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3rd July, 2008

The Committee Secretariat
House Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth

Dear Sir or Madam,

**Victorian Mental Health Carers Network Inc. Response
to the report on "Better support for Carers",
House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Family, Community, Housing and Youth**

The Carers Network commends the House of Representatives for addressing this issue and their acknowledgement of the vital contribution made by carers together with an awareness of the burden this care can incur and the impact of this burden on carers' health, employment and social life.

The Network would like to point out that there have been many comprehensive studies and reports on this issue of 'Better Support for Carers', which we believe, provide excellent guidance, suggestions and recommendations. Rather than reproduce the excellent and detailed research on this subject, we will list documents we regard as of central relevance and significance and urge the Standing Committee to examine these documents carefully. The documents referred to focus specifically on the issues involved in providing better support to carers. They are as follows:

'Carers of People with Mental Illness Project Report, 2000'. This project was an innovative partnership project funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care and jointly conducted by the Mental Health Council of Australia and the Carers Association of Australia.

'Enhancing Relationships between Health Professionals and Consumers and Carers Report 2000', Mental Health Council of Australia.

'Caring together – An action plan for carer involvement in Victorian public mental health services', Mental Health Branch, Department of Human Services, Victoria, 2006.

'I feel so sad ...it breaks my heart', Mid West Area Mental Health Service Carers of Non-English Speaking Background Research Project. 2002

'A Long Way to Go: National Survey of Services for Carers of People with Mental Illness, SANE Australia, 1998

'The Blueprint Guide to Carer Education and Training', SANE Australia, 1999

'Pathways of Recovery; Preventing Relapse', prepared for the National Mental Health Promotion and Prevention Working Party by Debra Rickwood, 2004, pages 20 – 22.

In addition to drawing the Standing Committee's attention to this substantial body of research and knowledge, the Network would like to provide comments on the Terms of Reference.

Terms of Reference:

The introductory sentence to the terms of reference refers to Australia's current system of community-based *person-centred care*. The Network prefers the term *consumer/family/carer focused care*. 'Person' is too general and includes the entire population which is misleading, focused seems to represent more accurately the intention rather than 'centred'.

We also suggest that the 3rd priority 'the practical measures required to better support carers, including key priorities for action' would be better listed as the first issue. We see this as the first issue requiring attention because unless practical measures are put in place to support carers, they cannot participate in the ways envisaged.

Additional Comments:

Educational information and workforce training on inclusion of families/carers as partners in treatment and care

Central to all the terms of reference listed is the issue of ensuring that educational information and training is provided to the work force, which facilitates the inclusion of families/carers as partners in treatment and care. Some excellent initiatives have been developed by the Bouverie Centre in Victoria to assist workers to engage and work with families of mentally ill people, e.g. Building Family Skills Together and Family Sensitive Training. These types of programs are being piloted in Victoria and parts of New South Wales and could be profitably extended to all states.

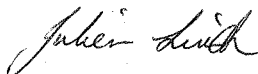
Processes need to be put in place to ensure that the work force is provided with information and training in involving families/carers as partners in treatment and care. There also need to be accountability measures built in and evaluation of the operation of the programs, systems and processes.

Accountability systems

Frequently, excellent policies and processes are put in place but accountability and evaluation systems are not instituted to ensure these policies and processes are executed. This needs to be remedied.

Review and Implementation of 'Caring together – An action plan for carer involvement in Victorian public mental health services'. This plan needs to be reviewed with a view to including accountability and evaluation provisions and could then be fully implemented in Victoria and extended to other states.

Yours sincerely,



Julien Leith,
Executive Officer



Colin Fryer,
Chairman