

JUNE 2026

FCAV CARER CENSUS 2026

A BIENNIAL CENSUS OF FOSTER CARERS, THE CHILDREN IN THEIR CARE, AND THEIR EXPERIENCES ACROSS VICTORIA.

CONDUCTED BY ORIMA RESEARCH ON BEHALF OF THE FOSTER CARE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA



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Background and Objective

Foster Care Association Victoria (FCAV) is the peak body for Victorian foster carers. This research, commissioned by FCAV, aims to **gather insights into the experiences of Victorian foster carers** to inform advocacy, engagement, policy and service development.

Methodology

The quantitative research consisted of a voluntary **online survey of current and former Victorian foster carers** drawn from an FCAV member database. Prior to the commencement of fieldwork, primary approach letters were sent to all FCAV members, providing background to the project, key dates, information about privacy and confidentiality, and an opt-out process for those who did not wish to be involved in the process. **n=3,137 unique links** to the survey were distributed by ORIMA Research to carers, with **n=665** providing at least one response beyond screening questions. Fieldwork was conducted from **April 10th to May 19th, 2026**.

Overview of research phases:



When interpreting the data:



Arrows are used to indicate if a cohort's result is substantially higher or lower compared to the 2024 results by at least 10 percentage points as a minimum threshold (unless otherwise specified).



The FCAV acknowledges the unceded sovereignty of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge their continued connection to Country, lands, waters and cultural knowledges and pay our respects to Elders past and present. We are the united voice and advocate for all foster carers across Victoria, and we aim to continually develop our knowledge and act with respect to First Nations sovereignty.

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OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

The FCAV conducted a carer census in April/May 2026. 665 former and current accredited Victorian foster carers participated.

The 2026 FCAV Carer Census builds on the inaugural Foster Care Census that the FCAV conducted in 2024. The **2026 Census is providing a valuable picture** of Victoria's foster care community, carers' experiences of providing foster care to children and young people, and how these may be changing over time.

The strong response to the Census enables the FCAV to better understand foster carers, the children they care for, and the **opportunities and challenges** they experience while providing care. These findings will inform FCAV's service delivery, resources and advocacy, helping ensure our work continues to reflect the **experiences and priorities of foster carers across Victoria**.

Alongside **demographic information**, the Census explores **carers' experiences** of fostering, including their relationships with agencies, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Child Protection and the broader care system. By tracking these findings across successive Censuses, the FCAV can **identify emerging trends**, observe change over time and strengthen the **evidence base** that informs our work on behalf of foster carers.



03

WHO ARE VICTORIA'S FOSTER CARERS?



Respondents came from metropolitan (59%) and regional (41%) Victoria. Most carers **(78%) owned their home** or had a mortgage, while **21% were renting**. More than one-third **(36%) were sole carers**, fostering without a co-carer.

Carers continue to have high levels of educational attainment, with 84% holding a post-secondary qualification, including a Certificate or Diploma (34%), Postgraduate Degree (27%) or Bachelor's Degree (23%).

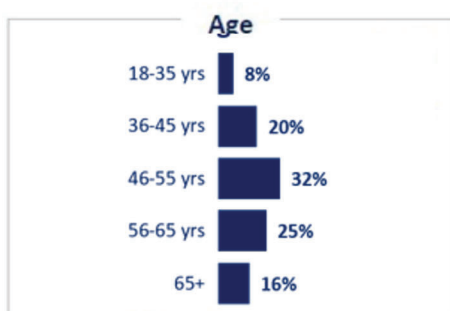
Almost **two-thirds (64%)** of respondents were **employed**, compared with 69% in 2024. **Full-time** employment accounted for **34%**, while **18% were retired** or pensioners and 5% were unemployed and not looking for work.

Household incomes were broadly distributed, with 36% earning \$120,000 or more, 32% earning \$60,000 to under \$120,000, and 31% earning under \$60,000.

71% of respondents currently had a child in foster care living in their household.

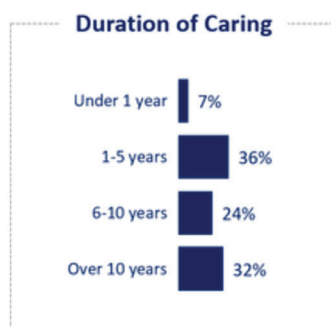
04

FOSTER CARE DEMOGRAPHICS



Foster carers responding to the Census represented a broad range of ages and levels of fostering experience.

