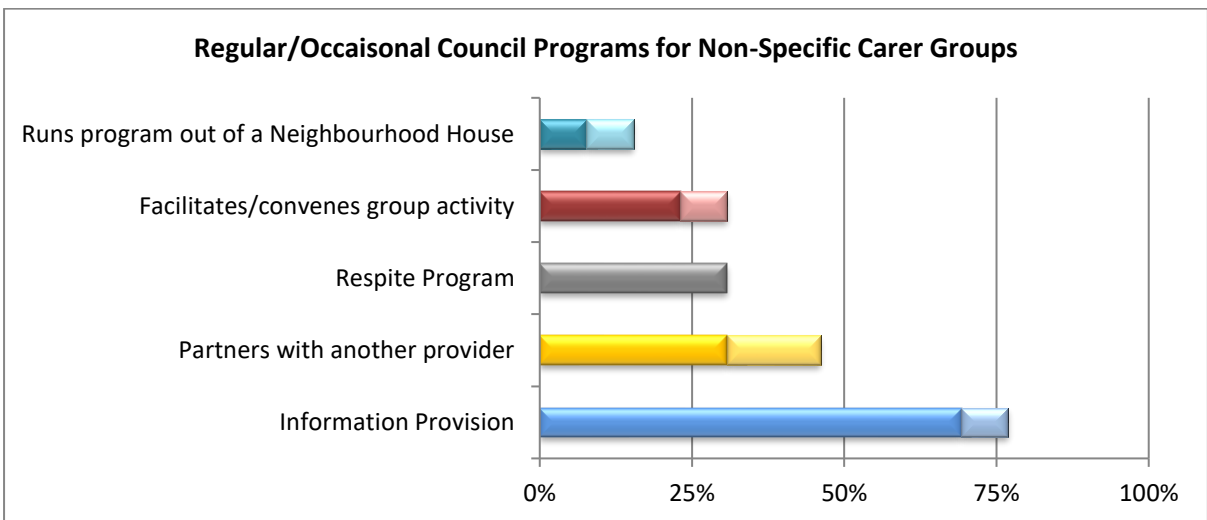
Almost half (48%) of responding councils deliver regular/occasional programs to a broad range of carers. Over three-quarters (77%) of these councils provide regular/occasional information to carers. Forty-six per cent of these councils are partnering with other providers to deliver regular/occasional programs and activities. Regular respite programs are provided by almost one-third of councils (31%). The same number (31%) convene group activities on a regular/occasional basis.

Graphs and Tables: Programs for Carers from Culturally Diverse Communities and Non-Specific Carer Groups



**Table 15: Council Programs for Carers from Cultural Groups (13 councils)**

	Information provision	Respite Programs	Facilitates/convenes group activity	Neighbourhood House	Partners
ongoing/regular	7 (54%)	4 (31%)	3 (23%)	2 (15%)	3 (23%)
occasional	3 (23%)	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	4 (31%)



**Table 16: Council Programs for Non-Specific Carer Groups (13 Councils)**

	Information provision	Respite Programs	Facilitates/convenes group activity	Neighbourhood House	Partners
ongoing/regular	9 (69%)	4 (31%)	3 (23%)	1 (8%)	4 (31%)
occasional	1 (8%)	0	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	2 (15%)

## Young Carers

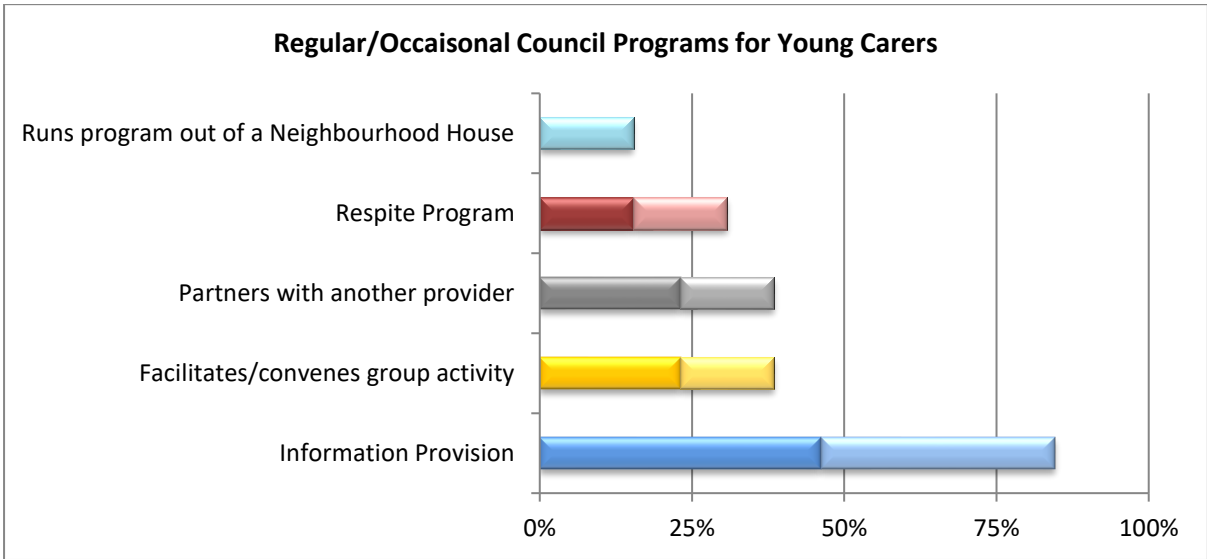
Almost half (48%) of responding councils deliver programs supporting young carers. The majority of these councils (84%) provide occasional/ongoing information to young carers. Thirty-eight per cent facilitate occasional/ongoing group activities for young carers and the same number (38%) partner with another provider on an occasional/ongoing basis. Thirty-one per cent of councils provide ongoing/occasional respite services to young carers.

