

Commonwealth Enquiry into Better Support for Carers Report on Carers Focus Group 12 June 2008

Venue Gladesville Rd Community Centre
44 Gladesville Rd, Hunters Hill

Participants 12 Aged Carers & 3 Carees

Method

Participants met together for a regular Support Group session. Our meeting room seats up to 20 in a 'round table' format. The atmosphere was relaxed and informal with morning tea supplied. Approximately half an hour was devoted to this topic until no further comments were forthcoming.

Participants were invited to submit letters to the Enquiry privately, but few were interested in taking home the guidelines supplied, as their time is limited and the instructions looked 'too complicated'.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The overriding issue which caused hardship on several levels to participants was the service provided by Centrelink. However the Dental Health Service and Counselling line were also mentioned.

A. COMMENTS ABOUT CENTRELINK

Complexity of the 'system'

"Dealing with Centrelink is sooo stressful"

"An insensitive system -very much a 'one size fits all' "

"The means-test for assets - It's like trying to navigate a minefield"

"A nightmare having to find all those old documents"

"Such an unnecessary need to reapply with all my documentation to transfer from Carers Pension to the Aged Pension"

(After mother went into Residential Care)

"Only being able to earn \$132 per fortnight without your pension being reduced is a disincentive to look for work – you lose \$1 for every \$2 earned"

"Having to find 'all those documents' is a particularly difficult for older people"

"They treat you as if you are 'old & senile'"

"See you as an illiterate 'home-body-idiot'"

"You have to give a new address to Centrelink every 3 months!"

"Massive number of letters generated by Centrelink – I'm bombarded with at least 3 per week"

"They don't want you to know too much"

"Where do you go? There's no good guidance"

Delays

“It takes too long to get an appointment with a Financial Officer”

“3 ½ months to transfer from Carers to Aged Pension”

“Very slow to react. Computerisation has slowed everything down”

Communicating with staff

“The Financial Manager was not very well informed. I could have got what he repeated to me off the website. I was looking for more insight.”

“Many of the counter staff come from other countries and their English is not very good. They tend to interpret the rules very literally and can't think outside the square”

“The flexibility of the 'rules' depends on the Customer Service Review Officer you happen to get”

“If you see a younger person on the counter – they give you the 'soft-shoe shuffle”

B. DENTAL HEALTH SERVICE

“The staff at those centres are mostly inexperienced trainees”

“The service is very poor – after 7 months I still have problems”

C. CARERS INFO. LINE

“They are understaffed. When I called for urgent counseling it took 2 weeks for them to respond and phone me back”