



Submission No. 1212

(Inq into better support for carers)

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1 July, 2008

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth
P.O. Box 6021
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

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

In my experience my role as a full-time carer (65y.o.) for my wife (57y.o.) is not appreciated by politicians, bureaucrats and the general public. Politicians only want to know us, when an election is looming. Public Service departments like Centrelink and Health are treating us and our carees with contempt, abuse and intimidation, when we are seeking assistance.

I feel that both I as a carer and my wife as my caree have contributed substantially to the Australian society during our previous working lives in executive managerial positions. By the same token as a full-time carer, although on government pensions, I am saving the Australian taxpayer a bundle of money by looking after my wife. I am also an unpaid volunteer member of a number of committees with NSW Health and the GP Network as a community representative. I also try to assist other carers in their battle for assistance with bureaucratic red tape.

I face severe financial problems, having about \$65-100 per fortnight left to buy food for my caree and myself. I also cannot access medical help for my wife, who suffers from congenital Klippel-Trenaunay-Weber syndrome coupled with severe Lymphoedema. There are only 240 cases known worldwide. My wife is the only sufferer in Australia. We were a highly taxed working family once, but we had to spent our superannuation payouts on saving the life of our youngest daughter. Again there was no financial help available. Now that we need help, we are being ignored and thrown on the scrapheap.

I can not participate in social life, because of my wife's lack of mobility and her high care needs. Our 15 year old car has now broken down with no money for repairs, which in turn has now led to my wife being totally socially isolated and I have very limited social exposure.

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As indicated earlier we are financially virtually destitute, just attempting to survive and keep up payments like our mortgage etc. There are a few days every fortnight, when we do not eat.

Although I am 65 years old, I still would like to do some paid work. As a retired research manager I have a lot of experience and knowledge to offer, particularly in teaching or mentoring roles.

This work should not mean that I or my caree loose any of our Welfare payments. I would however need support to assist my wife, while I am working. My caring duties do not entail hours from 9 to 5, but rather 24/7!

I am exceedingly concerned about my future, because I am not able to keep up with escalating costs and the uncertainty is affecting my health.

The most stressful points for me are the lack of financial certainty and the lack of medical assistance available for my wife, especially considering that we both have worked extremely hard in our working life and now when we need help, none is available.

As a full-time male carer I need occasional help with all those domestic chores and a free service would be a good solution for me. Furthermore a service that provides free outings, to give us some relief from the social isolation we experience.

However the best help the government can provide for carers is a better financial outcome. Community Care providers are funded by the Federal government to the tune of millions of Dollars. These care providers are paying their Community Care Assistants \$19.33 - 21.51 + travel allowance + super. I have had personal experience with one of these providers (KinCare, Sydney). Firstly there is a co-contribution of \$10/ hour with a minimum of 2 hours per week. These care assistant do absolutely very little, many of them can hardly communicate in English. Secondly care providers charge commercial rates, if general house cleaning is required. Hundreds of these Community Service providers have sprung up, each with massive overheads paid for by the taxpayer. Carers like myself can not afford these services. Being on government pensions means that we are living below the poverty line.

I suggest that the Federal Government pay a full-time carer on a government pension the equivalent of the income received by a Community Care Assistant for a 40 hour week. This would equate to about 40 hours @ \$20/ hour. There also should not be any reduction in the Disability Support pension for the caree, because of the outragesly high medical costs. Carees like my wife should be able to access Private Hospitals paid for by Medicare, when appropriate services are not available in the Public system. Another way to help carers like myself would be to extend the Rental Assistance Scheme to cover carers, who are paying off their mortgage - A Mortgage Assistance Scheme. A novel way would be to make carers and their carees, who receive government pensions, "GST exempt".

I used to have a multiple caring role, looking after my wife, my youngest daughter and my now 93 y.o. mother-in-law. The stress and strain on a carer with multiple roles is absolutely horrendous. I am fortunate that these days I only have to care for my wife, but I am still struggling to access services for both my wife and myself, because of the complex nature of the relationship between federal and state funded services. There is also a total lack of understanding, empathy and unwillingness to help by bureaucrats in general, but in particular those in Centrelink and in Health.

In closing I would like to draw the following to the attention of the Standing Committee.

- 1.- Statement by the Prime Minister on 8 March, 2008 from the Solomon Islands,
" There is no way we leave carers and seniors in the lurch. We are there to extend a helping hand to those in need". (Source: Channel 9 Sydney 6pm News, 8 March, 2008)
- 2.- United Nations/ World Health Organisation Charter ,
"The provision of Healthcare is a basic Human Right"

We do need a helping hand and we do need Healthcare for our carers.

Many carers and their carers, like my wife and I, need urgent help right now. We can not wait till May or even December 2009.

Successive governments have told us, how rich this country is. They talk about helping the "Working Family".

My family used to be a "Working Family", paying up to 63 cents in a dollar tax. This fact is conveniently forgotten by governments.

And by the way we are still working families, our roles have simply changed.

I challenge every politician and bureaucrat to spend 2 weeks, doing the job that I am doing. I would suggest that their stress levels would skyrocket and they would give up very quickly.

Politicians and their bureaucrats have no idea, how tough it is for us out in the real world. It is easy to sit in an air-conditioned office in front of a computer drinking coffee and pontificate.

Talk is cheap, setting up committees is easy - How about some action.

I would like to thank you for taking my views and comments 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.

Yours faithfully

Frederick