## Kinship Carers

“Kinship care is the care provided by relatives or a member of a child's social network when a child cannot live with their parents. Aboriginal kinship care is care provided by relatives or friends to an Aboriginal child who cannot live with their parents, where Aboriginal family and community and Aboriginal culture are valued as central to the child's safety, stability, and development. Aboriginal kinship services operate in every region of the state” (DFFH).

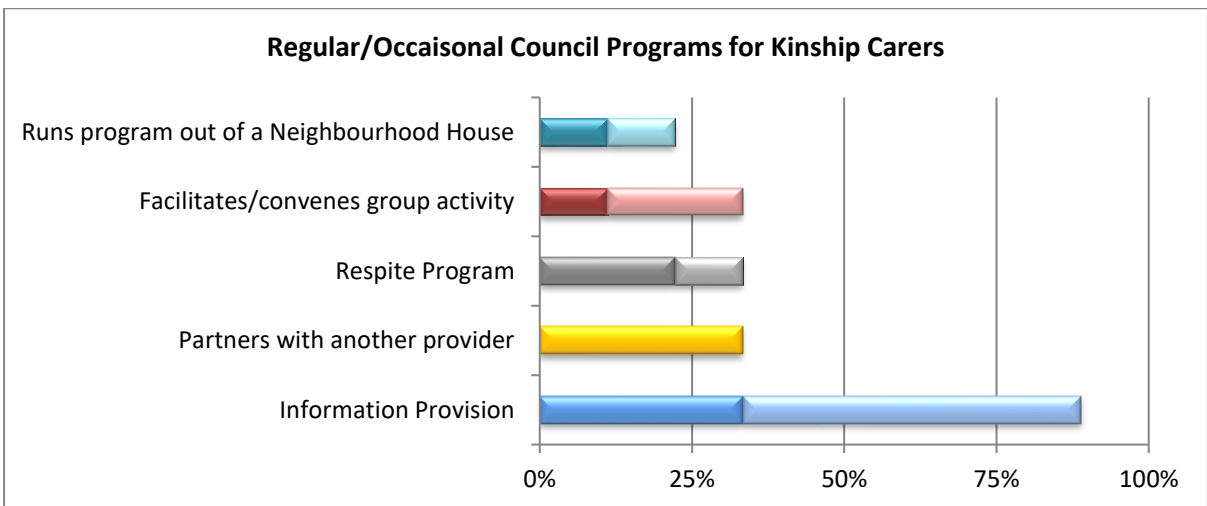
One third of responding councils (33%) provide regular/occasional programs to Kinship carers. For the majority of these councils (89%) this involves regular and occasional information provision. One-third of these councils (33%) partner with other service providers to deliver regular programs for Kinship carers. The same number (33%) provide regular/occasional respite services and facilitate/convene group activities for Kinship carers.

Graphs and Tables: Programs for Young Carers and Kinship Carers



**Table 16: Council Programs for Young Carers (13 councils)**

	Information provision	Respite Programs	Facilitates/convenes group activity	Neighbourhood House	Partners
ongoing/regular	6 (46%)	2 (15%)	3 (23%)	0	3 (23%)
occasional	5 (38%)	2 (15%)	2 (15%)	2 (15%)	2 (15%)



**Table 17: Council Programs for Kinship Carers (9 councils)**

	Information provision	Respite Programs	Facilitates/convenes group activity	Neighbourhood House	Partners
ongoing/regular	3 (33%)	2 (22%)	1 (11%)	1 (11%)	3 (33%)
occasional	5 (56%)	1 (11%)	2 (22%)	1 (11%)	0

## Grandparent Carers

Thirty per cent of responding councils provide programs for Grandparent carers. This involves regular/occasional information (provided by 88% of these councils). Half of the councils (50%) provide ongoing/occasional group activities for grandparent carers. Over one-third of these councils (38%) provide ongoing respite to grandparent carers.

