

MEDIA RELEASE



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Attack on family and friend carers insulting and ill-informed

“Carers Australia is heartily sick of attacks on carers of people with disability, chronic illness, mental illness and the frail aged who are receiving a Carer Payment and/or Carer Allowance, and the frequently crude statistical underpinnings of their arguments,” said Ara Cresswell, CEO of Carers Australia today.

“A case in point is Rick Morton’s article in today’s *Australian* which is self-evidently pitched at serving a number of agendas.

“Mr Morton points out that the numbers of people on Carer Payment and Carer Allowance are growing, going back 20 years as a point of comparison for the Carer Allowance to dramatise the point.

“Of course the number of people on the payments is growing, along with population growth, growth in the aged population, and growth in the number of people with disability and chronic illness living longer.

“Very importantly, more people are becoming aware that they are classified as carers and that there is help out there for them to deal with the physical, mental and financial stress which accompanies putting in long hours, weeks and years of caring.

“According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), in 2012 close to 40% of Australia’s 770,000 primary carers provided on average 40 plus hours of care every week.

“Almost two thirds (65%) of primary carers resided in a household with equivalised gross household income in the lowest two quintiles, compared with 36% of non-carers.

“Nor are carers a drain on the economy. Deloitte Access Economics estimated in 2015 that family and friend carers provided 1.9 billion hours in unpaid care and the annual cost for replacing this care with paid care services amounted to \$60.3 billion. It is widely acknowledged by government that, without unpaid carers, aged care and disability care would be unaffordable.

Over



“In time the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and aged care reform may well reduce the number of carers who have to rely on income support. Indeed, as the article shows, the numbers have plateaued in the last two years.

“However, the NDIS will provide individualised package support to only 430,000 people on full roll-out – leaving about twice as many who will not be eligible. And the number of aged care Home Care Packages is capped. This means family and friend carers will have to continue to fill in the gaps.

“Morton quotes both Patrick McClure, who headed up the government’s welfare reform review, and Minister Porter, both of whom lament that young carers are often faced with lengthy periods of welfare dependency. This is a problem Carers Australia has long acknowledged and has been asking governments for a number of years to address through programs that help young carers to stay in education and to assist them to find employment.

“But Morton’s suggestion, which he attributes to the Department of Social Services, that young carers are going onto the Carer Payment because it is worth more than the dole is both insulting and ludicrous.

“Quoting the ABS again, in 2012 there were 306,000 young carers under the age of 25 in Australia, 23,200 of whom provided the majority of care – usually for a parent. Of these, in March 2016 there were 9623 receiving the Carer Payment and Carer Allowance and an additional 2197 receiving the Carer Allowance only.

“These young carers are often extremely socially isolated, face severe financial hardship and suffer high levels of emotional stress. They have to take on responsibilities way beyond those expected of other young people their age. They care out of a sense of duty and love.

“Carers Australia welcomes the government’s commitment to assisting young carers to avoid a long-term social welfare trap. This will be achieved by providing them with more intensive support. Not simply by removing their means of living.”

For media enquiries please contact Edward Allpress on (02) 6122 9921 or 0408 956 578