

From: Pauline & Clive
Sent: Thursday, 5 June 2008 6:18 PM
To: Committee, FCHY (REPS)
Subject: Review of Carers' Services

Thursday, 5 June 2008

To:
Committee Secretary,
Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth,

Dear Secretary,

Carers' ACT informed me, as a carer, that the government is considering the present system and support for carers. I present a submission for consideration by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth's enquiry into better support for Carers.

I care for my wife and fortunately we are in a much better position than many other carers, in that she is able to do many things for herself as she has no extreme mental, physical and emotional disability. She had a catastrophic stroke in Dec 2001 and was not expected to live. With the help of the Canberra Hospital Staff, at all levels, and then Community Services she came through. The recommendation was to place her in an institution but our family felt we could manage her condition at home. This has been successful, with the help of all the health and community care available to us. My wife still has major limitations in speech and mobility and with some other processes. She is restricted to driving only in the local area. This means that I need to help her with many of our daily needs. But our daily lives are quite full with good friends, outings and hobbies and craft. Our life is full and there is not much we can say we lack. We have reduced our circle of contacts to a large degree because many people are not comfortable dealing with my wife's condition.

- An issue I raise is why as an age pensioner I qualify for only the \$500 annual benefit I receive with the carers allowance' and not the additional \$1000 paid to those on carers' payments. My situation is no different from any full time carer and I see no reason for the distinction.

The committee is seeking better understanding of Carers' situations.....

- My role as full time carer saves the community enormous resources in time, funds and providing full time care and accommodation.
- This is a significant benefit to the community as a whole. Federal and State governments benefit from a significantly reduced responsibility for a possible full time patient needing low/medium level full time care in an institution.

I recognise that we in Australia benefit from a generous social welfare program compared with most countries. However are we comparable with Holland, Belgium, Scandinavia and Finland ? When we see the government's budget for some programs, e.g. Defence, and the waste that can occur through mismanagement and poor decision making there is clearly scope to improve payments to carers' and seniors by reduction in spending & better management of other programs. The massive budget surpluses in the last few years have clearly offered an opportunity to improve carer payments.

- While the problems I face are not as significant as for the majority of carers I do find the 24/7 care of a person not fully well a strain for me as well as my partner. She has to cope with my impatience and lack of understanding of the severe difficulties she faces daily to maintain a reasonable and enjoyable life. To help us with her situation I stopped working as a private contractor which I enjoyed. I have also cut back to very low levels my time spent walking and golfing, two activities we both enjoyed. We have no family in Canberra and while friends are happy to offer respite this does not make my wife comfortable because of the strain to engage in conversation. We are not seriously concerned about finances at this stage but the situation could change drastically if my wife became unwell and her condition deteriorated and when I also fall ill and am not able to manage our lives and home.

The Committee is interested in solutions.....

- There are no obvious solutions I could offer in our case other than me walking away for the situation and leaving my wife's care to the State. This was the view offered by the health professionals when she first came out of Hospital. However our family all agreed we would manage our situation as best we could and so far we have done OK. The Canberra Health and Community Services gave us a good deal of support in the first few years and the need for this has decreased. We also had the offer of respite care but my wife was not comfortable with the idea. The ACT Carers' Australia has also offered support whenever necessary. We have not used their respite services but have enjoyed some of the social events that they arrange from time to time. To take the occasional break we have bought, with a \$200,000, mortgage, a holiday home on the mid south coast. This has given us all a great deal of pleasure and a chance to break from routine. Perhaps this may be an idea for the committee's consideration: purchase some holiday homes around the country that people like ourselves may be able to rent on a roster basis and at a moderate rent. Perhaps provide assistance to carers with allowances for petrol/fares and board and lodging for a quarterly holiday of 3-5 days, at some nearby holiday location and with reasonable costs.

Thank you for the opportunity for my input.

Yours faithfully

Clive