

MEDIA RELEASE

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Carers' wellbeing lowest on record

More than one third of family carers in Australia have been found to be severely depressed and/or stressed in a survey released today into the health and wellbeing of carers.

The special report titled *The Wellbeing of Australians: Carer Health and Wellbeing* builds on the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index, which has been developed in partnership between Australian Unity and Deakin University to measure how satisfied Australians are with their lives.

The index investigates satisfaction with economic, environmental and social conditions in Australia, as well as giving ongoing insights into our perceptions of individual wellbeing.

Professor Bob Cummins from Deakin University said that carers have the lowest wellbeing index score he has ever seen for any large group in Australia.

"This is truly sad stuff," said Professor Cummins. "We have been doing research in this area for more than six years now and after 17 surveys of the Australian population, I am not aware of any group that has ever been found to have a wellbeing score as low as carers."

Carers SA CEO Rosemary Warmington said the findings were alarming and called for clinical health policies within the primary health care system to reduce the deterioration of South Australia's 222,700 family carers' health.

"While the average score of the Australian population usually sits between 73 and 76, this study found that the average score of the around 4,000 carers surveyed was 58.5, which is disturbingly low," Ms Warmington said.

"It shows the enormous strain and challenge our carers are under."

A previous survey also found that a caring situation impacts on the wellbeing of all adults in the household, not just the primary carer.

The recent study also explored other areas of carers' lives and found startling results in their levels of depression, anxiety, and health in general.

"I am not surprised by the findings of this new survey as previous research has shown that the health and wellbeing of carers is compromised as a result of their caring role," Ms Warmington said.

"However, this study quantifies it in a way that has never been achieved before on a scale that has never been attempted.

"It also highlights the financial strain many carers are under and the impact on their wellbeing; there's a double jeopardy when there is less money coming in, and often more going out to pay for medical expenses and other needs," she said.

The findings of the survey will be presented at the official launch of National Carers Awareness Week today at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra.

Carers Week is an annual event that aims to promote and raise awareness of the valuable role that family carers play in our community and the issues facing them.

For information on any of the activities occurring in your local area during Carers Awareness Week please call 1800 242 636 or visit www.carers-sa.asn.au

SOME KEY POINTS FROM THE RESEARCH:

- The findings in this report come from the largest ever survey into the health and wellbeing of Australian carers
- Carers have been found to have the lowest collective wellbeing of any group yet discovered
- More than one third of carers were found to be severely or extremely severely depressed
- More than one third of carers were found to be experiencing severe or extreme stress
- The findings in this report indicate that caring could be one of the leading causes of depression in Australia
- Caring does not get easier with time and wellbeing levels appear to stabilise after two years in a caring role
- Caring compounds the effect of any other variable that leads to reduced wellbeing
- It is evident that any level of consistent, daily, immediate caring responsibility is sufficient to severely damage wellbeing
- Wellbeing decreases as the number of hours spent caring increases
- The presence of a person in the household who requires care severely compromises the wellbeing of other family members, whether they have primary carer responsibility or not

Carers Week 2007 is an initiative of Carers Australia and is funded by the Australian Government.

Carers SA CEO Rosemary Warmington is available for interviews

**To arrange, please contact communicate et al:
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