Almost **three-quarters (73%)** were aged **46 years or older**, including 16% aged 65 or over, while 8% were aged under 36.



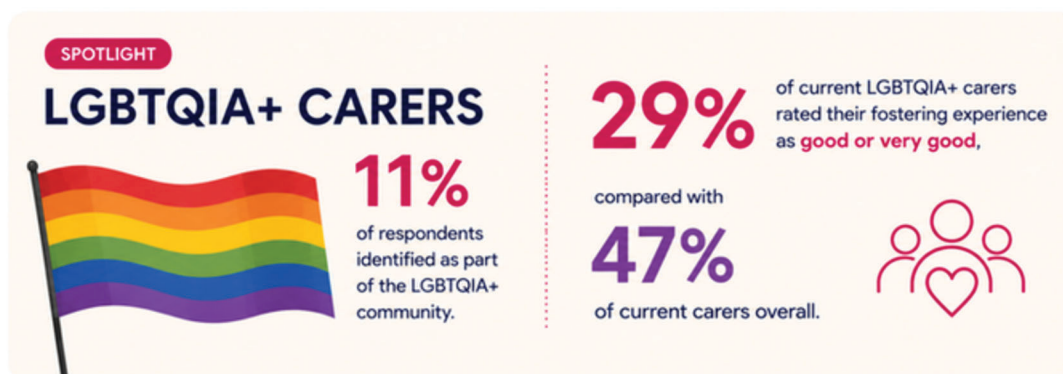
The Census also reflects an experienced carer cohort. **32%** had been fostering for **more than 10 years** and a further **24% for 6–10 years**. At the other end of the carer journey, 7% had been fostering for less than one year.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers represented **3%** of Census respondents.



10% of respondents spoke a **language other than English**. Among these carers, Italian was the most frequently reported language (23%), followed by Auslan and Greek (12% each).

11% of respondents identified as part of the **LGBTQIA+ community**.

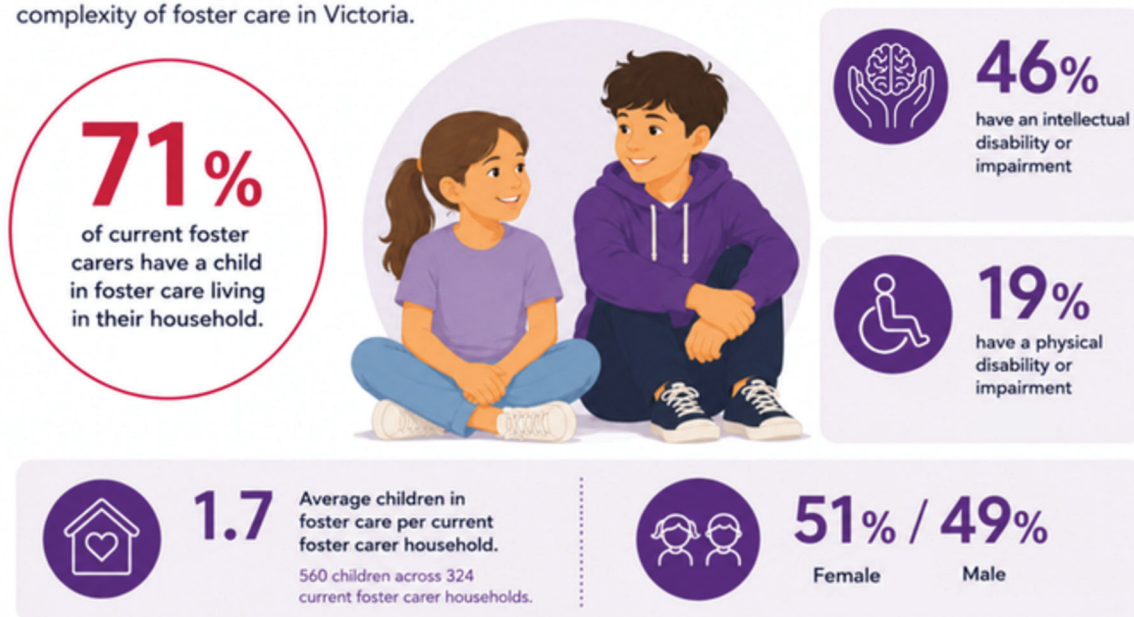


CHILDREN IN CARE

SPOTLIGHT

Children in respondents' care

The children in respondents' care reflect the diversity and complexity of foster care in Victoria.



