

6 October 2009

Mental Health Week – a chance to acknowledge carers of people with mental illness

One in five Australian adults experience mental illness in any one year (National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing 2007).

Mental Health Week (4 - 10 October) is an annual event which aims to raise awareness of the importance of mental health and wellbeing in the wider community while increasing community awareness and education about mental illness.

The support of family and friends is vital in the treatment and recovery of those who are affected by mental illness. However, without adequate support families and carers themselves experience negative impacts on their physical and emotional wellbeing as well as finances and employment opportunities (Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Summary of Findings: Disability, Ageing and Carers 2003*).

Carers NSW operates The Family and Carer Mental Health Program - a free, confidential service which supports carers of people with mental illness.

The program seeks to:

- improve carer coping, knowledge and management skills
- enhance carer wellbeing, resilience and relationships
- improve professional and service responsiveness to the needs and circumstances of carers
- enhance relationships between carers, mental health services and other community supports
- improve outcomes for people with mental illness through supporting their families and carers.

These aims are achieved through providing tailored and localised individual support, group educational programs and supporting peer support groups.

Carers NSW offers the program in South East Sydney / Illawarra, Greater West and North Coast area health service regions. Other service providers run the program in other regions of NSW and carers can be referred to these service providers.

"It is important we acknowledge and support carers of people with mental illness so that they can better maintain their own health and wellbeing," said Elena Katrakis, CEO of Carers NSW.

"Programs such as the Family and Carer Mental Health Program, funded by NSW Health, go a significant way in offering such support."

Carers can gain referral to the Family and Carer Mental Health Program, or more generalised carer counselling and advisory services by calling the Carer Line on 1800 242 636 (Freecall except from mobile phones. Mobile calls at mobile rates).

Media contact: Nina Olle, Carers NSW, 02 9280 4744 / 0400 061 100

A carer is any individual who provides unpaid care and support to a family member or friend who has a disability, mental illness, drug and alcohol dependencies, chronic condition, terminal illness or who is frail.