



Background to 'Who Cares?' Project

The Ethics of Caring in a Good Society:

National conversation, national action

Background

We face a future crisis in caring.

The ageing of the Australian population is a demographic reality. According to the Productivity Commission (2005) the effects over the next 40 years will be pronounced. One quarter of the population will be aged 65 years or more by 2044-45, roughly double the present proportion of the population in that age cohort. The proportion of the oldest old (85 years and older) will increase threefold, from 1.5 to 5 per cent over this period.

One implication of an ageing population is that there will be more Australians requiring assistance. This has already begun. According to Carers NSW analysis (2005a) of the 2003 ABS Survey of Disability Ageing and Carers (2003b), NSW key trends from 1998 to 2003 were:

- The number and proportion of older carers (75+) has increased;
- There are more ageing carers who have recently begun caring;
- The proportion of carers not in the labour force has increased from 61% to 64%;
- The proportion of carers caring for 40 hours or more per week has increased;
- The high proportion of people with mental and behavioural disorders who need assistance, received neither formal nor family assistance.

There is considerable uncertainty about whether the current caring scenario, where unpaid family carers provide the bulk of care, can be maintained. Both Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM), have considered the future supply of carers. NATSEM found, in the case of carers of older people, that while the number of available carer will rise by 57% in 2031, the number of older people requiring care will rise by 160%. This will lead to a shortfall of people available to provide care.

In short, there will be an ageing population overall and an increasingly aged carer population. This is not confined to Australia; it is a world wide trend. However, no nation has engaged in a national conversation to determine the way forward.

Against this background, Carers NSW, the peak state organisation for carers, asks the broad question: 'What ethical challenges might we as a society face to meet the changes in the needs of both those being cared for, and those who do the caring?' It is a philosophical enquiry around 'Caring in a Good

Society' where the word 'caring' refers to caring for people of all ages who have a chronic illness, a disability, a mental health illness or who are frail aged.

The national conversation will seek answers to the following questions:

- What is a good society?
- What is caring?
- Who is responsible for caring?
- What does caring look like in a good society?

Fifty focus groups will be conducted throughout Australia. To reflect the diversity of the Australian experience, participants will include current and former carers, the corporate and small business sectors, media, public and private health and disability sectors, government and non-government organisations providing services to carers, ethicists and medical practitioners. Both religious and secular perspectives will be sought, as well as perspectives from people from different geographic, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Online input to the questions will also be sought from all Australians who will access the questions on the St James Ethics Centre website.

The project is expected to take 12 -18 months and will research nationally what fundamental values might be held by a civil society and determine the implications these values have at personal and systemic levels for caring for people of all ages who have a chronic illness, a disability, a mental illness or who are frail aged.

Carers NSW will use the findings to inform governments, community and corporate sectors about Australians' thinking on issues involving caring. Who should be responsible for care? Families? Community? Business? Government? The findings will highlight what the Australian community believes the future for caring should look like, and will provide the basis of long term policy planning.

This is an initiative of [Carers NSW](#), [St James Ethics Centre](#) and [Macquarie Bank Foundation](#)