At the time of the Census, **71% of current carers had at least one child** in foster care living in their household. Together, these households were caring for **560 children in foster care**, an average of 1.7 per household.

The children represented all age groups: **33%** were aged **five or younger**, **33%** were aged **6–10**, **24%** were aged **11–15** and **10%** were aged **over 16**. Girls and boys were represented in almost equal proportions, at **51%** and **49% respectively**.

Disability and impairment were also common among children represented in the Census. **46% were identified as having an intellectual disability or impairment and 19% a physical disability or impairment**. These categories are not mutually exclusive, with some children identified as having both.

Foster care also sits within broader family households. Around **36% of current carer households included the carer's own children**, while some households also included children in permanent care or other children, including adult children.

CO-CARER STATUS

More than one-third (**36%**) of respondents foster **without a co-carer**.

Women make up **92%** of this group. Among sole carers, 76% had a child in foster care living in their household at the time of the Census.

Sole carers had a distinctly different economic profile from carers fostering with a co-carer. **54% were employed, compared with 69%** of carers with a **co-carer**.

More than half (**53%**) had a household income **below \$60,000**, compared with 19% of carers with a co-carer. At the other end of the income range, **15% of sole carers** reported household incomes of **\$120,000** or more, compared with **49%** of those **fostering with a co-carer**.

Housing circumstances also differed. **35% of sole carers rented their home, compared with 13%** of carers fostering **with a co-carer**.

Despite these differences in employment, income and housing, there were no substantial differences in the types of fostering challenges reported by sole carers and carers fostering with a co-carer.

SPOTLIGHT

Sole carers

More than one in three foster carers are fostering **without a co-carer**.



36%
are sole carers

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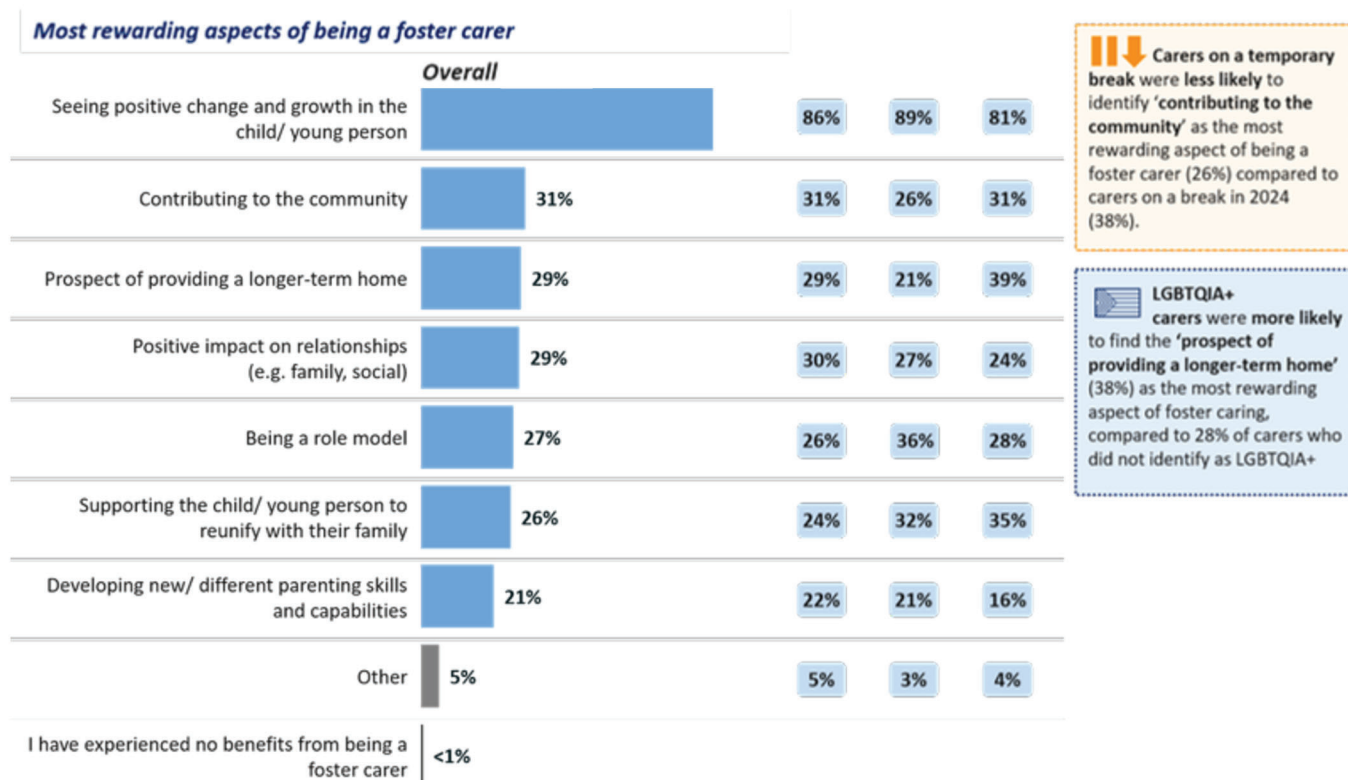
WHY PEOPLE FOSTER

