

ADC 4/8/08
Submission No. 1169
(Inq into better support for carers)

Sent: Thursday, 3 July 2008 10:17 PM
To: Committee, FCHY (REPS)
Subject: Carers Inquiry Submission

Dear Secretary
This my submission to the inquiry.

I am submitting to this inquiry because

As a carer/consultant who has worked for many years in the mental health system I am making a submission on behalf of the many carers from culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD) Many of these people do not have the skills to reply to to this submission and I have chosen to speak for them. Throughout the past 20 years I have had concerns at the problems that they face.

1. The role and contribution of carers in society.

My personal contributions to society has been extensive.

As a carer/family we have supported our son who experiences chronic schizophrenia with housing, moral support understanding and the love of his extended family.

I see my role as his mother to be part of the treatment team as expressed in mental health policy. To be listened to and respected. By working in partnership with the clinicians I am contributing to society by learning how understand him and help him not to relapse. This becomes cost effective to our society.

The CALD families through their collective family values also contribute to society through taking the responsibility of caring for their ill person. Not only caring but providing both secure housing and financial support. These families see it as their responsibility.

2. The barriers to social and economic partnerships for carers from CALD are

The stigma of mental illness in their communities is very strong. It becomes a barrier for them to lead a peaceful life within their friendship and family groups. It creates divisions in their societies and both the consumer and the family feel isolated.

The carer faces financial difficulties, especially the mother or wife of the ill person. The erratic nature of serious mental illness makes it really hard for them to keep their jobs. The nature of the illness also creates problems when the consumer is irresponsible with money.

3. The practical measures required to better support carers.

As with all carers the Carer Allowance for carers of relatives with mental illness is most unfair. The criteria to be accepted is based on physical demands of care for the consumer. With mental illness there is so much psychological stress which often includes financial demands. The effect of this type of caring is causing real health problems to these carers and it needs to be changed.

Our CALD carers need better trained clinicians to understand the cultural and value differences that are so important when treating mental illness

This training should be available to all people studying in all the health faculties.

There is a great need for bi-lingual and bi-cultural workers to be involved in the mental health system. This will enable the carers some comfort when communicating their problems.

From my experience I know how valuable it has been to families when they knew I was bi-lingual. It helped the clinicians work more effectively.

Our CALD carers, especially our recent migrants must have trained interpreters in mental health

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

I think the Government can better help the carer by

Encouraging and having incentives to encourage more people into the mental system.

Improved training for these workers to communicate effectively with the carers to help guide them in their caring role. Very few CALD carers go the NGO or attend education programs. There is always an excuse that interpreters are not available.

To better engage CALD communities to help break down stigma.

To facilitate bi-lingual workers into the system

To fund and train more outreach workers in all communities to visit homes and give carers support and respite.

Increased housing with supported trained staff.

CALD communities to be encouraged to be involved in supporting housing projects for their ethnic people with mental illness.

Carer Allowance to be more accessible.

Using the ethnic media more effectively to help in educating people to understand mental illness and be part of a campaign to break down stigma.

More effective rehabilitation for our CALD consumers would indirectly help the carers.

I look forward to reviewing any recommendations you make to improve life for carers in Australia.

Yours sincerely

Kali