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House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs
PO Box 6021,
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Carers NSW welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs with regards to best practice Indigenous engagement by corporations and Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) to help improve corporate behaviour.

Carers NSW would like to pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, we acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and histories, and pay our respect to the oldest continuous living cultures in the world. Carers NSW values the vital contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers make to the person they care for, their families and communities.

Carers NSW aims to increase awareness and recognition of caring roles in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and promote effective, culturally appropriate support. This brief submission will focus on the unique engagement needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who provide care and support to a family member or friend.

Carers NSW is the peak non-government organisation for carers in New South Wales (NSW). A carer is any individual who provides care and support to a family member or friend who has a disability, mental illness, drug and/or alcohol dependency, chronic condition, terminal illness or who is frail. Carers NSW is part of the National Carer Network and a member of Carers Australia. Our vision is an Australia that values and supports all carers, and our goals are to:

- Be a leading carer organisation in which carers have confidence
- Actively promote carer recognition and support
- Actively support carers to navigate a changing service landscape that will be characterised by ongoing policy reform
- Promote connected community experiences and opportunities for carers that are inclusive of diverse carer groups
- Lead and advocate for carer-specific and carer-inclusive policy making, research and service delivery
- Continue to be a quality-driven, responsive and carer-focused organisation.

Thank you for accepting our submission. [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Elena Katrakis
CEO
Carers NSW

Introduction

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers often have strong connections with their families and communities through kinship systems and view care as a shared family and community responsibility. Research suggests that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are up to twice as likely as other Australians to be carers. The 2018 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) identified 2.65 million Australians, or 11% of the population, as carers.¹ In comparison, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2014-2015 reported 25.5% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander were providing unpaid care.² Among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living remotely, up to 34% were in a caring role.³

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carer profile

The high incidence of caring in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is linked to the greater prevalence of disability and chronic health conditions in these communities.⁴ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers are more likely to be women, and are significantly younger than other carers on average.⁵

Research also indicates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers are more likely than other carers to support multiple care recipients.⁶ This is particularly true of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who often have multi-generational caring roles.⁷

The Carers NSW 2020 National Carer Survey⁸ found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported lower wellbeing than other carers. Additionally, a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported high social isolation (70.3%) and over half reported (62.4%) high or very high levels of psychological distress.⁹

The socio-economic disparities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are well documented. Being a carer can result in additional challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including balancing paid work and care.¹⁰ The effect of providing care on paid employment is particularly significant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men.¹¹

The 2020 National Carer Survey¹² found that the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents who were looking for work was nearly double of that of non-identifying carers (14% and 8%). This was reflected in the financial outcomes of these carers, with over 50% having an annual

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) *Survey on Disability, Ageing and Carers 2018*, Summary of Findings, Canberra: Australian Government.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey*, Australia, 2014–15, Cat.4714.0, Table 10.3, Canberra: Australian Government.

³ Ibid.

⁴ NSW Ministry of Health (2012) *NSW Aboriginal Health Plan 2013-2023*, North Sydney; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011). *The health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: An Overview*, Canberra.

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) *Census of Population and Housing*, table I09 +GCP1, Canberra.

⁶ Carers NSW (2020) *Carers NSW 2020 National Carer Survey: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Carers*, available online at: https://www.carersnsw.org.au/uploads/main/Files/5.About-us/Our-research/Fact_Sheet_Aboriginal_carers.pdf.

⁷ Wall, S and Koori Growing Old Well Study Project Team at Neuroscience Research Australia, in partnership with The Benevolent Society (2013), *Working with Older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*.

⁸ Carers NSW (2020).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Hunter, B., Gray, M. & Crawford H. (2016) 'Who Cares and Does it Matter for the Labour Market? A Longitudinal Analysis of the Labour Force Status of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Carers', Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Canberra: ANU College of Arts & Social Sciences

¹² Carers NSW (2020).

household income of less than \$50,000. Nearly three quarters experienced financial stress, and over a quarter experienced severe financial stress.

Barriers to engagement

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can experience a range of imposed barriers to engagement, informed by a number of unique historical, cultural, spiritual and socio-economic factors. Carers NSW would like to support the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations that respond to this inquiry. This section will highlight the common barriers to engagement which can also be exacerbated by the caring role.

Carer identification

Despite the higher prevalence of disability and caring in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers are less likely to use support services.¹³ One reason is that they may not identify themselves as carers. The term 'disability' is not used by many Aboriginal communities within NSW,¹⁴ and may be rejected to avoid labelling, stigmatisation or exclusion. Because caring is so common, it is often seen as a natural extension of normal family roles and ultimately a community responsibility, reducing the likelihood that carers will seek assistance from formal carer support services.

Cultural and historical barriers

Another potential barrier to engagement may be the distrust of government and non-government organisations due to experiences of discrimination and inter-generational trauma from historical mistreatment and government interventions. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander carers may find that the services and businesses are not culturally appropriate.

Socio-economic factors

Socio-economic factors, such as low income and lack of access to transport, represent a common barrier to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carer engagement with corporations. This barrier is particularly common for carers in rural and remote areas of NSW, where service availability is already limited.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carer policy and legislation

Public service agencies in Australia are obliged under the Commonwealth *Carer Recognition Act 2010* to ensure their staff and agents are aware of the principles of the Statement for Australia's Carers (Schedule 1 of the Act) and reflect the Statement in their employment policies. Public service care agencies are additionally required to ensure their staff and agents enact the principles of the Statement. The Statement lists a range of best practice principles for working with carers, including a principle recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers.

The Commonwealth *Carer Recognition Act 2010* refers to diversity and carers of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage in its Statement for Australia's Carers (Schedule 1 of the Act). Public service agencies must raise awareness of, and reflect, these principles.

¹³ Carers Australia (2013) *Practical ways to overcome isolation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers*, Canberra.

¹⁴ NSW Aboriginal Community Care Gathering Committee (2011) *Challenge, Change and Choice- Policy Position*, p. 10, Sydney, 2011: Carers Australia (2013) *Practical ways to overcome isolation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers*, Canberra.

Key recommendations

To improve engagement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, Carers NSW recommends the following, which we continue to work towards:

1. **Self-determination** through enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers to shape the policies and programs which affect them.
2. **Raising awareness** of carer supports and services in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through accessible and culturally appropriate information.
3. **Flexible, holistic services** that accommodate diverse caring circumstances and historical and cultural factors, as well as supporting existing kinship networks.
4. **Culturally secure services** delivered through or in partnership with services and staff who have built relationships and established trust within Aboriginal communities.
5. **Increased social and emotional wellbeing** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, taking into account the importance of cultural and spiritual factors.

Conclusion

Carers again thanks the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs for the opportunity to provide feedback on this matter. Carers NSW believes that improved identification, recognition and inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers will foster best practice engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by corporations and improve corporate behaviour.