Carers described a wide range of motivations for fostering, but their open-ended responses consistently returned to a desire to provide children with safety, stability and care, to make a difference, and to give back to their community. Many also described reaching a point in their lives where they had the time, space, skills or resources to offer care.

I have the space and resources to stand in the gap for a child in need.

WHAT CARERS FIND REWARDING

These motivations are reflected in what carers find rewarding. **86%** identified seeing **positive change and growth in children** as the most rewarding aspect of fostering, well ahead of any other response.



08 THE FOSTER CARE EXPERIENCE

SPOTLIGHT

The foster care journey

Carers' experiences, motivations and challenges change over time.



Fostering is a journey.

Carers who have been fostering for less than a year are the most positive about their experience, while those who have been fostering for 6–10 years are less likely to report a good experience. The challenges carers identify also change according to how long they have been fostering.



47%

of all current carers rate their experience as good or very good.

The challenges carers identify shift according to how long they have been fostering. Among carers who had been fostering for less than one year, **46% nominated a care-related issue** as their **greatest challenge**, with managing children's challenging behaviours and emotional issues **the most commonly identified individual challenge (22%)**.

Among carers who had been fostering for **6–10 years**, **care-related challenges were lower (22%)**, while **system-related (35%)** and **financial challenges (28%)** were **more prominent**. For this cohort, **support, inclusion and respect** in Child Protection planning (**18%**) and **inadequate carer allowance (16%)** were the two most commonly identified individual challenges.

