



State Budget Submission 2008 – 2009

Introduction

1 in 8 people in SA are Carers (ABS). Carers SA¹ is making this submission on their behalf.

Carers come from all cultural and social backgrounds and age groups. Some care for love alone: others provide care from a sense of obligation. Some provide care twenty four hours a day, every day: others give care for a few hours each week.

- There are 227,700 family Carers in South Australia, including 41,290 or 18% in a primary caring role (ABS).
- In the push to reduce service costs the needs of family Carers cannot be overlooked. They provide an estimated 5.6 million hours of caring in South Australia every year valued at \$2.66 billion pa (Access Economics 2005).
- Many family Carers are harmed physically, mentally, emotionally and socially by their caring responsibilities due to the stress of caring, social isolation, loneliness, changing relationships and loss and grief (Carers Australia 2001, ILC 2006).
 - One third of Carers are severely depressed and/or stressed (Australian Unity 2007).
 - Family Carers are significantly more likely to report at least one chronic health condition when compared to non Carers.
- Carers admit that they neglect their own physical and mental health needs in a struggle to make ends met (Carers Australia 2001: NATSEM 2006).
- Primary Carers are amongst the poorest of Australians with 37% reliant on a government pension or allowance for their income (ABS).
- A "Carer crunch" is looming: by 2031 Carer numbers will rise by 57% compared with a 160% for older people requiring care (NATSEM 2004).

Carers SA, through its Family Carer Recognition and Support State Budget Submission 2007 – 2008 provided a comprehensive range of strategies to address family Carer needs in South Australia based on the SA Carers Policy and its analysis of the Carers Charter. The submission continues to provide a template for action. It can be found at www.carers-sa.asn.au.

This current submission presents a snapshot of the most pressing needs to be addressed through the State Budget 2008 – 2009, to build on existing and developing work across the government.

Everyone in the household where care is provided is affected, with declining wellbeing felt by all. The real number of people affected by government decisions and policies that impact on Carers is about one quarter of the population.

If solutions are not found to the current unsustainable strains on Carers the impact will be felt by the entire community, at enormous cost.

As members of society Carers are entitled to participate in jobs, education and family, leisure and respite activity. As partners in care they are also entitled to recognition in community, health and residential care settings. What is required is an approach that addresses the complexity of the issues yet is flexible enough to cater for individual circumstances:

- A sound policy framework in which the role, rights and needs of Carers are recognised as well as the government's responsibility to support them.
- More resources for ageing, disability, mental health and general health programs and services which benefit Carers directly and indirectly.

Local and international evidence demonstrates the social and economic benefits of supporting Carers through a range of services such as respite, training, counselling and emotional support.

Carers SA continues to support a strategically driven whole of government approach that recognises the across portfolio nature of the caring role and the need for each government agency to develop its own family Carer policies and programs within a central, consistent, framework.

The South Australian Strategic Plan and the SA Carers Policy are providing this framework by outlining statewide and Carer specific strategies.

Agencies are encouraged to develop short and long term strategies, with appropriate one-off and recurrent funds, for programs that meet the needs of family Carers within specific measures and generic services.

The SA Carers Policy rightly points to special needs groups that require particular consideration, including young Carers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, family Carers from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, sole parent Carers, ageing Carers and those living in rural and remote regions of the state.

Identification and Recognition Support: Implementation of the SA Carer Policy

Carers SA acknowledges that the important work of implementing the SA Carers Policy is taking place through the coordinating and education efforts of the Office for Carers and at individual departmental level as agencies come to grips with their obligations. We recognise that a number of departments have taken a first step by addressing the identification of, and support for, Carers within their own staff.

Whilst the promotion of the SA Carers Recognition Act 2005 and the SA Carers Policy is building upon the existing goodwill toward family Carers in the community and amongst service providers, nevertheless additional support is required so that service providers can develop real participation of family Carers in service delivery, and build genuine partnerships with them.

Although family Carers play a vital role in the community services and health industry, their knowledge, skills, experience and expertise in the provision of care is little recognised or utilised by the community services and health industries.

Training to meet the specific needs of family Carers would assist service providers to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, quality and sustainability of their services by planning for, developing and including family Carer inclusive work practices within service delivery.

Such a program would address the knowledge and skills necessary for working with family Carers across all chronic illnesses, conditions and disabilities; the

major issues that have been identified for family Carers, including the culture of caring and service provision, family Carer health and well being and the inclusion by service providers of the family Carer in the care relationship; the diversity of family Carers; and information, communication, attitude, assessment, service quality and coordination issues.

