

National Carer Strategy

The Australian Government contracted Carers Australia to conduct consultations with carers nationally in regard to the development of the National Carer Strategy. The consultations were undertaken in November and December 2010.

The National Carer Strategy discussion Paper was the focus of the consultations and outlined the purpose, vision, aim and goals of the National Carer Strategy. The five goals in the strategy consider carer recognition, workforce Participation, access to information, education and training and health and wellbeing.

The national consultations are now complete and the consultation information along with further written submissions from carers will be used to inform Carers Australia's report to the Australian Government.

A final report from the Australian Government on the National Carer Strategy is expected in mid-2011.

MELBOURNE - Key Messages:

- Working carers lose earnings to Centrelink, which removes the incentive to work
- A centralised point of information in multiple languages and with translation services is needed.
- A 'Carers Co-Op' for carers who can not apply for mainstream banking was suggested.
- Look after the family unit- this will provide hope for both carers and care-recipients.
- Government agencies need training on where to direct carers.
- Access to legal and financial services in reference to privacy policy is needed
- Funding should be provided on carers' terms to empower them.
- A coordinated pathway for the whole carer experience is needed, which health professionals need to be made aware of.
- There must be an availability and choice of respite, whether in-home or facility
More financial assistance for carers needed.

BALLART - Key Messages:

- Provide adequate funding and support for carers and carer-related services
- The need is now, not in 10 years
- Impress the value of carers on health agencies
- Carers must be consulted with patients by health professionals, or messages will be lost
- Listen to carers and be aware of their diversity

- There must be coordination in services from the top level
- Income support system should include superannuation
- Privacy laws around mental illness need to be reconsidered
- When on Carer Payment or Carer Allowance, a package should be sent by Centrelink detailing other entitlements
- Carers must get financial recognition.

NATIONALLY - Key Messages:

Goal 1: *Better recognition for carers*

- Community awareness is key to better recognition. This must include awareness among health professionals, government and broader society
- Dedicated national media campaigns to raise awareness are needed
- Increased community awareness will lead to greater understanding of carers and their lives
- The formation of an official 'Carer Register' that allows carers to be officially recognised and acknowledged
- Carers should be identified within health services - for example through the inclusion of a 'carer identification field/checkbox' in medical software
- There must be a process to ensure health agencies understand the value, knowledge and expertise of carers
- Respect for the role of health professionals is important.

Goal 2: *Better support to help carers work*

- Carers are working and care work should be valued to the same level as paid work
- An education campaign for employers about caring is needed
- Funding incentives to encourage employers to support and employ carers are needed
- An increase in resources, training and funding will increase the number of carers able to participate in the paid workforce

- Working carers are losing income to Centrelink, which acts as a disincentive to work
- There is a need for greater flexibility in the Centrelink payment process
- Quality alternative care is needed to allow carers to work
- Concerns were expressed about the word 'work' and many carers thought it should be replaced with the term 'paid employment'.

Goal 3: *Better information and support for carers*

- Access to information is critical for carers
- A centralised source of information for carers is needed and should be available in various formats and languages and accompanied by translation services
- Dedicated national media campaigns are required to raise awareness of available services
- The Department Of Human Services does offer great services, but the service delivery can be poor
- Centrelink can be too 'black and white' in their considerations
- Government agencies need to be better coordinated and need training on where to send carers for effective support
- Information on entitlements to support carers should be provided with Carer Payment and Carer Allowance by Centrelink
- Services need to go out to carers, rather than carers 'seeking out' services
- There should be a flow chart of information options from the first diagnosis of the person requiring care, to identify the different paths available. This must take into account the decision of the carer and the person's family wishes
- Access to information was the most highlighted area of concern across the consultations.

Goal 4: *Better education and training for carers*

- Carers should be provided with training on how to care, both for the care-recipients and themselves
- Training and education should be available close to the home, regardless of whether the carer lives in urban, regional, rural or remote locations - distance should not be a hurdle
- Carers need investment if they are expected to maintain their role
- First aid courses should be available to all carers
- The government and society need to look at carers for what they're worth
- Education and training is an important area for consideration in future planning
- Fees to undertake education and training are beyond carer capacity to fund.

Goal 5: *Better health and wellbeing for carers*

- Increased availability of in-home and facility respite is needed
- An informal chat line between carers would be beneficial
- All children have the right to a childhood
- Carers are a resource, which, like other natural resources, will run dry if not managed
- If carers have no time to look after themselves, then care provision goals may fail
- A 'carer identification field' in medical software would be beneficial - health professionals must focus on carers as individuals
- A coordinated caring pathway, involving health professionals, would benefit the whole caring experience
- A 'Gold E-Card' containing relevant information and history for carers is required
- Looking after the entire family unit would provide hope for both carers and Care-recipients

- A 'buddy/mentor' system was suggested - a number of past carers would like to assist those beginning their carer experience.
- Establishment of a community care system where volunteers could offer short-term respite.

Other comments

General

- There were a number of concerns raised about the use of the word 'better' across all goals
- Many carers thought there should be an additional goal that specifically addressed their financial concerns including the cost of care, superannuation and financial planning. For example: Goal 6 -Better long term financial security for carers
- The need is now, not in *10* years
- Language is too weak
- Carers have an entitlement to services
- Streamlining government information is required, particularly for permanent disabilities
- Carers must be consulted by health professionals along with carer recipient as messages may be lost
- Be aware of carer diversity
- Remember the needs of rural and regional carers
- Carers' health is a priority, which can be improved with additional respite allowances
- Sixty-three days respite is not enough
- Twenty-five hour rule impacts on carers' ability for long-term financial security
- Government must commit to reform
- Strategy should be backed with appropriate funding and reporting

- One size does not fit all
- There must be national consistency in service delivery to allow transportable services.

Financial

- Financial assistance has not been directly addressed in the discussion paper
- Greater financial assistance for carers - specifically designated financial support packages is needed
- Funding must be provided on carers' terms
- Support payments should go directly to carers to allocate to required services
- Superannuation specifically for carers is needed
- Carer Payment should not be taxed for care recipients over the age of 65
- Carer Allowance is insufficient
- The creation of a 'Carers Co-op' - a financial institution for carers who can not apply for mainstream banking is required
- A 'carer package' should be available, as well as the 'care-recipient package'.

Legal

- Legal services are required in relation to privacy laws for care-recipients over the age of 18
- Legal rights are needed to represent a care recipient once they are over 18

Privacy

- Privacy laws around mental illness need to be reconsidered
- Privacy issues were highlighted as an area of significant concern for a number of carers.