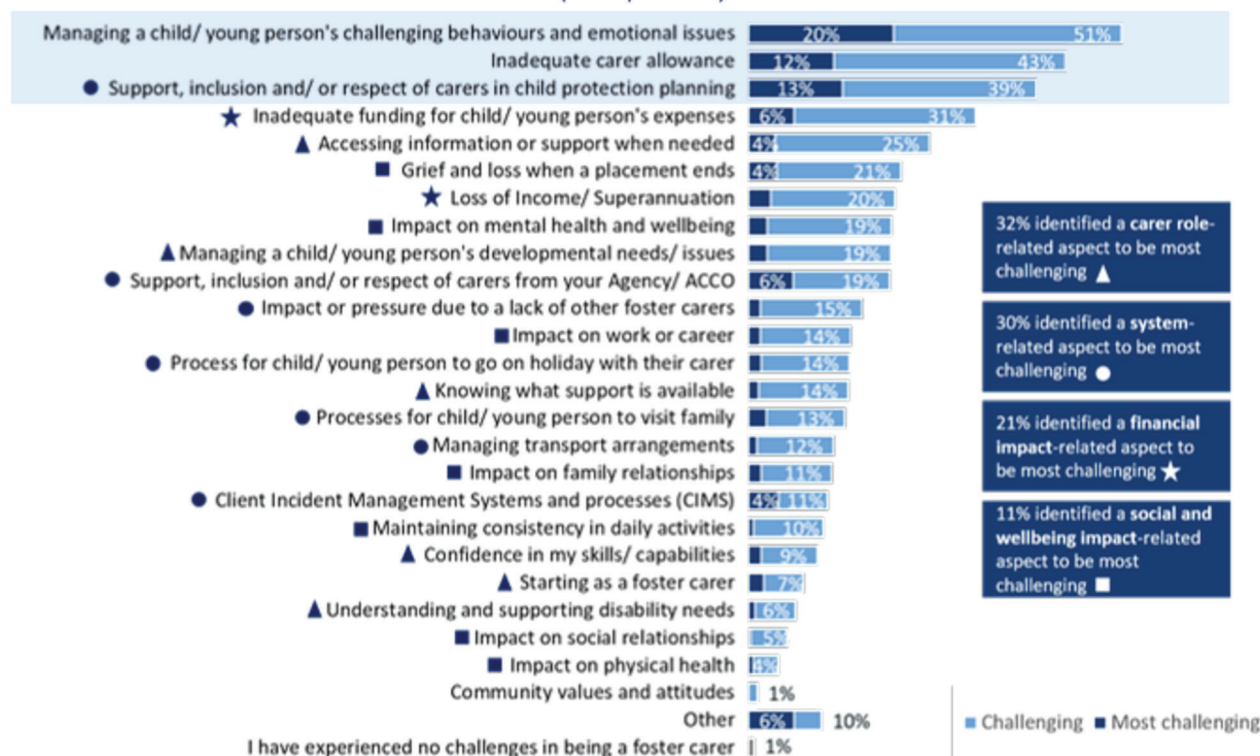
Motivation also differed according to time as a carer. **19% of carers with less than one year's experience** said their motivation to foster had changed, compared with **40%** of those who had been carers for **6–10 years** and **35%** of those who had been carers for more than **10 years**. Among carers who had been fostering for more than 10 years, managing children's challenging behaviours and emotional issues was again the most commonly identified individual challenge (20%).

The findings show that the 6–10 year cohort has the strongest concentration of **system and financial concerns**, while among carers with more than 10 years' experience, care-related challenges again become prominent.

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THE CHALLENGES OF FOSTER CARING

Challenging aspects of being a foster carer (All respondents)



“Their needs are constant and the complexity of each child means there is no break.”

Supporting children with complex emotional, behavioural and developmental needs is a central part of foster caring. Managing children's challenging behaviours and emotional issues was the most commonly identified challenge, cited by **51%** of respondents and nominated as the greatest challenge by **20%**.

Other frequently identified challenges related to the **systems and resources** surrounding foster care. **43% identified inadequate carer allowance** as challenging, **39% identified support, inclusion and/or respect in Child Protection planning**, and **31% identified inadequate funding** for children's expenses.

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CHALLENGES BEYOND THE CARING ROLE

“Once I started fostering, I realised how much advocacy is involved in making sure children’s needs and best interests are truly being prioritised. I also saw how important it is to advocate for carers to receive the respect and support they need.”

30% identified a **system-related** aspect to be most challenging

21% identified a **financial impact-related** aspect to be most challenging

11% identified a **social and wellbeing impact-related** aspect to be most challenging

Beyond the direct demands of caring, carers identified significant system and financial challenges. System-related issues accounted for 30% of greatest challenges, while 21% were financial impact-related.

39% identified support, inclusion and/or respect in Child Protection planning as challenging, and 25% identified accessing information or support when needed. Financial challenges included inadequate carer allowance (43%), inadequate funding for children’s expenses (31%) and loss of income or superannuation (20%).

Financial impacts were greater for some carers. **31%** of carers supporting a child with a **physical or intellectual disability or impairment** identified **loss of income or superannuation as challenging**, compared with **15%** of other current carers. Financial pressures were also more common among **renters**, with **76%** identifying at least one financial impact-related challenge, compared with **63%** of homeowners. **Renters** were also more likely to nominate a system-related issue as their greatest challenge (**37% compared with 28%**).



