

Committee Secretary  
Inquiry into Better Support for Carers  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family,  
Community, Housing and Youth  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

I wish to make a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth's Inquiry into Better Support for Carers.

I am submitting to the Inquiry because...

Not only do I care for my veteran husband I am also President of Partners of Veterans SA and in that role represent our members, many of whom are carers not only for their partners, some also care for disabled children and elderly parents.

I have been married to my veteran for 44 years when he returned from Vietnam in 1966 he was unable to sleep inside, so he slept under the house with the dog so he could do regular patrols during the night, he often mistook me for the Viet Cong, can you imagine the impact on a young wife and son. He tried many times to get treatment for a condition that wasn't recognised in the 70's. During the 70's and 80's was the most difficult time for me as by then I had two children to consider, our beloved husband and father was not only out of control but until 1979 still serving in the defence force. He is no longer the young man I married in 1964; many of our hopes and dreams were shattered.

I am also the Chair of Carers SA, and in that role represent carers in the broader community. A number of States have a Carer Recognition Act, Carer Policy and Carers Charter, we believe that the federal government, if they are serious about carers, should also implement like legislation and ensure that they are enacted.

### **1. The role and contribution of carers in society**

As carers, our role is often not by choice in the first instance; however we take on and continue the role because we love the person.

We save the community many millions of dollars in many cases if we did not care it would mean many of our loved ones would need to be in residential care.

Basic Facts we have 2.6 million carers in Australia with 227,000 in SA, this is a huge poorly paid workforce that contributes to the wider community.

Many Carers are children some as young as five years old.

We protect our loved ones from a society and in many cases family that has no understanding of how their war service has affected and a government that doesn't care, as long as the responsibility isn't theirs.

### **2. The barriers to social and economic participation for carers**

*As a population group, carers generally have a lower standard of living than other population groups in Australia (ABS2004). This means that carers are at-risk of poor health and wellbeing in social and socioeconomic determinants of health (AIHW-2006b).*

As a carer, we face the following problems, many of us have give up lucrative careers to support our loved one , many who care for disabled children or are long term carers , have not had the opportunity to have a well paid careers and many live below the poverty level. Lower income has is a significant impact, on the whole family. In many cases no superannuation due to the length of the caring role

Many face ongoing difficulties paying for utilities, especially for heating and cooling. The cost of incontinence products is enormous, and a carer will go without to make sure their loved one is the priority.

Many Partners of veterans forgo Family outings as their veteran often cannot cope with social interaction, most of the civilian population do don't understand what the problem is as the "war has been over for years", in some cases 60years but the problem remains for the carer

### **3. The practical measures required to better support carers**

*The maintenance of carers' health is considered to be a significant public health issue, as it determines their capacity to provide care for people in their own homes who otherwise may have to rely upon the publicly funded institutional health care (Battam 2004).*

Recognition and adequate funding to support carers and families of War Veterans, by the Department of Veterans Affairs;

Recognition that not only have the Veteran made sacrifices for this country, also has the partners and children, I personally, and my children in many ways lost a loving husband and father, we have grown old before our time, may of us have also lost our lovers. We have lost our youth in service of this country. Our children have lived through the rages the attempted suicides, the alcohol abuse unaware that this not the norm.

When a carer can no longer cope with her veteran partner and leave because of their own ill health, they lose their service pension after 12 months, no consideration for that fact that they may have cared for Partners perhaps for thirty years or more.

We have many young carers that need to be recognition by the Education Department, and given better support, many children have done a days work at home before or after school, and sometimes are just plain worn out.

As a carer, we need to be recognised and respected for what we do, by government and health care professionals, recognise and involve the carer in and treatment plans, as in many cases it is the carer who implements any plans.

Recognise and respect that carers have put their lives on hold.

Recognise and offer suitable training to not only cope better with our loved ones, but to be better able to advocate for them , training that is mindful of what the carer needs and wants.

Access to better health care for carers

Access to meaningful respite tailored to the carers needs.

Have adequate respite available for our loved ones with suitable trained staff, many carers cannot access respite due to lack of training.

Access to affordable counselling, carers have many losses. Succession planning for older carers is a great concern, older carers want to have plans already in place before they pass away, this is very important for their peace of mind.

Lack of understanding of not only government but the general community,

### **4. Strategies to assist carers to access opportunities and choices**

I think the Government can better help carers by making the Centrelink Carers' Allowance form more user friendly, it is very difficult when Centrelink do not understand the term Totally and Permanently Incapacitated . The form is very Task orientated and doesn't take into account people with a mental illness, who can do many of their ADL'S but no allowance for the time a carer spends trying to settle someone who is out of control, perhaps at midnight. After all if you ask anyone with a mental illness they will tell you that there is nothing wrong with them, just the rest of the world.

Centrelink's Reviews for the above is both distressing and time wasting to all concerned.

## 5. Past Carers

Need support after their caring role.  
To recover from health impact  
To deal with grief and loss  
To rebuilt their lives and recover from social isolation

## 6. Health of Carers

As far as I am aware there are no initiatives that address the carers' needs or see carers as individuals with their own health and wellbeing given consideration.

Carers Australia Published in 2007

"The Wellbeing of Australians-Carer Health and Wellbeing".

The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc since our inception in 1999 has been investigating health of partners and or carers of veterans with Operational Service via our health committee. Initially Newcastle University were involved but currently work is being out at the University of New England. Research is ongoing and we will persist in our efforts to seek and find funding to continue this important and ground breaking research.

## References

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004). 2003 disability, ageing and carers: Summary of findings  
Canberra.

Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing (2006b). Chronic diseases and associated risk factors in  
Australia, 2006. Accessible at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10319>

Battam S (2004) Family Carers growing role in population health: Implications for the Health &  
Community Service System, Flinders University. Adelaide

Thank you for taking my views into consideration as part of the Committee's Inquiry. I look forward to reviewing any recommendations you make to improve life for carers in Australia.

Yours sincerely

*Signature*



*Jan*

*Date 1<sup>st</sup> July 2008*