Carers SA proposes a Participation and Partnership Project that would provide a comprehensive education and training program for service providers on family Carers and the caring role and develop a family Carers participation and partnership template. This would serve to develop service providers' capacity to respond to developments arising from the State Government's Carers Recognition Act 2005 and SA Carers Policy.

Recommendation

That funds be provided through Families and Communities for a Family Carers Participation and Partnership Project including:

- \$50,000 one-off to develop a template for service providers in Carer partnership and participation in service delivery.
- \$200,000 pa for two years for practical assistance in the development of family Carer practices by service providers.
- \$500,000 over two years to develop and provide family Carer education and training to service providers: to be delivered by Carers SA.

Health and Wellbeing Support

At the core of family Carers' capacity to maintain a caring role is their own health and wellbeing. Carers experience reduced physical, mental and emotional health once their caring commences. Over time the affects are intensified. The more hours spent caring the greater the damage to Carers' health.

The sheer scale of the problem indicates that Carers are an at risk population group in their own right and must become a 'mainstream' priority for government action through a coordinated range of health care monitoring and maintenance programs and complimentary social support measures.

Carers are at risk of greater mortality, disability and morbidity than non Carers. They have measurably lower health status than non Carers in the population. By virtue of their caring role and lifestyle restrictions they are being prevented from maintaining or even achieving an optimum health status.

A major problem is that Carers put their own health last, regarding any problems they might have as less important in comparison to the health problems of

the cared for person. In doing so they lose the capacity to respond to their own illnesses. Current policy is oriented to the provision of practical services and respite for Carers to relieve them of their caring role, but lacks a clinical approach to Carer health and wellbeing through a pathway of assessment, maintenance and improvement.

The poor health of Carers affects their ability to provide care and many Carers spend time in hospital because of their own ill health. This means additional costs for hospitalisation and alternative care arrangements.

A clinical and population approach that recognizes that Carers have significant health needs that are identifiable, treatable and preventable is demanded within the primary health care system to reduce the deterioration of South Australia's Carers. It is vital that health professionals can identify them as Carers and address their concerns. The development and use of clinically based Carer health assessment and health check tools would assist this process. 75% of Carers first point of call is a GP. GPs can provide

information and emotional support to Carers, as well as monitoring their health needs. A GPs Kit has been developed by Carers SA, but lack of funds has prevented its use.

Recommendation

That funds be provided through Health for the development of a Family Carers Health Program including:

- An education campaign about family Carers as an at risk population group: to be developed and undertaken within the health system through Health promotional projects.
- A Carers Health Assessment Tool for use in General Practice and clinical settings: to be developed within Health programs.
- The promotion of health checks through GPs: through Health promotional projects, in association with assessment tools being developed through Carers Australia.
- \$150,000 pa recurrent for training in the use of a Carer Assessment Tool.
- \$500,000 over two years to develop and deliver a GPs Education and Liaison Project, including roll out of the GPs Kit.
- \$100,000 one-off to develop mechanisms for Carer engagement within health systems: to be developed by Carers SA.

Refer Carer Training Support below for a recommendation for a Health and Wellbeing Training Program for Carers.

Mental Health

Non government Carer focused leadership is critical for the effective implementation of the reform of Mental Health Services, including the implementation of the Whole of Government Carers Policy and the introduction and implementation of new mental health legislation.

There is a need for a comprehensive two-pronged program that addresses the mental health issues of Carers and supports Carers caring for people with mental illness.

Disturbing new Australian research indicates that one third of Carers are severely depressed and/or stressed (Australian Unity 2007). The combination of factors such as tiredness, lack of energy, unhappinesses, unfulfilled roles and life goals can act as precursors to clinical depression. One additional factor which can push pre-depression into a clinical stage is the deterioration of the cared for person's physical or mental condition.

Therapeutic counselling that addresses stress management, isolation self-care, grief and loss and transition decision making is playing a vital role in maintaining Carer well-being, preventing the complete collapse of Carers overwhelmed with their circumstances. Demand for counselling at formal and informal levels is increasing.

Limited resources for community based care of people with a mental illness places considerable burden on the family Carers who support people with a mental illness. The support needed for these Carers includes peer support, specialised information and training in self care and supporting organisations, respite, counselling and advocacy.

Without ongoing funds the state wide leadership and regional events currently undertaken through Carers SA are unsustainable.

