



Carers Victoria submission

Inquiry into Expanding Melbourne's Free Tram Zone

January 2020

AN AUSTRALIA THAT VALUES AND SUPPORTS ALL CARERS

ABOUT CARERS VICTORIA

Carers Victoria is the state-wide peak organisation representing people who provide care. We represent more than 736,600 family carers across Victoria – people caring for someone with a disability, mental illness, chronic health issue or an age-related condition.

People receiving care could be a parent, child, spouse/partner, grandparent, other relative or friend. Carers Victoria is a member of the National Network of Carers Associations, and the Victorian Carer Services Network. Carers Victoria is a non-profit association which relies on public and private sector support to fulfil its mission with and on behalf of carers.

Carers Victoria is a membership-based organisation. Our members are primarily family carers, who play an important role in informing our work, contributing to advocacy and strategic aims, and distributing information more widely to other carers.

This policy paper was prepared by Carers Victoria's Policy Team.

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Carers and Public Transport

Carers Victoria welcomes the Committee's Inquiry into Expanding the Free Tram Zone.

Fifty per cent of unpaid family and friend primary carers are on low incomes and many find it hard to cover living expenses, save money or build up superannuation. Reducing the financial stress experienced by carers has been recognised as one of five priority areas in the *Victorian Carer Strategy 2018-22*.

Carers Victoria supports point one in the Terms of Reference of this Inquiry. Expanding the Free Tram Zone to cover the routes listed will ease the transport expenses of carers required to attend hospital for their own health care and/or for the person they are caring for. This would benefit people living in Melbourne, as well as people who have travelled from regional, rural and remote Victoria to access hospital treatment in Melbourne.

Under the Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme (VPTAS) people travelling to Melbourne from regional, rural and remote areas can receive 'fare reimbursement based on the cost of an economy fare or the relevant concession fare if travelling by rail, bus, coach or ferry'. However, the fare reimbursement does not cover the separate leg of travel to the hospital (i.e. if a patient is staying in accommodation and is using a tram to get to the hospital the next day and thereafter).

Carers Victoria supports the VPTAS Alliance's continued calls for the VPTAS to be reviewed biannually, which should include: 'further improvements to the Scheme - mainly increases to the reimbursements, changes to the distance thresholds and improvements to the administration and promotion of the Scheme'.¹

¹ <https://www.cancervic.org.au/for-health-professionals/clinical-network/clinical-news/victorian-patient-travel-assistance-scheme.html>

RECOMMENDATION 1: The Free Tram Zone is expanded as per point one in the Terms of Reference.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme to continue to be reviewed biannually.

Carers Victoria further recommends expansion of point three in the Terms of Reference: 'removing fares for all Seniors Card holders'.

Carers Victoria welcomed the actions taken by the Victorian Government to expand the entitlements associated with the Victorian Carer Card. Initially this granted access to concessional travel and free travel during Carers Week. Then, on 16 October 2019 Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers Luke Donnellan announced² holders of the Victorian Carer Card would receive the same entitlements as holders of the Seniors Card. Removing fares for all Victorian Carer Card holders would significantly ease the financial pressure experienced by carers when travel is required to support the person they care for.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Remove fares for all Victorian Carer Card holders as well as Seniors Card holders.

Carers Victoria recommends the Economy and Infrastructure Committee considers making the tram network more accessible for people with disabilities. As the graphic from the ABC³ below indicates, even within the free tram zone, many people with disabilities are excluded from tram travel. This exclusion extends to carers as well as people with disabilities. The 2015 ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Caring highlights that 31 per cent of carers have a disability.

² <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/half-price-travel-and-extra-concessions-for-carers/>

³ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-11-28/melbourne-tram-disability-access-wheelchair-accessible-vehicles/11734170>



Only a few of Melbourne's tram routes have full disability access (green), while many only have some (black) or none at all (red).

RECOMMENDATION 4: Improved infrastructure to improve accessibility of the tram network for people in care relationships.