

**Inquiry Into Support For Carers  
The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family,  
Community, Housing and Youth**

**Submission**

UnitingCare Community Options (UCCO) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth's, 'New Inquiry into Support for Carers.

UCCO is a Uniting Church agency which provides support to older people, people with disabilities and carers. UCCO aims to enable people to achieve and maintain a worthwhile life. UCCO is the largest case management and brokerage agency in the Inner Eastern Region of Melbourne. The organization has a number of Federal and State Government's funded programs such as NRCP, CCRC and Carelink, CACP, EACH, EACHD, HACC, and Flexible Support Packages for people with a disability. Through this suite of services UCCO on an annual basis assists approximately 4000 people including people with care need and carers.

Upon careful consideration of the inquiry's terms of reference the organization would like to bring the following to the commission's attention: The focus area of the inquiry - that is, carer recognition, barriers to social, economic participation, measures required to support, strategies to increase access to opportunities in life and capacity to choose and plan for the future - are well documented in both the national and international body of literature. Reports tabled by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the Australian Institute of Family Studies, as well as findings of academic led research and advocacy bodies<sup>1</sup> are some examples of what has been published on these topics. These well-documented reports have not only identified the key issues but also provided strategies as to how these challenges can be resolved.

Given that issues are well covered by the existing body of literature, this submission will address the inquiry's questions by identifying issues that the organisation consider at the core of carer policy and program development. Individual carers who have been supported by UCCO are individually placing contributions to the inquiry.

UCCO urges the committee to consider a family-centred framework when developing carer policies and programs. A family-centred policy framework encourages the development of supports that are focussed on the household, significant others and the wider informal support network as opposed to a focus on the individual carer in isolation from his/her context. Such a framework recognises the intertwined nature of care relationships and it emphasises the importance of families and significant others in the lives of individual carers and care recipients. The carer-only focussed policy and programs tend to consider carers in isolation. While we recognise the crucial role

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2008, The Nature and Impact of Caring for Family Members with a Disability in Australia, Research Report No. 16.  
Centre for Health Service Development, 2007, Effective Caring: a Synthesis of the International Evidence on Carers Needs and Interventions, University of Wollongong.  
Carers Australia, 2004, Productivity Commission's Research Study on the Economic Implications of an Ageing Australia,  
Schofield, H. et al, 1998, Family Care Givers: Disability, Illness and Ageing, Allen and Unwin.

of supporting carers, we believe that this should always be done in a way that preserves the dignity of the person being cared for, and does not project them into the role of being a “burden”.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that interventions are more effective when targeting the wider support network. Strategies that only target carers are often considered not supportive enough to alleviate stress. Carers often feel supported by the knowledge that the person with care needs is also engaged in meaningful activities. The literature provides some evidence of the efficacy of such intervention framework. For example, the Centre for Health Service Development’s (2007) analysis of carer interventions shows that family-centred supported intervention is effective. The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services ACT (2003) Review of Effective Carers Interventions<sup>2</sup> also suggests that intervention measures produce better outcomes when taking into consideration the carer, care recipient in their family and closer network context.

In short, we must move beyond one-dimensional response that most of the time only alleviate a moment of crisis, say for instance, through emergency respite.

To implement such multifaceted support framework policy-makers will have to:

- Reconsider eligibility for services – A family-centred approach to carer policy would provide extended eligibility to other members of the family when the principal carer is absent for a limited period of time. Carers need to be able to pursue hobbies, studies and other activities without fear of losing support. At the moment, eligibility for support is limited to the main carer who has to perform a minimum number of hours of care work to be eligible for support. As a result, if the carer, for any reason, temporarily ceases care, support is discontinued or withdrawn.
- Introduce flexible funding arrangements and program guidelines – For example, allowing agencies to deliver preventive health and educational activities. Carers benefit from the opportunity to network with others who are in similar situation. They also learn from open discussions on matters related to caring for others and self care. UCCO has funded a pilot respite program – a five days Carer Wellness Retreats. This extended respite provided carers with the opportunity to rest and at the same time learn strategies for dealing with their physical and emotional health. This model of respite has proven to be extremely valuable for carers. Yet, current carer program guidelines do not support such activity.
- Increase community care resources – Although, the focus of supporting carers is to enable people with care support needs to remain in the community, funds for carer support are not included in the community care resources pool. Resources for carer support need to be an integral part of community care funding.

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<sup>2</sup> Department of Disability Housing and Community Services, 2003, A Review of Effective Carer Interventions, Appendix B, Developed for the Caring for Carers Project, ACT Government.

- Reconsider the notion of “respite” that tends to emphasise the need for a carer to have a break. If we look more at what the person needing support used to be able to do and needs support to continue doing, or to take up new interests and activities, then carers will also have the opportunity to have time for their own interests and time away from the caring role. Options therefore need to be flexible and focussed on people’s strengths and interests.

UCCO hopes this submission will add to a more holistic approach to the development of carer policies and programs.

Yours sincerely

Ronda Held  
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4<sup>th</sup> July 2008