

## Who is a carer?

- The term 'carer' is used to describe a person who provides unpaid care and support to relatives or friends who have a disability, mental health problem, chronic condition or who are frail aged.
- Carers can be of any age and from diverse culturally and linguistic backgrounds. They could be parents, partners, brothers, sisters or other relatives, or friends or children.
- Carers may care for a few hours a week or all day every day.
- A primary carer is the person who takes most responsibility for providing care for the person requiring support.

## What does a carer do?

- Some carers assist with the tasks of daily living: feeding, bathing, dressing, toileting, administering medications.
- Many carers provide care for 40 or more hours each week.
- Others care for people who are quite independent but who may need support with transport or finances.
- All carers generally provide some form of emotional support, with some helping to sustain some of the community's most vulnerable and isolated members.

## Why do people become carers?

- People become carers for a variety of reasons, including :
  - The person needing care is a relative and the carer feels a family responsibility to provide care
  - The carer believes they can provide better care than anyone else
  - The carer feels an emotional obligation to provide care
  - There are no other family or friends available to provide the care, other than the carer
  - The carer feels they have no other choice but to provide the care.

## Key demographic statistics on carers in the population In Australia (ABS 2003)

- There are 2.6 million carers – 13% of the population.
- 474,600 are primary carers.
- The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2003<sup>1</sup> revealed 6.6% of carers were aged under 18 and 7.2% were aged 75 and over.
- 71% of primary carers and 54% of all carers in Australia are women.

## In NSW (ABS 2003)

- There are 748,000 carers – 11% of the NSW population.
- Of these, 149,700 are primary carers.
- 12.4% of the NSW Indigenous population are carers.<sup>2</sup>

## The value of caring

- Carers save taxpayers an estimated \$30.5 billion annually (the cost of replacing carers providing informal care with paid care workers) which equates to nearly \$10 billion for New South Wales.<sup>2</sup>
- As carers assist people to remain living in the community for longer they also make substantial savings on premature admission to costly residential care or supported accommodation options.
- Carers also experience benefits from caring, particularly in terms of their relationship with the person being cared for. Caring can also be a very positive, rewarding experience.

## What are the impacts of caring?

### Social isolation

Carers often miss out on important social relationships, including those associated with work, recreation and leisure pursuits, which leaves them feeling very isolated.

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<sup>1</sup> The Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003, *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers*

<sup>2</sup> Access Economics 2005, *The Economic Value of Informal Care*

Carers are more likely than the general population to have little face-to-face contact with friends or relatives outside the household, especially when caring for someone with high level care needs.<sup>3</sup>

## Financial disadvantage

Caring responsibilities can adversely affect carers' financial situations. There can be a drop in income if a carer has to give up work to become a full-time carer. Most carers are on low incomes and have no opportunity to accumulate or preserve superannuation or any other savings.

- 44% of all carers of work force age are not in the labour force versus 34% of the total population (ABS 2003)
- The gross household weekly income for 41% of all carers is less than \$453 versus 28% of the general population (ABS 2003)
- Often there are extra associated costs with caring (medical supplies/incontinence supplies/ transport costs etc.) which impact the carer financially. The average weekly cost of caring for a person with a disability is estimated at \$118, or \$162 for an elderly person.<sup>4</sup>
- Government payments for carers include the Carer Allowance (\$98.50 per fortnight) and the Carer Payment (\$525.10 per fortnight). For a single carer receiving both payments this works out to \$311.80 per week which is \$200.06 less than the weekly minimum wage of \$511.86. If one minuses the cost of caring for a person with a disability, this leaves just \$193.80 per week to live on.
- The average income for carers is more than 25% lower than for non-carers. (ABS 2003)
- It is estimated that carers lose earnings in excess of \$4.9 billion per year.
- 33% of primary carers live in the poorest 20% of Australian households.<sup>7</sup>

## Carers' health and wellbeing

A national survey of carers (1999) revealed:

- 58% of carers reported that their physical health had been adversely affected by caring
- One third said that they had sustained a physical injury from caring
- Over half reported depression, anxiety, high levels of stress and other impacts on their mental health from caring.

## The future of caring

- The population is ageing. The percentage of the Australian population aged over 85 will increase from 1.5% to 5% of the total population by 2044.<sup>5</sup>
- Technological advancement is contributing to increased longevity of people with disabilities, which subsequently increases the number and length of informal care relationships.<sup>6</sup>
- A dramatic drop is projected in the ratio of carers to older people needing care over the next 30 years, from 57 primary carers per 100 people needing care in 2001 to just 35 primary carers per 100 people by 2031.<sup>7</sup>
- Over the next 30 years the number of carers is projected to rise by 57% while the number of aged people needing care will rise by 160%.

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Institute of Family Studies and FaCSIA 2007, *The Families Caring for a Person with a Disability Study and the social lives of carers*

<sup>4</sup> Taskforce on Care Costs 2006, *Where are we now?*

<sup>5</sup> Productivity Commission 2005, *Economic Implications of an Ageing Australia*

<sup>6</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2000, *Disability and Ageing Australian Population Patterns and Implications*

<sup>7</sup> National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) 2004, *Who's going to care? Informal care and an ageing population*