MEDIA RELEASE

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New Senate inquiry ‘consequential’ for Australia’s unpaid carers

A new Senate inquiry into the adequacy and effectiveness of government’s supports, laws, programs and payments for carers is a consequential development for carers and much welcomed by Carers Australia CEO Joanna Cave.

Ms Cave said she was pleased Senator Penny Allman-Payne had taken the initiative to stimulate the inquiry in the Senate yesterday.

“Carers Australia has been calling for reviews of respite and other carer supports for some time and we are pleased to see a comprehensive inquiry of these issues.

“Carers are people who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition, terminal illness, an alcohol or other drug issue or who are frail aged. Almost all of us will be one or need one in our lifetime, yet they are often overlooked in legislation, in healthcare and by the community.

“For example, the recent National Disability Insurance Scheme reforms went through the parliament without examining the impact cutting supports for people with disability will have on their carers, who will no doubt step up to fill the gap and provide the care.

“We recently gave evidence to the Inquiry on the Support at Home program. The program aims to help older Australians age at home with dignity. It’s a great objective, sadly failing and relying heavily on unpaid carers when older Australians are left languishing on waiting lists to access supports – those waiting lists rely on unpaid carers to step up.”

Unpaid carers are at greater risk of poor health and wellbeing than the average Australian. Ms Cave said the most recent Carer Wellbeing Survey results show fewer than 40 per cent of carers report healthy wellbeing, well below the Australian average of 66 per cent.

“And just 29 per cent of parents supporting a child or grandchild with a disability report healthy wellbeing.

“Caring also has a significant financial toll on Australians. Many are forced to leave fulltime employment to manage their caring role. This doesn’t just impact them, it has real impacts on the country’s productivity, keeping many Australians (mostly women) out of the workforce.

“This Inquiry presents a significant opportunity for Australia to recognise and acknowledge the enormous contribution of our unpaid carers. Their $80 billion dollars of care is holding Australia’s health and community services together.

“While we rely on them, we must renumerate, recognise and offer respite to our carers so caring does not cost them. Unpaid carers are not unwilling. But they are unsupported. This inquiry gives us an opportunity to change that. Let’s take it,” Ms Cave said.

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About Carers Australia and the National Carer Network

Carers Australia is the national peak body representing Australia’s carers, advocating to influence policies and services at a national level. The National Carer Network, which consists of Carers NSW, Carers ACT, Carers Victoria, Carers Tasmania, Carers SA, Carers WA and Carers Queensland, deliver a range of essential carer services across states and territories.