

MEDIA RELEASE



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Productivity Commission acknowledges the need for more recognition and support for mental health family and friend carers

Carers Australia welcomes the long-awaited release of the Productivity Commission's final report from its Mental Health Inquiry, and its range of recommendations to improve supports available to family and friend carers.

"As is the case with carers of people with other conditions, mental health carers often provide care at considerable cost to their own wellbeing, including their own health, peace of mind, financial security and the opportunity to pursue their own education, employment and interests," said Liz Callaghan, CEO of Carers Australia.

"However, they often don't have the same visibility as carers of people with physical or intellectual disabilities, and this can be an obstacle to accessing recognition and support.

"In particular, we welcome recommendations dealing with the long-recognised barriers to accessing income support payments for mental health carers when their caring role interferes with their ability to work," said Ms Callaghan

Eligibility for the Carer Payment requires carers to provide continuous care or, in the case of the Carer Allowance, daily care. These requirements are biased against carers of people with episodic, but nonetheless frequent and serious conditions, such as mental health carers. The assessment tool also puts a heavy emphasis on physical and intellectual disability.

The Commission has recommended a relaxation of these current requirements to include that a significant amount of regular care must be provided every week.



It has also recommended the introduction of monthly rather than weekly restrictions on the hours people on the Carer Payment can engage in work, in order to give them more job flexibility, and the removal of all restrictions on their capacity to engage in volunteering and educational activities.

Other recommendations address the need for greater carer inclusion in the policy processes and services which support those they care for.

“With the dramatic rise in mental health problems becoming a serious and growing issue which must be addressed, it is fitting that considerable recognition and support be extended to family and friend carers of those living with mental health issues,” said Ms Callaghan.

About Carers Australia

Carers Australia is the national peak body representing Australia’s unpaid carers, advocating on their behalf to influence policies and services at a national level. Its member organisations, the Network of state and territory Carers Associations, deliver a range of essential carer services across states and territories.

About carers

An informal, unpaid carer is a family member or friend that cares for someone that has a disability, chronic or life-limiting illness, is frail aged, has a mental health illness, alcohol or other drug related issue. Informal carers are distinct from paid support workers who are colloquially also called carers but are fully employed and remunerated with all the benefits of employment. Conversely, family carers perform their caring duties without remuneration

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