



AOC 17/7/08

Submission No. 915  
(Inq into better support for carers)

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

2<sup>nd</sup> July 2008

Dear Secretary,

On behalf of the Australian Association of Gerontology, I would like you to consider the enclosed submission to the Inquiry into Better Support for Carers.

The AAG is Australia's largest multi-disciplinary professional association of people who work in, or have an interest in ageing. Our membership extends across practitioners, researchers, educators and policy makers from a broad range of disciplines and employment settings. The AAG has almost 900 individual and corporate members from every State and Territory who work together to improve the quality of life for older people. Our membership includes carers, people who provide services to carers, carer advocates, carer service planners and policy makers, and carer researchers.

We believe that the contribution made by carers in supporting and maintaining older people and people with disabilities to remain in their homes and communities is invaluable to our community. We commend the Australian Government for conducting this Inquiry and trust that it will lead to improvement in carer policy across the whole of Government.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr Briony Dow

AAG Representative  
Carer Submission

On behalf of

A/Prof Laurie Buys  
AAG National President

*expanding knowledge of ageing*

## **Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG) response to the Australian Government's Inquiry into Better Support for Carers – July 2008**

The AAG is Australia's largest multi-disciplinary professional association of people who work in, or have an interest in ageing. Our membership extends across practitioners, researchers, educators and policy makers from a broad range of disciplines and employment settings. The AAG has almost 900 individual and corporate members from every State and Territory who work together to improve the quality of life for older people. Our membership includes carers, people who provide services to carers, carer advocates, carer service planners and policy makers, and carer researchers. The AAG response to each of the four Inquiry Terms of Reference is outlined below.

### **1. The role and contribution of carers in society and how this should be recognised**

Carers contribute an enormous amount of unpaid assistance to family members or friends who may be older people and/or people with a disability. This care saves the public purse billions of dollars each year and enables older people and people with a disability to remain in their own homes and communities. The contribution of carers has been estimated as equivalent to 1 million full-time employed persons or \$19.3 billion which is almost double the total government contribution to welfare services (AIHW, 2003, 2004). Despite this contribution, the AAG believes that there is still inadequate recognition of the role and contribution of carers to society.

This lack of recognition is evidenced by:

- government policies and programs that shift the burden of care from the State to carers without any consultation or recognition of this shift, such as, early discharge and hospital admission avoidance programs
- the lack of consideration of the costs to carers in evaluation of government policies and programs
- the lack of consultation with carers by health professionals regarding care decisions that impact upon the life of the carer.

The AAG endorses the recommendation by Carers Australia that the Australian Government should establish a whole of government Office for Carers to develop a national policy framework with and for carers. This Office could then advise on the carer impact of proposed new policies and programs.

Furthermore any research into the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of changes to the health and welfare service system should include the opportunity costs to and replacement costs of carer contribution to the health and welfare of Australians.

### **2. The barriers to social and economic participation for carers, with a particular focus on helping carers to find and/or retain employment**

The recent Taskforce on Care Costs (TOCC) report found that combining work and aged or disability care was detrimental to the careers or jobs of 34% of carers. The challenges include:

- needing to take more time off than other workers
- having disrupted careers that impact upon opportunities for promotion, professional development and contributions to superannuation
- having to pay for replacement care in order to attend work.

The AAG recommends that the Australian Government adopt the recommendations made in the TOCC report, including:

- development and consistent implementation of a full range of flexible work practices for people with caring roles who want to participate in the paid workforce
- increasing the level of financial supports to employees with caring responsibilities to enable them to purchase care and have a choice about the level of paid work and care they wish to engage in
- commitment to a Family Responsibilities and Carers' Rights Act
- a comprehensive review of public policy and employment strategies to assist employees to balance their work and care responsibilities.

In addition, the AAG supports the proposal made by Carers Australia that the Government should introduce a Carers Superannuation Scheme for recipients of the Carer Payment with a Government contribution of 9% of the Federal Minimum Wage.

### **3. The practical measures required to better support carers, including key priorities for action**

A review of the published and grey literature on carer supports conducted in 2004 by the National Ageing Research Institute (NARI) for the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) found that carers prefer respite services that are:

- Flexible, adaptive and responsive
- Person centred
- Available after hours, on weekends, overnight; eg evening activity groups (5 – 8.00 pm) so carers have a break around dinner time
- Able to provide regular planned breaks from caring
- Known
- Reliable
- Quickly and easily accessible, including by transport, and without a lot of "red tape"
- Available, including in rural areas
- Affordable
- Good quality and good reputation
- Inclusive of the carer to inform care, preferences and needs of the care recipient
- Sensitive to linguistic, dietary, spiritual and cultural diversity, and gender differences
- Perceived as safe and comfortable for the person they care for
- Staffed with caring and continuous staff who take a holistic approach to care.

Some innovative approaches to carer support that have been found to be successful include:

- Physical activity groups for carers - a six month physical activity program, where carers can choose yoga, strength training, or tai chi
- Men's carer support groups, where men can share stories and emotions, and have them validated as legitimate and "normal"
- Information technology to communicate among carers, and between carers and providers. This includes telephone, Internet and video links with carers in their homes, including those in rural areas
- Flexible carer retreats – carers feel less isolated and alone, can focus on their own health and well-being, and feel uplifted from the break. Retreats can introduce previously hesitant carers to the benefits of planned respite
- Carers continuing to meet together after an initial event such as a physical activity group or retreat
- The care recipient is involved in, or cared for, during the carer activity.

Current in-home respite services are not generally adequate to provide carers with a meaningful break. Carers who are caring for increasingly aged and frail persons at home have identified the need for in-home respite on a regular basis. The hours available with aged care packages are not sufficient to give a meaningful break, that is, a day off on a regular basis, rather than just a few hours for the carer to attend to shopping and bill paying. With the very frail high dependency people now being cared for at home, attending day care programs is not always an option.

Caring is also a significant public health issue, with carers significantly more likely to suffer from various chronic health conditions and report moderate to major impacts on their physical and emotional health (Pop. Research and Outcomes Studies Unit, SA Dept of Health, 2007).

Carers also need to be supported by Government to access suitable housing, transport, equipment, home modifications, health services, education and training and income support as required to reduce health and wellbeing impacts and enable them to continue in their caring role if required.

The AAG recommends that the Australian Government commission further research into the needs of carers and support services that can be shown to have both objective and subjective benefits for carers.

#### **4. Strategies to assist carers to access the same range of opportunities and choices as the wider community, including strategies to increase the capacity for carers to make choices within their caring roles, transition in and out of caring and effectively plan for the future**

Adoption of the above recommendation would help to give carers access to the same range of opportunities and choices as the wider community. However, it is also recommended that the Australian Government explore ways in which carers can be supported to plan their caring roles and future.

It is recommended that services be developed that enable carers to participate in a life planning or strategic planning approach to caring careers, identifying life goals, barriers to and opportunities for achieving the goals, and steps or strategies to achievement. This has been done successfully by a carer support group in Western Australia.

Research in progress at NARI has found that carers are still not aware of the range of services available to them. It is recommended that strategies to address carer knowledge of and access to existing services need to be further explored and developed.

Finally, carer advocacy bodies, such as Carers Australia and its State and Territory bodies and Alzheimer's Australia should be adequately resourced and supported to continue their important role in advocating for and supporting carers.

#### **Prepared by**

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STANDING COMMITTEE  
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