The following cohorts were more likely to have a good/ very good experience as a foster carer compared to 47% of current carers overall:



74% of those who had been a carer for **under a year** (n=38)



62% of carers **aged 65 and over** (n=66)



59% of **male carers** (n=87)



58% of carers whose highest level of education was **Year 12 or below** (n=48)



58% of carers from **Melbourne – Inner East/ Inner South** (n=33)



The following cohorts were less likely to have a good/ very good experience as a foster carer compared to 47% of current carers overall:



37% of those who had been a carer for **6-10 years** (n=111)



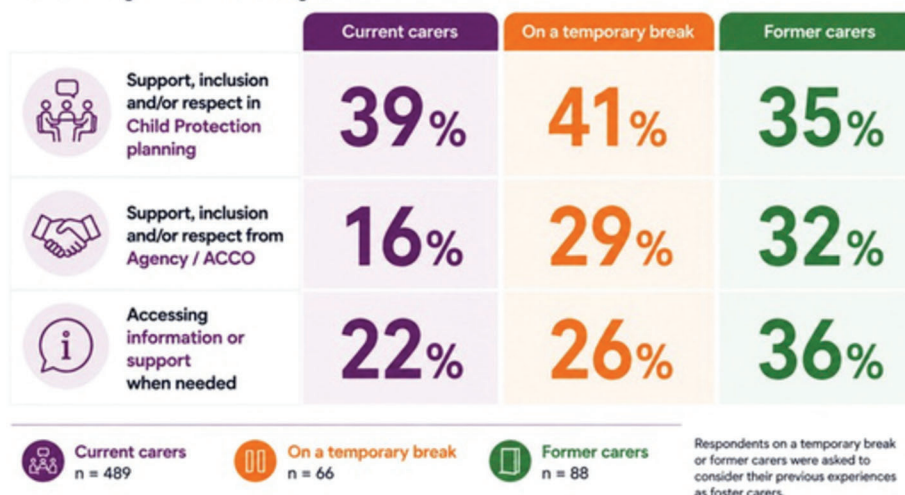
29% of carers who identified as **LGBTQIA+** (n=45)

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SUPPORT AND RELATIONSHIPS

Experiences of support and inclusion

Percentage of respondents who identified each of the following as a challenge in their fostering role



Support and relationships are an important part of carers' experience of foster care. Almost four in ten respondents (**39%**) identified support, inclusion and/or respect in Child Protection planning as challenging, while **25% identified accessing information or support when needed and 19% identified support, inclusion and/or respect from their agency or ACCO.**

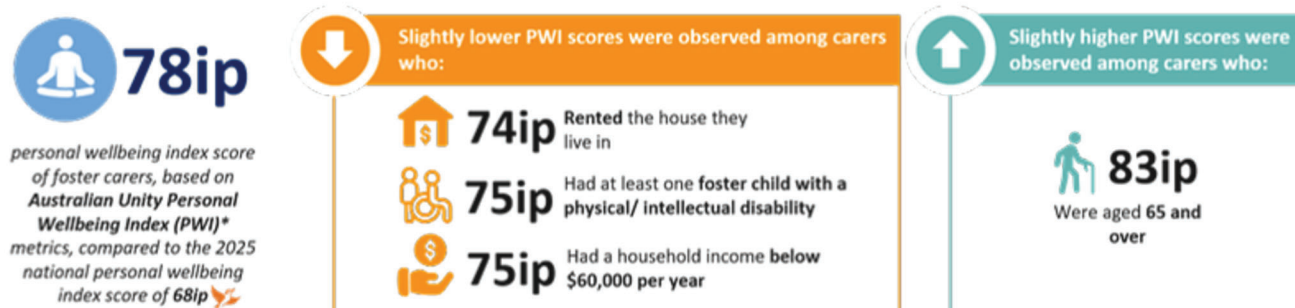
Experiences were not consistent across all carers. Challenges relating to Child Protection planning were reported at similar levels across current carers, carers on a temporary break and former carers. Differences were more pronounced in other areas of support. Carers on a temporary break and former carers were more likely than current carers to identify support, inclusion and/or respect from their agency or ACCO as challenging. Former carers were also more likely to report difficulty accessing information or support when needed.

Differences were also evident among current **LGBTQIA+ carers. More than half (51%) identified support, inclusion or respect in Child Protection planning as challenging**, compared with **39%** of other current carers. They were also more likely to identify challenges with agency/ACCO support (**33% vs 15%**) and accessing information or support when needed (**31% vs 21%**).

