

Media Release



15 October 2007

Carers Australia is the recognised national voice of Australian carers. Our members are the carers associations in each state and territory. We have no political affiliation. We work with all parties to achieve better outcomes for all carers. We believe that all carers are entitled to the same rights, choices and opportunities as other Australians.

Carers' wellbeing lowest on record

Professor Bob Cummins from Deakin University will today present the findings of the largest ever survey into the health and wellbeing of Australian carers at the official launch of Carers Week 2007.

Professor Cummins will announce that carers have the lowest wellbeing index score he has ever seen for any large group in Australia.

"This is truly sad stuff," said Professor Cummins. "We have been doing research in this area for more than six years now and after seventeen surveys of the Australian population, I am not aware of any group that has ever been found to have a wellbeing score as low as carers."

The special report titled *The Wellbeing of Australians: Carer Health and Wellbeing* builds on the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index which has been developed in partnership between Australian Unity and Deakin University to measure how satisfied Australians are with their lives and life in Australia.

The Index investigates satisfaction with economic, environmental and social conditions in Australia, as well as giving ongoing insights into our perceptions of individual wellbeing.

"The average score of the Australian population usually sits between 73 and 76," explained Professor Cummins. "We've found in this study of around 4,000 carers, that their average score sits at 58.5 which is alarmingly low. It's particularly worrying due to the sheer scale of the survey.

"It shows the enormous strain and challenge that these Australians are under.

"In a previous survey, we've also found that a caring situation impacts on the wellbeing of all adults in the household, not just the primary carer, so it's a really big issue with far-reaching effects," said Professor Cummins.

The study also explored other areas of carers' lives and found startling results in measures of depression and anxiety, and health in general.

Carers Australia CEO Joan Hughes was not surprised by the findings.

"We know from previous research that the health and wellbeing of carers is compromised as a result of their caring role," Ms Hughes said. "However, this study quantifies it in a way that has never been achieved before on a scale that has never been attempted before. The results are incredibly disturbing.

"It also quantifies the impact that the financial strain many carers are under has on their wellbeing. Many had such high levels of worry about being able to pay their household expenses that it was having a clear impact on their wellbeing.

"It's a double jeopardy when there is less money coming in, and often more going out to pay for medical expenses and other needs," said Ms Hughes.

Professor Cummins will present the findings at the official launch of Carers Week today from 10:00am at the National Museum of Australia.

Carers Week is a national awareness week held during October each year right across Australia. The event was established to promote and raise awareness of the valuable role that carers play in our community and to generate discussion about carer issues.

There are 2.6 million Australians who provide unpaid care and support to a family member or friend with a disability, mental illness, chronic condition or who are frail. More information about Carers Week is available at www.carersweek.com.au.

SOME KEY POINTS FROM THIS RESEARCH:

- The findings in this report come from the largest ever survey into the health and wellbeing of Australian carers
- Carers have been found to have the lowest collective wellbeing of any group yet discovered
- More than one third of carers were found to be severely or extremely severely depressed
- More than one third of carers were found to be experiencing severe or extreme stress
- The findings in this report indicate that caring could be one of the leading causes of depression in Australia
- Caring does not get easier with time and wellbeing levels appear to stabilise after two years in a caring role
- Caring compounds the effect of any other variable that leads to reduced wellbeing
- It is evident that any level of consistent, daily, immediate caring responsibility is sufficient to severely damage wellbeing
- Wellbeing decreases as the number of hours spent caring increases
- The presence of a person in the household who requires care severely compromises the wellbeing of other family members, whether they have primary carer responsibility or not

Carers Week Launch

Time: 10:00 am - 11:00 am

Date: 15 October

Venue: The Peninsula Room, National Museum of Australia, Canberra

Please call for advance details of the report or to arrange interviews with Professor Cummins or Carers Australia representatives.

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