



Urgent assistance recommended for carers

Immediate financial relief for carers is a key outcome the House of Representatives Family Committee is seeking in its report *'Who Cares ...?'* released today.

The committee has recommended increasing the base rate of income support for carers and has called for means testing thresholds to be reviewed.

With hundreds of carers speaking out about their desperate struggle to cope, the committee has responded with 50 recommendations to bring much needed help.

"Carers have told us they desperately need more financial assistance to cope with the additional costs of disability and caring, as well as greater access to respite for time out of the caring role," said Committee Chair Annette Ellis MP (Member for Canberra).

More than 1300 submissions to the inquiry told of carers and their families under serious financial stress, struggling to meet the everyday costs of living, including food, housing and transport.

"With so many carers indicating they are in crisis, urgent action is needed," Ms Ellis said.

The committee has recommended an urgent increase in respite and in-home assistance for carers, with current demand far exceeding supply.

Better coordination of support services is also needed, with the committee recommending a one-stop-shop for information on community care services, as well as support systems that are nationally consistent and more streamlined.

"The current array of support systems for carers is too complex," Ms Ellis said. "All three tiers of government are involved. Services cross several portfolios and are delivered through hundreds of government and non-government organisations. As one carer told us, "the service system is a dog's breakfast". It's confusing and frustrating for carers and increases the likelihood of administrative inefficiencies."

The committee supports more options for carers who want to manage the purchase of services themselves, including self-managed individualised funding packages. It has also recommended:

- a national education campaign to increase community awareness of the needs of carers;
- national carer recognition legislation and a national carer action plan;
- a national strategy to address the skills and training needs of carers;
- increased access to case management services for carers;
- strengthening options for flexible working arrangements for carers;
- supporting carers to find suitable employment after a period of absence;
- extension of preventative health care initiatives to include carers; and
- more counselling services for carers and their families.

A press conference will be held in Committee Room 2S1 at 12 noon on 1 May 2009. This will be webcast live at: <http://webcast.aph.gov.au/livebroadcasting/>

For media comment, please contact the Committee Chair, Ms Annette Ellis, on (02) 6293 1344 (electorate office). The report is available at: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/fchy/carers/index.htm>

For all other inquiries please contact the Inquiry Secretary by phone on (02) 6277 4566 or by email fchy.reps@aph.gov.au or visit the Committee's website: www.aph.gov.au/fchy