



A.O.C. 7/7/08

Submission No. 545
(Inq into better support for carers)

DAWN

Community Secretary
Inquiry into Better Support for Carers
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community
Housing and Youth
P O Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

As the sole carer of my very elderly mother I wish to draw your attention to the following areas of concern to me and my mother.

- (1) When my father died in 1999 I gave up work to look after my mother. At first she was in reasonable health and we were able to enjoy several holidays and short breaks which I felt were very important activities for her. However as my mother's health deteriorated my daily living costs were never able to be replaced, (nor were my holiday costs). In all, up until I was sixty years of age, I lost almost \$400,000 in un-earned income. I am now a modestly self-funded retiree with a carefully maintained twenty year old vehicle so the *Carer's Payment* and *Carer's Allowance* are very important to me
- (2) The application to Centrelink for a *Carer's Allowance* and / or *Carers Payment* is not only extremely difficult but humiliating. I found the cavalier attitude of Centrelink staff so patronising that I felt that they were grimly determined that I should never receive any payment. It was only after several letters and telephone calls to the minister and to my local federal member that any positive action eventuated. Even now a friend whose father was 97 years old was denied a payment because he was "too good" and did not need special help!
- (3) Generally it is not possible to make an appointment to see a member of the Centrelink staff. I have found this very difficult because I am reluctant to leave my mother on her own unless I know how long I may be. I can rely on neighbours but I do need to have a time frame for them. Up until recently I have had the responsibility of an *Enduring Power of Attorney* for an uncle. I desperately needed a face to face discussion with a Centrelink staff member because the call centre operators had no understanding of an EPA and were constantly referring to

supervisors. I was often told misleading and incorrect information and of course each telephone call meant that a long explanation must be given through each and every time. I have wasted so much time on telephone calls that I would rather not make them!

- (4) Respite care is far too restricted. and inflexible. Sometimes carers need only two or three nights away but the person being cared for must book and pay for two weeks care. Twice my mother has done this and of course, refuses to do this again. Respite care must be flexible and more responsive to the carer's needs.
- (5) My mother is still able to enjoy outings but it is made nearly impossible by the lack of and abuse of disabled parking. There is very little disabled parking but often motorists are illegally parked without a permit or are using a permit for which they are not eligible. Despite a long running awareness campaign by *The Sydney Morning Herald* the government of the state of New South Wale has given up on the misuse of permits and has failed to increase the penalties which would help ensure that disabled parking is used by genuine permit holders.
- (6) In 2007 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs held an inquiry into *Older People and the Law*. Can your committee of inquiry ensure that the recommendations made in 2007 are not lost but are carefully considered and carried forward?
- (7) I feel that there are many other points I could add but as a full time carer my time is very limited.

With thanks

Yours faithfully

Dawn