

CARER RECOGNITION BILL 2010

SECOND READING SPEECH

This Bill is the Government's commitment to enshrine in law the Australian Government's national recognition of the exceptional contribution made by hundreds of thousands of carers across the country.

Every day they sustain and support the people they care for.

And through their dedication and hard work they enrich community life and are an inspiration to us all.

I am certain that every member in this place, representing electorates from the bush to the city, understands only too well the challenges and the sacrifices that come with the job of caring.

It's a job where you can't knock off at five o'clock – or six or seven. No public holidays.

No annual leave, no time off when you're sick.

Mr Speaker, this Bill recognises in legislation the contribution by the mums and dads, the grandparents, the sons and daughters, the brothers and sisters and partners who every day get on with the job of caring.

We are determined to give carers the acknowledgement of their role that they have asked for – and which they so clearly deserve.

Last year, carers told us they wanted greater acknowledgement and increased recognition.

This message came through loud and clear when the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth tabled its report, *Who Cares? Report on the inquiry into better support for carers*.

Central to the Government's response to this Inquiry was a commitment from the Commonwealth to lead the development of a National Carer Recognition Framework.

The National Carer Strategy will deliver on this commitment and will place the needs of carers at the centre of government policy so that they have the same opportunities as other Australians to live healthy, happy lives and reach their full potential.

This Bill is the first element of the Framework.

It formally acknowledges the vital contribution that carers make to Australian society and complements carer recognition legislation already in place in some States and Territories.

There are several key elements to the Bill.

Firstly, the Bill establishes a broad and encompassing definition of **carer**. This definition captures the diversity of carers and care relationships.

Secondly, the Bill sets out a **Statement for Australia's Carers**.

The Statement contains ten key principles that set out how carers should be treated and considered in policy development and program and service delivery.

This includes the fundamental principle that all carers should have the same rights, choices and opportunities as other Australians.

All public service agencies will be required to take all practicable measures to ensure their staff have an awareness and understanding of the principles in the Statement.

This includes a direction that all public service agencies should have due regard to the Statement for Australia's Carers when developing human resource policies that significantly affect an employee's caring role.

Public service agencies with responsibility for policies, programs and services that affect carers and the people that they care for will have additional obligations under the legislation.

These agencies need to ensure that their staff take action to reflect the Statement's principles when developing, implementing, providing or evaluating policies, programs or services directed to carers or the people for whom they care.

These agencies will also be required to **consult with carers**, and the bodies that represent them, in the development and evaluation of relevant policies, programs and services.

And they will be required to **report publicly**, in their annual reports, on their compliance with their obligations under the legislation.

Critically, the legislation also extends to associated providers, people or bodies contracted or funded by Australian Government public service agencies with responsibility for policies, programs and services that affect carers and the people that they care for, and their immediate subcontractors.

These associated providers will need to ensure staff and agents have awareness and understanding of the Statement's principles and take action to reflect the principles when they develop, implement, provide or evaluate policies, programs or services.

The Bill supports the work the Government is undertaking to reform the system of supports for carers and the people for whom they care.

It recognises that carers should have the opportunities and the capability to enjoy optimum health and wellbeing, and social and economic participation.

Implementation of the Bill will drive increased awareness and understanding of the role and contribution of carers.

As well as a much-needed cultural and attitudinal shift so that carers' interests are taken into account by public service agencies and service providers.

Raising the status and profile of the caring role builds on the Government's practical measures to improve the lives of carers.

Members will also be aware that Government has commissioned a Productivity Commission inquiry to examine the feasibility, costs and benefits of a National Long-term Disability Care and Support Scheme that would provide an entitlement to services over a person's lifetime, with a focus on early intervention.

This is a complex area that has the potential to transform the lives of people with disability and their carers – a transformation I am sure you all will agree will be for the better.

The Productivity Commission has been asked to report their findings to the Government in July 2011.

But, Mr Speaker, we know there is still much more to be done to achieve our vision of a fairer Australia for carers.

Which is why, as part of the National Carer Recognition Framework, we are developing the National Carer Strategy to be delivered early next year.

Working with the States and Territories, the National Carers Strategy will shape our long-term agenda for reform.

It will guide policy development and the delivery of services by government agencies and non-government organisations that work with carers.

The National Carers Strategy will include many of the issues raised by carers through the Inquiry into Better Support for Carers.

We have already identified that the strategy will consider, among other things, the training and skills development needs of carers and the adequacy of case management and care coordination for carers.

Addressing the needs of young carers and carers in rural and remote communities will be also be key priorities of the Strategy.

Mr Speaker, this Bill is the first part of a fundamental reform process for carers through the National Carer Recognition Framework.

It recognises in law, the valuable social and economic contribution, as well as the many personal sacrifices that carers make.