

AOC 16/7/08

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...

I have a care role with two family members, a brother using the adult public mental health services, an elderly grand parent who very recently required intervention and support from aged persons mental health services and who is currently an inpatient at an acute unit. I also work in the mental health services but despite knowing what can and ought to be provided to my family members and myself, I have been sadly disappointed by lack of family sensitive communication and collaboration and feel strongly that attention to these area would improve outcomes for myself as a caregiver as well as my family members who use the public mental health services.

1. The role and contribution of carers in society

As a carer, I feel that my role is...

Undervalued by both state and federal governments. I understand that carers and other family members provide equivalent of millions (possibly billions) of unpaid care to relatives who are seriously unwell. Over the past 20 years I have noted that my family members need to be far more seriously unwell in order to:

- receive care from the public mental health services, particularly admission to an inpatient unit (more so in the adult service than aged care service).

More information is attached on a separate sheet

2. The barriers to social and economic participation for carers

As a carer, I face the following problems ...

For me this means taking time out of work to provide care and support in the lead up to

admission as well as after discharge when things are still seriously' not quite right', places a burden on myself and other relatives who provide care. Some of us do not live in the same township as our family members who experience mental health issues and this further impacts on us economically when trying to provide support, attending family meetings etc.

More information is attached on a separate sheet

3. The practical measures required to better support carers

As a carer, I need help with ...

In the aged care mental health setting:

1. Formal written care plans be developed with family and a written copy be provided to family. This will hopefully ensure greater communication and collaboration between family and service providers. In aged care there are many other agencies involved do to co-morbidity issues associated with aging.

2. Clearer pathways of access to care as well as communication between other aged care service providers.

3. Formal assistance and procedures regarding advance care directives so that the affected family member conveys their wishes for psychiatric management when they are best able to make these decisions. Our experience has been such that hospital staff, who have absolutely no idea of our grandparents level of functioning and general lifestyle choices, are making decisions for her or accepting her current unwell presentation and (out of kilter) wishes as her choices without taking notice of families collateral information.

More information is attached on a separate sheet

4. Strategies to assist carers to access opportunities and choices

I think the Government can better help carers by ...

As above I point 3.

Better publication of funding available to assist in the care role ie the mental health services carer brokerage support funds as well as mental health friendly application forms for Commonwealth Carer Respite centre funding – these forms and many of the centres workers are oriented to physical illness and have limited application or understanding of mental health issues – except for the mental heath workers within the CCRC's.

Address the need to supplement Sick leave and carer leave entitlements at a national level, to more appropriately recognize the cost of caring in terms of loss of wages and work time.

More information is attached on a separate sheet

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