

# Response to Australian Government Department of Social Services Consultation: Disability Services and Inclusion Bill 2023

Carers Australia welcomes the opportunity to respond to the second stage of Department of Social Services (the Department) consultation for the Disability Services and Inclusion Bill 2023 (the Bill). While Carers Australia supports the introduction of an Act that more appropriately and effectively promotes the agency of people with disabilities, as the national peak for Australia's 2.65 million carers, our response focuses on carers. We note that more than a third of the population of primary carers have disability, meaning that primary carers are twice as likely as the general population to have disability themselves.<sup>1</sup>

In this response, Carers Australia highlights several opportunities for the new Act to accurately recognise and incorporate carers within the context of the Statement for Australia's Carers under the *Carers Recognition Act 2010*<sup>2</sup> which states, among other things, that:

- Carers should be acknowledged as individuals with their own needs within and beyond the caring role.
- The relationship between carers and the persons for whom they care should be recognised and respected.
- Carers should be considered as partners with other care providers in the provision of care, acknowledging the unique knowledge and experience of carers, and
- Support for carers should be timely, responsive, appropriate and accessible.

## Carer Definition

**A carer's role is distinctly different from parenting or generalised familial support or parenting and as such the policy responses and information needs are different.** Although caring roles are most often filled by close family members or friends it is important to acknowledge the distinction between family and parents, with carers.

Carers Australia is conscious that terminology can have negative connotations for many people and acknowledges that not everyone's experience is properly captured by terms. We are supportive of efforts to influence respectful and inclusive language about people with disability; however, inclusivity must also extend to language related to carers and caring. As such we recognise that use of clear and established definitions for carers is welcomed and strongly recommended to foster greater inclusivity of the diversity of carers, care relationships and those receiving care.

We applaud the use of the term carer within the exposure draft of the Bill as it supports the recognition of the relationship between carers and the persons for whom they care. However, we believe greater effort should be taken to recognise and include carers and thus, **we encourage the Department to include the definition of carers within Section 2, Division 8 – Definitions.** The *Carer Recognition Act 2010* outlines the

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings (SDAC)* (ABS, 2018), [\[accessed online\]](#)

<sup>2</sup> *Carer Recognition Act 2010* (Cth)

meaning of a carer in Section 5 and Carers Australia recommends this meaning be used to define carers within the Bill.

Accurate and explicit reference to carers is part of achieving carer recognition, to which carers are not only entitled within the Statement for Australia's carers but also deserving of, as an integral part of Australia's health and social service system. The importance and impact of recognition is we note the current [Inquiry into the recognition of unpaid carers](#) by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, announced on 14 June 2023 and have begun to highlight issues with and the absence, or lack of, consistent terminology and recognition of carers across Australian government portfolios to the Inquiry.

## Co-design

Carers Australia welcomes the inclusivity of the proposed Bill, specifically in ensuring that supports and services for people with disability are designed with people with disability or by people who can adequately represent the interests of people with disability. We encourage the Department to extend this inclusivity to carers by recognising the need to include carers when designing services relevant to them. This is extremely important in the context of the proposed Bill as it allows funding for respite care.

The importance of respite care cannot be understated, and adequate and accessible respite care continues to be an ongoing priority for Carers Australia. Findings from the 2022 Carer Wellbeing Survey highlight that carers are three times less likely to have high levels of wellbeing compared to the average Australian, yet for carers having access to support is associated with significantly higher wellbeing.<sup>3</sup> Those who had access to support from friends and family were much more likely to have healthy levels of wellbeing, while amongst those providing care to people with high assistance needs, those who had access to respite care within the last 12 months were significantly more likely to have healthy levels of wellbeing.

Due to the significant impact that respite care has on the lives of carers, in addition to people with disability, **we recommend that the Bill make a greater effort to ensure carers are included within respite service design.** Including this within in the Bill would ensure services providers across Australia are consistent in their approach to respite care delivery.

## Recommendations

1. Include the definition of carer, as stated within the Commonwealth Carer Recognition Act 2010 within Section 2, Division 8 – Definitions
2. Ensure carers are consulted and included in decisions related to support provision relevant to, and significantly impacting on carers, including respite care.

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<sup>3</sup> *Caring for Others and Yourself: 2022 Carer Wellbeing Survey Full Data Report*, Carers Australia, 2022, [[accessed online](#)]

## About Carers Australia

Carers Australia is the national peak body representing the diversity of the 2.65 million Australians who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends with a disability, chronic condition, mental illness or disorder, drug or alcohol problem, terminal illness, or who are frail aged.

In collaboration with our members, the peak carer organisations in each state and territory, we collectively form the National Carer Network and are an established infrastructure that represent the views of carers at the national level.

Our vision is an Australia that values and supports all carers, where all carers should have the same rights, choices, and opportunities as other Australians to enjoy optimum health, social and economic wellbeing and participate in family, social and community life, employment, and education.

This includes carers:

- Who have their own care needs
- Who are in multiple care relationships
- Who have employment and/or education commitments
- Aged under 25 years (young carers)
- Aged over 65 years, including 'grandparent carers'
- From culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- Who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex (LGBTI+)
- Who are living in rural and remote Australia, and
- That are no longer in a caring role (former carers).

Carers Australia acknowledges Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities as the traditional custodians of the land we work on and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. As an inclusive organisation we celebrate people of all backgrounds, genders, sexualities, cultures, bodies, and abilities.

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