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SUPPORTING CARERS AND WELLBEING

EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES



WELLBEING IS NOT EXPERIENCED EQUALLY

Foster carers recorded an average **Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI)** score of **78**, compared with the 2025 national average score of **68**. The PWI measures satisfaction across seven areas of life, including health, relationships, standard of living, community connectedness, personal safety, achieving in life and future security.

While carers recorded relatively high wellbeing overall compared with the general population, wellbeing varied across different groups of carers. **Lower PWI scores** were recorded among **renters (74)**, carers with **household incomes below \$60,000 (75)**, and carers supporting at least one foster **child with a physical or intellectual disability (74.8)**.

Carers supporting a foster child with disability recorded an average wellbeing score of 74.8, compared with 79.7 among carers whose foster children did not have disability. Carers **aged 65 and over** recorded the **highest average PWI** score among the cohorts examined, at **83**.

Alongside these wellbeing results, almost **half of carers (45%)** reported accessing some form of mental health support in the previous 12 months.

Carers accessed support through a range of services, including private mental health services, GPs, Employee Assistance Programs and **FCAV's Carer Assistance Program**.

Current carers with foster child/ren with physical or intellectual disability were more likely to cite 'loss of income/ superannuation' as a challenge (31%), compared to 15% of current carers whose foster child/ren did not have a physical/ intellectual disability. Carers of foster children without physical or intellectual disabilities were more likely to cite 'process for child/young person to go on holiday with their carer' as a challenge (22%), compared to 12% of carers of children with such disabilities.

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LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Carers' intentions for the next 12 months provide an important indication of the future shape and stability of Victoria's foster care workforce.



“I am now more passionate about fostering, as I have seen the positive changes in the children who have spent time with us.”

Most current carers intend to continue fostering, but a substantial proportion are uncertain about their future in the role. Almost **two-thirds (62%)** intend to **continue fostering** over the **next 12 months**, while **29% intend to take a temporary break, are unsure, or intend to stop** fostering.

Future intentions also intersect with carers' broader experience. Almost **half (47%)** of current carers who intend to stop fostering or are unsure said their motivation to foster had changed, compared with **27% of current carers overall**. Among carers who described a change in motivation, experiences of the foster care system featured prominently.

The challenges identified by carers also differed according to their future intentions. Among those intending to stop fostering, **40% identified a system-related issue** as their **greatest challenge**, compared with 20% of those intending to continue.

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WHAT THE CENSUS TELLS US

*'I did have a quite idealised view of it at the start.
I had some negative experiences and felt a little
differently after that, but still have the motivation to
give love to kids who need it.'*

Across Census years, carer demographics, motivations and experiences have remained relatively stable, although there are some findings to monitor for emerging trends.

In 2026, there was a slight increase in carers aged 65+ and a small increase in carers who were not employed (<5%). There was also a slight decrease in the proportion of carers intending to continue fostering and a small increase in those intending to stop.

The 2026 Carer Census nevertheless presents a clear and consistent picture of foster caring in Victoria. Carers describe a strong commitment to children and the difference they can make in their lives, with seeing positive change and growth in children overwhelmingly the most rewarding aspect of fostering.

The foster care experience is also shaped by factors beyond the direct demands of caring. Financial pressures, interactions with the broader system, access to support, and carers' inclusion and respect in decision-making all form part of that experience.

Experiences are not uniform, and carers' circumstances can shape the pressures they face. Financial challenges were more common among renters, while sole carers were more likely to have lower household incomes, be renting and be less likely to be employed than carers with a co-carer. Carers supporting children with disability also reported greater financial impacts, while differences in support and inclusion were evident among LGBTQIA+ carers.

Most **current carers intend to continue fostering**, but a **substantial proportion are considering a break**, are **unsure** about their future, **or intend to stop**. Taken together, the findings highlight the importance of understanding not only **why** people become foster carers, but **what** shapes their experience once they do and what supports their capacity to continue.



Thank you to the foster carers who participated in the 2026 Carer Census. Your contribution provides an important evidence base for understanding the needs and experiences of foster carers across Victoria.

Thank you also to ORIMA Research for conducting the fieldwork, analysis and reporting for the 2026 Carer Census.

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