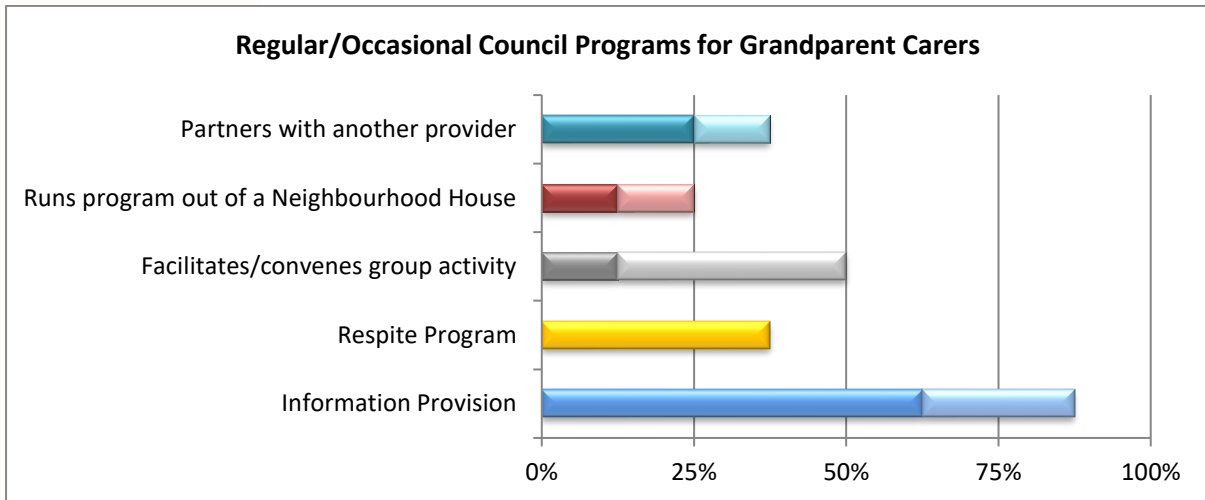
## Promotion of Other programs

The majority of responding councils (89%) promote wider council programs and activities to carers. Around two thirds (67%) promote these on an ongoing/consistent basis. Twenty-two per cent promote programs but did so less consistently.

These programs include (but are not limited to):

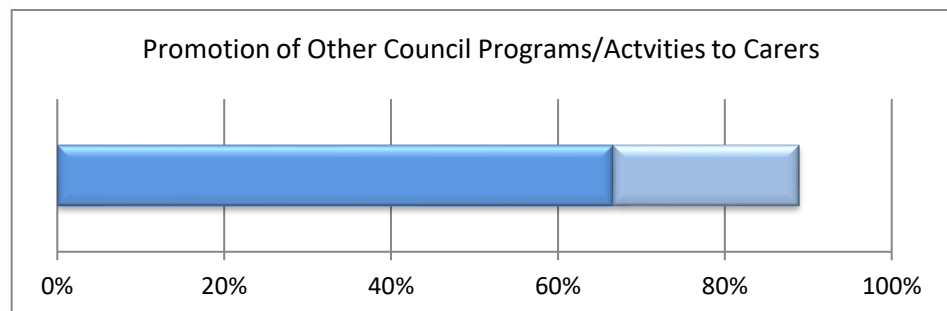
- Recreation and exercise programs at council facilities
- Library programs
- Programs run out of Men's Sheds and Senior Citizen Centres
- Festivals, such as Seniors Festival
- Bus Trips, lunches, and entertainment outings
- Funding Neighbourhood Houses to provide programs.

**Graphs and Tables: Programs for Grandparent Carers and Promotion of Programs and Activities**



**Table 18: Council Programs for Grandparent Carers (8 councils)**

	Information provision	Respite Programs	Facilitates/convenes group activity	Neighbourhood House	Partners
ongoing/regular	5 (63%)	3 (38%)	1 (13%)	1 (13%)	2 (25%)
occasional	2 (25%)	0	3	1 (13%)	1 (13%)



**Table 19: Promotion of Other Council Programs**

Yes	18 (67%)
Not consistently	6 (27%)



## National Carers Week

Over half (56%) of responding councils have participated in National Carer's Week in the past. Fifty-two per cent intend to participate in the event this year. Some councils have indicated they may not participate in the event this year due to uncertainty around the COVID-19 pandemic and resource constraints resulting from changed financial capacity of councils to support community initiatives.

A range of programs and activities have been delivered by the councils participating in National Carers Week which have included communication and social media campaigns and one-off activities (delivered by 67% of participating councils respectively). Almost half (47%) have partnered with another service provider, 27 per cent delivered programs through their libraries and 20 per cent of councils delivered a program through a Neighbourhood House.

