



MINISTER FOR CHILD PROTECTION; COMMUNITIES; WOMEN'S INTERESTS; SENIORS AND VOLUNTEERING

The Secretary of the Committee
Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission No. 761

(Inq into better support for carers)

Dear Secretary

A.O.C. 15/7/08

INQUIRY INTO BETTER SUPPORT FOR CARERS

I commend the Australian Government on establishing this inquiry into what is a very important matter and I welcome the opportunity to make a submission.

As the Western Australian Minister for Communities, carers are included within my portfolio and more specifically, I have responsibility for the administration of the *WA Carers Recognition Act 2004*.

In this regard, I would like to draw your attention to the two reports of the Carers Advisory Council on compliance with the *Carers Recognition Act 2004* which show positive change by the WA public health and disability sectors in recognising the role and contribution of carers. Copies of these reports are enclosed (Attachments 2 and 3).

I make further comment on the implementation of this legislation and associated issues in Attachment 1 and include other comments highlighting the success of the Carers Counselling Line and the Carers Health Awareness and Retreats Program which the Western Australian Government funds Carers WA to deliver.

I have also enclosed a copy of *Research Insights – Safe Caring?* (Attachment 4) which gives an overview of a research project undertaken by the Independent Living Centre with funding from the Western Australian Government to pilot a training model for carers to prevent injury through safer manual handling. This is an area where significant improvement could be made in preventing injuries to carers and so build greater sustainability into the community care sector. The full report can be downloaded from www.ilc.com.au.

Yours sincerely

7 JUL 2008

Sue Ellery MLC

**MINISTER FOR CHILD PROTECTION; COMMUNITIES;
WOMEN'S INTERESTS; SENIORS AND VOLUNTEERING**

Att.

Carers Recognition Act 2004

The *Carers Recognition Act 2004* came into effect on 1 January 2005 and is an important step in supporting the crucial and often difficult and complex role of carers.

The Act was developed in response to calls by carers for greater recognition and consideration by service providers. The legislation is based on an understanding that carers have knowledge, expertise and skill that can assist service providers to deliver services more effectively, that carers themselves have needs and should be supported to be able to continue to provide care, and that carers like everyone else have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them.

The Act is aimed at changing the culture of public health and disability service providers so that the impact on carers is considered when services are assessed, planned, delivered and reviewed, and acknowledges that any care situation will be improved if service providers and carers work together in providing care.

The *Carers Recognition Act 2004* applies only to the public health and disability sectors in Western Australia in keeping with the view that these sectors have the most significant interaction and impact on carers and many of the issues carers grapple with are common to both sectors.

A key part of the Act requires service providers to comply with the Western Australian Carers Charter. The Charter provides clear direction on how carers are to be treated and how carers are to be involved in decisions affecting service provision that impact on them and the role of carers.

The Western Australian Carers Charter

1. Carers must be treated with respect and dignity.
2. The role of carers must be recognised by including carers in the assessment, planning, delivery and review of services that impact on them and the role of carers.
3. The views and needs of carers must be taken into account along with the views, needs and best interests of people receiving care when decisions are made that impact on carers and the role of carers.
4. Complaints made by carers in relation to services that impact on them and the role of carers must be given due attention and consideration.

This applies to the WA Department of Health, Public Hospitals, the Disability Services Commission and the organisations they fund to provide services, and includes the Home and Community Care program.

In addition, the Department of Health, Public Hospitals and the Disability Services Commission must involve carers, (or persons or bodies that represent carers), in any policy or program development, or strategic or operational planning that might affect carers and the role of carers.

These State Government agencies also have to report annually to the Carers Advisory Council on their compliance and performance under this Act.

The Carers Advisory Council is established by the Act and it is charged with providing an annual report for tabling in Parliament on the compliance with the legislation, working to promote and support compliance with the Act, and provide advice to the Government on matters relating to carers.

Relevance to Australian Government Programs.

Whilst the *Carers Recognition Act 2004* does not apply to solely Australian Government funded or operated programs, the underlying premise on which this legislation is founded is equally relevant as carers are critical to providing the care and maintaining the health and wellbeing of the person needing care in any community care setting.

In economic terms I refer to the report by Access Economics released in 2005 *The Economic Value of Informal Care*, which found that in general the average cost of care per person being cared for is lower when the informal care provided by carers is combined with community based formal care services, than the cost of institutional care.

- Informal primary care combined with HACC = approx \$10 681 per annum services
- Informal primary care combined with a CACP = approx \$23 115 per annum
- Residential Aged Care – low care = approx \$30 044 per annum
- Each plus informal primary care = approx \$46 720 per annum
- Residential Aged Care - high care = approx \$59 532 per annum

Investing in services to support carers and address their needs makes the community care system more sustainable, ensures that the care provided is more effective and recognises this group within our community who sacrifice many of their own personal aspirations to care for their loved ones, and who are deserving of our support.