Recommendation

That funds be provided through Mental Health for a Family Carers Mental Health Program including:

- \$390,000 pa recurrent for state wide leadership, education, information and representation that links Carers, including young Carers, across the state: to be provided through Carers SA.
- \$500,000 pa recurrent for regional information, training and support.
- \$150,000 pa recurrent for counselling for Carers of People with a Mental Illness living in South Australia to build on the framework of the National Carer Counselling Program.

Carer Training Support

The bulk of family care is provided in the care recipient's home. The increasing recognition of Carers as partners in care and the changing modes of community and health delivery are placing increasing expectations on what family Carers must undertake, including that they will continue to be available when needed over the long term in caring for people with high support needs now living in community settings.

Family Carers take on the caring role with little or no training. However, the appropriate training available across South Australia is largely informal, ad hoc,

uncoordinated and very limited in scope. This training is essential to build Carer capacity. Even those people who have been caring for many years benefit from learning new techniques and discussing new options. A 1995 American study demonstrated cost savings of \$34 for every dollar spent on family education programs for Carers (Access Economics 2002).

The training required includes Carer's roles and responsibilities; disabilities and illnesses; manual handling; Carer personal care and health and well being; communication and relationships; negotiation, advocacy and making complaints; the health and

community services system where it provides support to Carers and the care recipients; and managing the relationship with paid care support workers.

Any training framework developed needs to offer flexible approaches including in home, informal workshops/forums as well as more formal course structures, in order to accommodate the time pressure on Carers, their physical and emotional status and the changing needs of care recipients. Provision also needs to be made for transport and respite so that Carers can attend.

Recommendation

That funds be provided through Health for a Health and Wellbeing Training Program for all family Carers including:

- \$120,000 one-off for the development of a state wide family Carers training framework: to be developed by Carers SA.
- \$240,000 pa for 2 years to develop pilot training options for family Carers.
- \$150,000 pa recurrent to provide training resources in practical nutrition and health care management for family Carers.
- An education campaign within existing Health promotion for the health system and the community about the importance of good health for family Carers.
- A specific injury minimisation program within existing Health promotion for family Carers including training resources.

Current Legislation

Complimentary to the additional resources being sought through this submission for Carer support measures, Carers SA has indicated its support for progressive measures being included in a number of bills before the State Parliament including the Equal Opportunity Amendment Bill 2006, the Mental Health Bill 2007 and the Health Care Bill 2007.

Measures outlined in these bills of importance to Carers and reflective of the current priorities of Carers SA include Carer's right to protection in employment and other fields and Carer participation in health care as partners in the delivery of mental health services and as participants in consultative structures in health services.

Carers SA is concerned that without adequate resources the 'good intentions' of these Bills will not be implemented when they become Acts, particularly with respect to the provision of information and training within Health on appropriate consultative mechanisms and within Mental Health for information and training of service providers for a change in service delivery culture and for information to Carers on their rights.

Recommendation

That funds be provided through Mental Health and Health respectively so that the Mental Health Bill 2007 and the Health Care Bill 2007 can be implemented as intended when they are passed as Acts.

References and Endnotes

- 2003 Survey of Disability Ageing and Carers Australian Bureau of Statistics Canberra 2005
Carer Recognition Act 2005 South Australian Government Adelaide 2005
Family Carers and the Physical Impact of Caring - Injury and Prevention Research Full Report Independent Living Centre of WA Perth 2006
SA Carers Policy Department for Families and Communities Adelaide 2006
Schizophrenia costs: an analysis of the burden of schizophrenia and related suicide in Australia Access Economics Canberra 2002
The Economic Value of Informal Care Access Economics Carers Australia Canberra 2005
The Wellbeing of Australians – Carer Health and Wellbeing Australian Unity Melbourne 2007
Warning Caring is a Health Hazard Carers Australia Canberra 2001
Who cares? the cost of caring in Australia today 2002 to 2005 AMP NATSEM Canberra 2006
Who's Going to Care? informal care and an ageing population NATSEM Canberra 2004

¹ There is an important distinction between paid care workers who attend care recipients in a professional capacity and Carers, usually family members or close acquaintances, who provide for their care at all other times. Carers SA acts as a peak body for the latter group and the use of the terms 'family Carers' and 'Carers' in this document refers to them. Carers SA submissions and responses are developed utilising documented research, surveys and other input of members, discussions by Carers SA policy working groups and focus groups of Carers and service providers.

