

Learning from older carers in Melbourne.

The experiences of Mei, Peter, Eva, and Narelle* open a window into the lives of thousands of older carers who call Melbourne home. Their profiles carry the wisdom and complex lived experiences of older carers, offering insights into how to strengthen government services.

The City of Melbourne wants to better understand the opportunities and challenges facing “older carers” – residents aged 55 and over who provide unpaid care for spouses or loved ones.

With support from the City Hub and Network for Gender Equity (CHANGE) Caring Cities program, the City of Melbourne took part in a three-month research sprint from June to August 2025 that reached 25 older people through interviews and focus groups. This offers a summary of findings.

**The names and details included in the profiles have been changed and combined to protect participants' privacy and summarise findings. Anything featured in quotes was a direct statement made by an older carer during the research.*

Meet Mei

Mei is a 64-year-old grandmother who lives with her husband and adores spending time with her four grandchildren. She also cares for her ageing parents. While Mei is grateful to have so much family around her, caring across generations requires a lot of time and attention.

Mei has tried to honour her parents' desire to age in their own home. With government support, she secured a Cantonese-speaking paid carer for her parents. However, Mei still needs to attend all of their doctor appointments to assist with the interpretation of complex medical terms.

Mei values meeting with other carers at the healthy ageing walking group. It has been a transformative opportunity to get to know her neighbours and local services.

“ I had to take leave without pay to look after my two elderly parents, who do not speak English... I arrived in Australia in my 30s, so I was not aware of many services. When I joined the carers walking group, big doors opened for me... It feels good to share. I always feel a bit lighter. There is no judgement from the other carers because they know the situation. ”

Insight from Mei's experience:

- Cross-promote services for carers in other government and community programming.
- Increase access to language interpretation support for older people in community programming and in medical contexts.

" People don't think they're going to be a carer. But then something happens... Suddenly, you have to go to all these medical appointments, deal with operations and pain and financial loss. Your big plans for the future go out the window. You are thrown into the deep end... I suffered for over a year and a half, not knowing there were other ways to cope with caring duties. "

Meet Peter

Aged 70, Peter loves to be in the community and to be of service to others. Nearing retirement, Peter and his wife, Kim, expected to travel overseas and enjoy their time together. However, ten years ago, Kim was diagnosed with a motor neurone disease that has left her with acute physical disabilities. All of the cooking, cleaning, and care falls to Peter.

Peter wishes he had accessed services earlier. He also feels there are opportunities to do more proactive outreach to older carers to inform them of available resources earlier in their journey and help them navigate options.

Insight from Peter's experience:

- Provide navigation support and advocacy for older carers as they work through complex medical and governmental systems.
- Conduct proactive outreach to older carers earlier in their journey to inform them of available services – including radio ads and posters in public spaces that reach people not using the internet.

Eva is a writer originally from India who moved to Australia as a child. She married her childhood sweetheart after a school dance many decades ago. Now, mostly retired at 77 years old, she wants to use her skills to tell the stories of older people.

Eva has been on a challenging journey of caring for her husband, who had early-onset dementia that radically changed his personality, leaving him with mood swings and bouts of violence. It took her a long time to seek support. Within her family, there was a lot of cultural stigma related to mental illness that made it hard to know what was happening and how to get support.

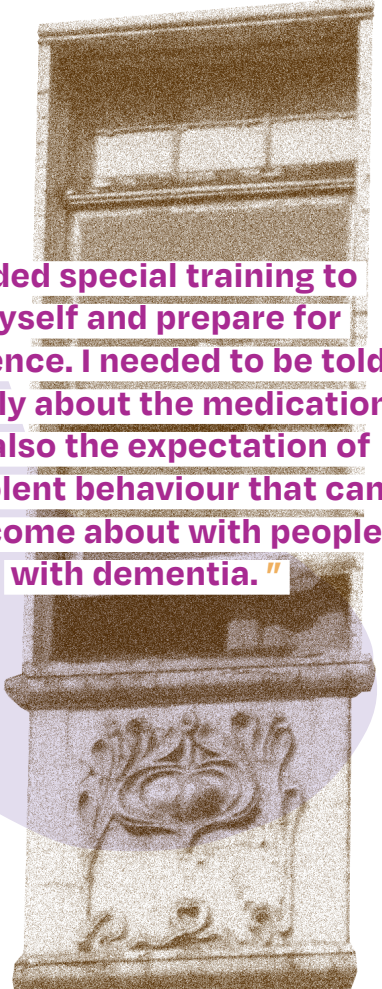
Eva feels devoted to her husband, who lovingly looked after her when she was battling cancer earlier in her life. When the dementia started, she wanted the best for him, but was also struggling with how to inform and resource herself as the situation changed.

Meet Eva

" I felt I needed special training to protect myself and prepare for the violence. I needed to be told not only about the medication, but also the expectation of violent behaviour that can come about with people with dementia. "

Insights from Eva's experience:

- Provide culturally competent dementia and memory loss training that is comprehensive, explaining potential medical and emotional changes.
- Create more opportunities for older people to use their professional skills and passions to help the community.



Meet Narelle

Narelle was a career educator teaching primary school for many years. Now, at 62 years old, her greatest achievement is supporting her grandson, Jeffery, who is autistic and legally blind. Under Narelle's care, Jeffery has grown into a caring young adult.

Since Jeffery came into her home, Narelle slowly reduced her working hours in order to manage his care. This led to less income and challenges with housing security. Their frequent moves between rental homes are hard on Jeffery, who thrives with stability. It has also made Narelle feel more isolated and less able to access networks of support.

Dive deeper in the experiences of older carers by reading the full report at citieschange.org/caring-cities

" I used to work full-time, but when my grandson's health declined, it limited my ability to continue working. Occasionally, when he's able to go out with a paid carer, I find myself with free time. But the problem is, there's nowhere to go and nothing to do. I don't have any social connections... My hope for the City of Melbourne is that there will always be somewhere people can go so they don't have to feel lonely. "

Insight from Narelle's experience:

- Create a central directory of activities and services in the City of Melbourne that is easy for older carers to access.
- Anticipate that many older carers face financial and housing insecurity, which can increase stress and isolation, and make it harder to access services and networks of support.

Recommendations

As the City of Melbourne continues to evaluate and invest in healthy ageing services, here are recommendations for government departments, service providers, and community organisations to keep in mind:

- Older carers in Melbourne are dedicated, resourceful, and loving. Let's honour their valuable contributions and build on their strengths.
- Government and community services can be life-changing for carers. Let's make them easier to learn about, access, and navigate.
- Older carers are eager for connection and community. Let's offer inclusive and flexible programming tailored to their lives.
- Older carers have so much to offer. Let's create opportunities for them to contribute.

View the full list of detailed and actionable recommendations in the full report: citieschange.org/caring-cities

Inspired to get involved?

Everyone can learn from the older carers in your family and community. Reach out and have a conversation! Here are some questions to start with:

Tell me about your day yesterday
What was the best part of your day?
Did you encounter any difficulties?
What is one thing you are proud of accomplishing?

What has being an older carer taught you?

What advice would you give to others who may be providing care or support to a loved one?

What hopes do you have for your own future?

What legacy do you want to leave for future generations?

Learn more by reading the full report:



citieschange.org/caring-cities

melbourne.vic.gov.au/older-people

Support for this research was provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.