The *Carers Recognition Act 2004* aims to ensure that carers take their rightful place in decision making forums and that as individuals they will be empowered to assert their right to have their needs considered by service providers. It is probable that some of this effect may flow on to carers interacting with Australian Government community care programs especially as similar legislation is being enacted in other jurisdictions.

Progress to date

The implementation of the *Carers Recognition Act 2004* and the work of the Council are still relatively new but already we are seeing positive changes within the Western Australian public health and disability sectors – see the Executive Summary within *Carer Recognition – Building tomorrow's partnerships today*.

Carers Counselling Line

The Western Australian State Government funds Carers WA to operate the Carers Counselling Line (CCL) which is a specialised telephone counselling service that carers can access anytime day or night throughout the year via a free 1800 telephone number.

All counsellors employed by the service have tertiary qualifications in counselling, psychology or social work and some field experience prior to employment. The counsellors are also provided with training in working with carers and carer issues and throughout their employment they are kept up to date on community services and programs relevant to carers.

The Carers Counselling Service is both a capacity enhancing service and a crisis service, the latter providing a safety net for carers during times of severe stress. Capacity enhancing strategies include building resilience and coping skills to sustain carers in their caring role and linking carers into other support programmes either provided by Carers WA or other service providers, and providing information kits and referrals to other agencies who specialise in non-carers issues when these arise.

Counselling staff conduct many follow ups with carers as a result of referrals from other agencies, and to support carers who need ongoing emotional support in their caring roles.

Carers Health Awareness and Retreats Program

The Western Australian State Government also funds Carers WA to operate the Carer Health Awareness and Retreats Programme (CHARP) to raise awareness of carers' health with General Practitioners and allied health professions and meet carers support needs. CHARP also raises the awareness of carers as to their health needs, and supports carers to increase their own capacity through the Linking Together volunteer social support aspect of the programme. The importance of the need to focus on carer health is further supported by encouraging carers to be aware of their need to take a break away from their caring role through the use of two-day short retreat grants.

Both the Carers Counselling Line and Carers Health Awareness and Retreats Programme were pilot projects which have subsequently been funded recurrently as the evaluation of the services showed that carers were having their diverse emotional and social support needs addressed in a holistic way through access to specialised counselling, information, referrals and linkages to other services and through their participation in carer support groups.

Other Issues

In undertaking its work Carers Advisory Council members have had opportunities to consult with carers in both metropolitan Perth and regional Western Australia and I would briefly like to comment on key issues being brought to their attention and subsequently to mine.

Respite

- Without exception the lack of respite services and the lack of respite options is raised in these forums. In particular, carers comment that emergency, overnight, short and long stay options are often not available unless booked well in advance. Carers are also concerned that in many situations the only respite available is in a residential care facility which is not appropriate and lacks the home away from home feel that they are seeking.

The very great challenge for respite is to be sufficiently flexible and responsive to meet the individual physical, emotional, financial and cultural needs of carers and the persons they care for within a wide range of changing economic, social and environmental situations and circumstances.

Care Workers

- In part Council members believe that some of the difficulty in accessing respite services is due to the scarcity of suitably trained care workers. Being carers they have first hand experience of having to deal with regular changes in personnel coming into their homes. This requires them to explain how their household works, areas of sensitivity in dealing with the care recipient and at times being told that there is no care worker available at the scheduled time, so showering etc doesn't occur until mid afternoon or later.

Council believes that the employment conditions, eg employment contracts which don't cover the care workers for cancelled home visits over which they have no control, and low wages are exacerbating these workforce issues.

Working Carers

- It is also being brought to Council's attention the difficulties that carers who are in paid employment have in securing and managing sufficient services to enable them to continue to work and that the biggest load seems to be co-ordinating all the services they receive from multiple providers.

In this regard I note one of the key findings of the Taskforce on Care Costs report *Where to Now?* that 54% of employees caring for a person with a disability and 50% of those caring for an elderly person would increase their part time work hours if care was more affordable. Many other carers not currently in the workforce or those about to leave the workforce to provide care would make other arrangements if care was more affordable.

However, this supposes that care services and other options would be available to meet this demand when currently there are waiting lists for many services, and in regional areas they may not be available at all.

At the same time I believe there would be value in having a national campaign encouraging employers to introduce more carer friendly work practices as a means of retaining and attracting carers who can't work largely because they can't find a workplace that accommodates their role as a carer.

I would also encourage the Australian Government to work towards dispelling the myth that people in receipt of a Carers Payment or a Carers Allowance are being paid to care rather than being in receipt of income support. This would acknowledge the lack of opportunity and options carers have of entering the paid workforce and the long term effects of being unable to save, plan for retirement and accrue superannuation.