

Submission No. 1124

(Inq into better support for carers)

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Doc 29/7/08

Committee Secretary
Inquiry into better Support for Carers
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family,
Community, Housing & Youth
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
3rd July, 2008

Dear Secretary

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

I am submitting to the Inquiry because as a Victorian Nurse/Midwife of 20 years and living in an aging population I am now in the position of being a part time carer for my elderly father . He is a 78 year old, widow, Italian speaking, bilateral amputee who is confined to a wheelchair. He is case managed with Southern Cross and has been allocated to Community Aged Care Packages (CACP).

I have been his carer since 1998 and his condition only gets worse and I am getting older. I am concerned about the aging population, as well as women having children later in life. These children will be might burden in the future year (i.e. when they are 20-25 years) to look after their parents . Currently there are limited resources available to us, for the future of carers, governments need to put strategies in place to help the future of carers and elderly people.

People are opting to be cared a home and the government save millions of dollars by keeping them in the home. However for the carer this put an enormous strain and pressure to perform duties and balance life as a care, daughter, partner and employee of the public system.

I am submitting this inquiry because as a community we need to address the issues of carers, the physical, emotional, financial, mental health impact on carers. As already mentioned the Federal government save millions in dollars for caring them in the home and not nursing homes at the expense of the carer.

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1. The role and contribution of carers in society

As a carer, I feel that my role is undervalued, not acknowledged and taken for granted.

I work full time as a midwife and general nurse and care full time for my father. With an aging population, limited extended family support and poor resources carers are burnt out, and I am one of them. The situation is only going to get worse

I believe that society does not value carers.

In the workforce if I am to take carers leave to run my father to appointment, my leave is taken from either sick leave or annual. There are no awards that allocate extra days for carers to attend to their loved ones.

People are more sympathetic if you care for young child as opposed to elderly parents. Men or society find the single mother far more attractive and engaging than a woman or man who is caring for their elderly parents. There appears to be lack of respect and acknowledgement from society and governments.

As a carer and full time worker I am contributing an enormous amount of love, care and passion in my work but also for my father.

2. The barriers to social and economic participation for carers

As a carer, I face the following problems if I was to give up my job full time my earnings would be 1/6 of what I earn now.

To be a carer was not a job I applied for, I inherited it. I get no annual loading, no sick leave, no Long service leave, no penalty rates, no on call rates, no discount for petrol, no tax deduction benefits, no salary sacrifice or salary package (even though what I am doing is not for profit), no company car & no superannuation.....I hardly think the allowance of \$45 dollars week is beneficial and an annual carers payment of ???\$20,000 is worth it.

I have to work because I am young and have to prepare for my future as an old, woman without children because things will change when I am old.

I have a mortgage and have to live; the pension is not one that will allow me to prepare for my future financially.

3. The practical measures required to better support carers

As a carer, I need help with finances and or more community support. In the UK carers are given travel & car allowances.

Their needs to be more aged care packages and the packages need to be available ASAP. There should be no waiting lists/time etc. If disabled or elderly people are to be discharge from hospital and services implemented the transition should be smooth and readily available.

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4. Strategies to assist carers to access opportunities and choices

I think the Government can better help carer by;

- Increase pension/carers allowance equivalent to what they earned before becoming a carer.
- As a carer we should have petrol reimbursements, discount for car insurance, RACV and like they do in the UK, if you a full time carer you a given a car on behalf of her majesty.
- Superannuation should be allocated for carers, particularly as they are getting younger and they need a future.
- Negotiate with Reserve bank for lower interest rates for loans.
- More disable appliances and for free, I do not believe pensioners should be paying full cost particularly when they have paid taxes for most of their lives.
- All carers should be given Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme card/ Health care card for discounts for medication. There is overwhelming evidence that carers are isolated and experience mental health conditions such as depression and if you are working you have to pay full price for anti-depressants and anti-anxiety pills. I believe that they should be some concession for them.

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.

If you would like to discuss any of the issues I have suggested believe do not hesitate to call me. If you are seeking members of the community to be involved any forums, committees or focus groups please do not hesitate to call me.

You're sincerely

Caterina,