

Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Better Support for Carers June 2008

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The role and contribution of carers in society and how this should be recognised.

- Greater recognition of the cost and value of caring through **substantially increasing the carer allowance and/ or a tax deduction or rebate of direct costs** associated with caring. In particular, car costs are a major impost on carers as a significant role of the carer involves taking the person being cared to medical appointments, physiotherapy, shopping, support group activities, etc.

The barriers to social and economic participation for carers, with a particular focus on helping carers to find and/or retain employment.

- **Greater availability of short term/and or urgent respite** is necessary to help the carer retain employment.
- **The six month minimum period for carers' allowance should be removed** as it unfair. In my particular case one of my adult sons rushed up to Townsville to take over the caring of my wife (she is disabled and has MS) as I had been admitted to hospital for emergency heart by pass surgery. He applied for and was granted the carer's allowance and cared for my wife for three months until I was well enough to resume as her carer,. Upon my son's return to Melbourne, Centrelink demanded a refund of the allowance paid to him, as he had not cared for my wife for at least six months. This was extremely unfair as my son dropped everything to come up to Townsville, leaving his job in Melbourne.
- The carer needs confidence that **emergency care will be of the appropriate standard**. My wife had arranged that she would be looked after the day I had my angiogram on 1st June 2005. Unfortunately her carer was unsuitable. She could not hear the vital telephone call (the doctor ringing my wife to tell her that I would need an emergency by pass); the carer could not lift (my wife had had several falls and it was vital that she was provided with someone who was able to lift).

- The carer also needs assurance that **agencies providing care receive sufficient funding** to enable them to offer the care packages needed. For example, a friend disabled by Parkinson's disease was assessed as needing 20 hours care per week at home, but because the agency had insufficient funds, he only received 12 hours leaving his wife/carer totally exhausted.

The practical measures required to better support carers, including key priorities for action;

- **Modifications to the home to enable the disabled person to be more independent and to therefore reduce the load on the carer.** Funds need to be available for urgent attention to address matters such as easier access to house entry; widen doorways of specified rooms; modifications of kitchen facilities such as pantry, food preparation benches, sinks, laundry facilities such as washing machines and driers, modifications of bedroom wardrobes, etc
- **Larger change rooms with grab rails in retail outlets** so that carer can assist the person cared for to shop for clothes.

Strategies to assist carers to access the same range of opportunities and choices as the wider community, including strategies to increase the capacity for carers to make choices within their caring roles, transition into and out of caring, and effectively plan the future.

- The range of opportunities for the carer and the person cared for is limited because of the **inaccessibility of many venues and locations** for the disabled person and the **general lack of toilets for the disabled.** Toilets for the disabled should be a mandatory feature not only of new buildings, but of old buildings that are being renovated.
- Carers crave the opportunity to take the cared-for person on a holiday. **Financial assistance should be available to encourage owners of holiday accommodation to provide medium cost disabled-friendly facilities,** so that the carer and the cared-for can have a holiday together.