

ADC 29/7/08

INQUIRY INTO BETTER SUPPORT FOR CARERS
House Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth
3 July, 2008

We commend the Minister and the Committee for undertaking this important inquiry.

I write on behalf of the Social Issues Executive of the Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney, in recognition of the important and often undervalued work of carers in our community. Our principal aim is to express our support for this inquiry and to acknowledge the many carers in our midst who due to the demands of caring, are unable to make submissions on their own behalf.

We draw your attention to the submission made by Anglicare (Sydney) which is the community care arm of the Sydney Anglican Church. As a major provider of services to people with a disability and their carers, Anglicare is well placed to provide specific information about the challenges facing carers. We would however like to also make the following more general points.

Financial hardship

We are particularly concerned that at a time when most Australians are feeling the pressures of rising food, housing and fuel prices, carers and their families are already quite vulnerable and face the prospect of further financial stress.

Common responses of carers in a recent study into their wellbeing were that:

- They believed the Carer Allowance is not enough, and that
- They are financially insecure because of the sacrifices they make to be a carer and the additional expenses that entails.

In another study by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) it was found that 30% of families with a carer receiving a Carer Allowance and 29% of families with a carer receiving Carer Payment had experienced difficulty paying electricity, gas or telephone bills on time, compared with only 14.6% of the general population.

Health of carers

Reports that carers do not receive treatment for their own conditions, either because they cannot afford the time or the cost, are not uncommon. Carers also often carry injuries that are a direct result of their caring role. One of the key issues to emerge from the AIFS study was that carers and other family members experience higher rates of mental health problems, particularly depression and anxiety, than the general population. We hope that the Government will be able to take measures to remove the obstacles that currently prevent carers from attending to their own health needs, particularly in the area of providing quality respite care options and support services.

Long term planning

Much of the anxiety experienced by carers revolves around the uncertainty about their own future and the future of the person for whom they care. We urge the government to make it a priority to continue planning for the future needs of this growing group of people, particularly in the provision of a range of suitable accommodation options that cater for the changing levels of care required over time, and also to address the workforce shortages in the disability services sector.

Advances in medical treatment have resulted in a growing number of people in need of care, either as a result of aging or disability. It is a mark of how caring we are as a nation that nearly half a million people on a daily basis provide the primary care for another person in their life. And yet it is to our national shame that these carers and their families often struggle on in isolation, with insufficient support, sometimes in poverty and with few choices available to them.

We trust that the government, as a result of this inquiry, will take urgent and decisive action to improve the level of support available to carers who provide one of the most important services to our community. We urge the government to make it a priority and we are optimistic that all Australians would support increases in government expenditure that would benefit this valued group of people.

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