

House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs

Public Hearing – 24 October 2023

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Inquiry into the recognition of unpaid carers

Question reference number: IQ23-000184

Question asked by: Peta Murphy

Type of Question: Spoken. **Hansard Page:** 2

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 07 November 2023

Question:

CHAIR: Do you know whether any of these other strategies that you have mentioned are mandated in acts or whether there is a requirement for reporting to the parliament, which is what we were looking at last week?

Ms Shannon: Australia's Disability Strategy is not mandated in legislation but it has quite formal reporting requirements back to the Disability Reform Ministerial Council. So there is a governance mechanism that makes sure that there is oversight. Like any area where there is dispersed responsibility for a particular subject matter, at the Commonwealth level but also at the state level, I think some sort of governance mechanism is quite important to make sure that there is oversight to drive delivery under the framework. I am not aware of other strategies where it is mandated in legislation. Actually, we might need to take that on notice.

Answer:

The Department of Social Services (the department) has not identified any strategies within the Social Services portfolio that are mandated in legislation or involve a legislative requirement to report to Parliament.

As an example, Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 includes a commitment within the strategy (rather than a legislative requirement) to report on outcomes to the Parliament.

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Question asked by: Peta Murphy

Type of Question: Spoken. **Hansard Page:** 3

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 07 November 2023

Question:

CHAIR: Is there any legislative or other restriction on making every agency report, whether or not they self-identify as having responsibilities for carers—make them actually report or say, 'Nothing we do impacts on carers'?

Ms Shannon: I would probably need to check, but I would not consider that there would be a legislative prohibition or inability to impose such a requirement. I guess the issue would be what you are trying to achieve through that. But greater visibility of what Commonwealth agencies are doing in relation to carers, I presume, would be the intention—that you are trying to drive a lifting of the standard by making agencies more accountable in terms of reporting.

The agencies have to report on a range of things, including through their annual reports or to parliament—including things like compliance with gender equality. There is a whole range of reporting requirements. It is quite possible that something along these lines could be introduced. It is probably something that would be led more through the Public Service Commission as a sort of obligation of public sector agencies. It is something that we could certainly take on notice to check for you whether or not there is any legislative impediment, but I don't imagine there would be.

Answer:

The Department of Social Services has not identified legislative impediments to broadening the reporting requirements in the *Carer Recognition Act 2010* (the Act) to additional Commonwealth agencies. As discussed, the requirement to report about compliance with the Act in annual reports currently only extends to an agency that identifies as a 'public service care agency'.

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Question reference number: IQ23-000186

Question asked by: Peta Murphy

Type of Question: Spoken. **Hansard Page:** 7

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 07 November 2023

Question:

CHAIR: My understanding is that the Carer Gateway counselling services are only available to carers 18 years or over. Do you know why it is not available to young carers? Is that a function of whichever state is delivering it?

Ms Lutz: Give me a moment and I will see if I can find that. Otherwise, we might take that on notice. I suspect that it is what the counselling is there for and it might be something to do with them needing to be 18 and over. But I will confirm that and come back to you.

Answer:

Two counselling services are available through Carer Gateway.

- In-person counselling services are available to carers of all ages and access is provided through Carer Gateway service providers. This includes access via video conference or telephone, in specific circumstances (such as when the carer is unwell or is in a remote location and cannot travel). Counsellors must have previous experience in providing counselling to children and adolescents before providing individual counselling for carers aged under 18 years of age. Carers are able to access 6 sessions.
- The Carer Gateway National Telephone Counselling Service is available to carers 18 years and over. Access to this counselling service is either through the Carer Gateway website ([For Carers Details \(carergateway.gov.au\)](https://carergateway.gov.au)) or by calling 1800 422 737 and selecting Option 2. The service was designed for carers 18 years and over. Carers are able to access 6 sessions.

Counselling services will be reviewed as part of the Carer Gateway impact evaluation currently underway.

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Question reference number: IQ23-000187

Question asked by: Peta Murphy

Type of Question: Spoken. **Hansard Page:** 8

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 07 November 2023

Question:

CHAIR: ... Going back to the service providers, the Carer Gateway service provider manual is something that is prepared federally; is that right? The published version is heavily redacted. Why is that?

Ms Lutz: I assume that it is about processes, but I would need to check that. I will take that one on notice as well.

CHAIR: Okay. Could we get, via the secretariat, a copy without redactions, if that is appropriate?

Ms Lutz: Sure; we will look into that.

Answer:

The abovementioned version of the Carer Gateway Service Provider Operating Manual (manual) was released in response to a Freedom of Information (FOI) request and made available on the Department of Social Services FOI Disclosure Log. The redacted parts of the manual were outside of the scope of the FOI request.

The manual will be released to the Committee Secretariat in full.

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Question asked by: Peta Murphy

Type of Question: Spoken. **Hansard Page:** 8

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 07 November 2023

Question:

CHAIR: Say I have a bad experience—for example, being told I'm not eligible and I am or I have a bad experience with a service provider—who do I complain to? Do I go back to the Carer Gateway or do I follow whatever passage there is through the service provider and their governing bodies?

Ms Lutz: There are generally two options. You can go back to the service provider, but the Department of Social Services is another complaint mechanism.

CHAIR: Is that clear on the website?

Ms Lutz: I would need to take that on notice

Answer:

On the Carer Gateway website the process for making a complaint is found at this link [Speaking up for someone | Carer Gateway](#) by clicking on 'Making a complaint' under the 'Speaking up for someone' section.

There is also a link on the Department of Social Services website (dss.gov.au) at the bottom of the home page to make a complaint directly to the department.