Some of the activities delivered by councils include recognition events; hamper packs; pamper days; staff information sessions; collection and promotion of digital stories and free events (such as movies at local cinemas, concerts, and meals).

Graphs and Tables: National Carer's Week

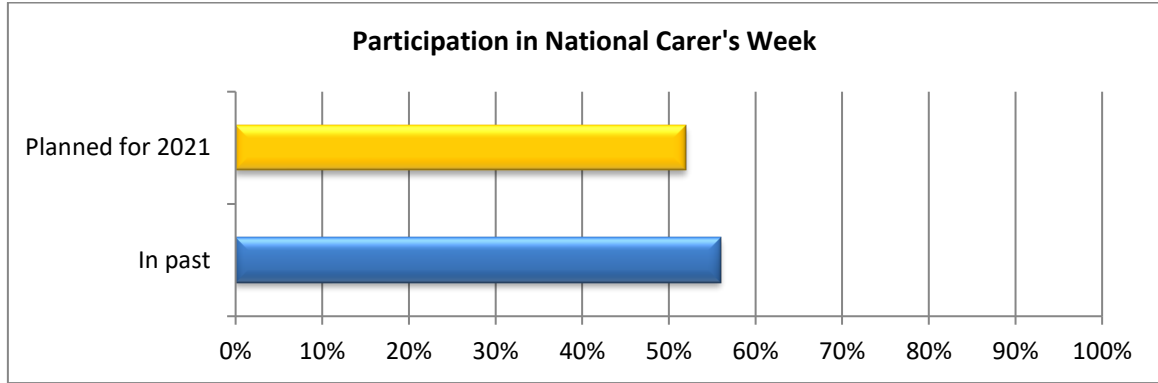


Table 20: National Carer's Week Participation

Previously	15 (56%)
Planned 2021	14 (52%)

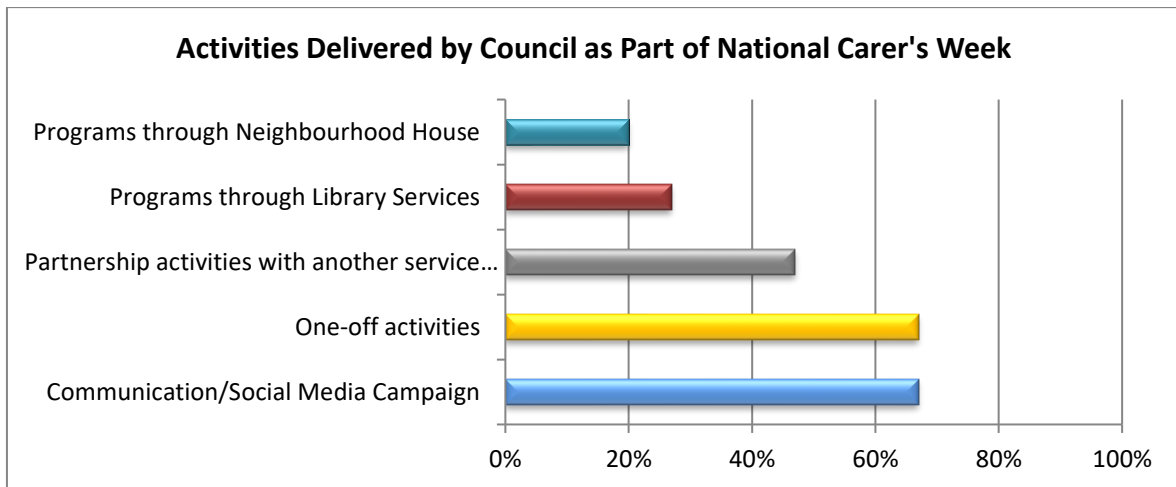


Table 21: Activities Delivered by Council as Part of National Carer's Week

Communication/ Social Media	One off Activities	Partnership	Library Services	Neighbourhood House
10 (37%)	10 (37%)	7 (26%)	4 (15%)	3 (11%)

# CONCLUSION

Carers provide important supports and services to the people they care for and contribute to the community and economy more broadly.

Victorian councils support both their communities and staff who have caring responsibilities. For example, employment obligations of councils ensure staff who have caring responsibilities are supported. Councils also support the diverse needs of carers in the community (in line with responsibilities in the Carers Recognition Act) and many councils go beyond these responsibilities in providing a range of programs and activities delivered as part of care services.

Councils have expressed a desire to continue to support carers through program delivery and other activities. Resource constraints compounded by financial pressures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and changing service delivery arrangements may mean some councils will seek new and innovative ways to support carers into the future.

This has already started with councils adapting their programs and activities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many moved to digital formats during periods of lockdown with hybrid models of face-to-face and digital formats becoming more popular as the community moves to COVID normal settings. It may be that this, and other innovations, could provide avenues for local government to further develop support for carers in their communities into the future.

