

Maya Ghassali - Personal difficulties statement
Master of Public Policy and Management - Start year 2026

During my undergraduate studies, my family and I faced a challenging time when my sister was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma at the age of 23. Her diagnosis occurred at a time where I was navigating the challenges of moving out of home for the first time and enduring the uncertainties of Covid-19 lockdowns. Inevitably, my academic performance was impacted by my changing circumstances, but with the support of my community, facing this adversity has made me a resilient, empathetic person, shaping my outlook on how delicate life can be.

Coming from a low-socio economic background, my parents could not afford to take leave from their work to care for my sister as she received treatment. I stepped in to become her primary carer, managing the responsibilities of driving her to and from chemotherapy, doctor's appointments and scans every week. To be present for my sister and fulfill these responsibilities, I took leave without pay from my role at the Centre for Multicultural Youth and reduced my class load at university, delaying my graduation by six months. As I took time off work, I relied on Centrelink payments to balance my caring duties, my health and well-being, and my ability to pay rent on time.

The extraordinary circumstances I faced in 2021 and 2022 disrupted my ability to perform my best in my education at Monash. I sought support from my university professors, friends, and healthcare professionals, who have all helped me overcome these challenges in different ways. My professors pushed me to continue my education by granting me extensions for my assignments, allowing me to take extra time to dedicate to my studies. I also received support from university health counsellors as well as external counselling sessions from Canteen, an organisation dedicated to helping young people affected by cancer in their families. This network of support uplifted me and helped me persevere through this demanding time.

When my sister was confirmed to be in remission in 2023, and my caring duties were no longer a priority, I had a renewed focus to dedicate my time to study, work, and take care of my well-being. I was able to complete overseas study in India, intern with Deloitte Access Economics in my final semester and graduate with my friends. My lived experience of being a young carer helped me remain focused even in the face of uncertainty and understand the importance of empathy and emotional intelligence as I supported my sister through this time. As I reflect on the challenges I have faced in my life, the qualities I have gained by caring for loved ones are central to who I am as a person. They have instilled in me a sense of unwavering resilience, motivation, and empathy. This journey has broadened my understanding of life's challenges, and I am eager to bring these qualities to the University of Melbourne, to thrive in its diverse community and all that it can offer.