

# NSW Carers Action Plan 2007–2012

## Summary



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# Foreword

More than one in ten members of the NSW community are carers — dedicated citizens making an unsung yet indispensable contribution to our social fabric.

While caring for those you know and love is immensely rewarding, it can also be a frustrating and isolated journey.

That is why carers need care too. They need to know they are not alone. That their service is valued by the community. And that practical help is available to make their journey that little bit easier.

The NSW Carers Action Plan outlines the NSW Government's five-year commitment to do these things.

Our plan includes significant new support for those living with mental illness and physical disabilities, as well as expanding measures to support carers such as the NSW Carers Program.

Our plan also recognises that support for carers crosses a range of policy areas such as ageing, community support, health, education, transport, employment and industrial relations.

The NSW Carers Action Plan therefore reflects a more connected approach that draws all these areas together.

But beyond all the specific measures in this Action Plan lies one clear and consistent philosophy: that carers must not be taken for granted. And the best way to acknowledge and honour our carers is to offer them more support and better support.

They can't do it alone — and under this Plan — they won't have to do it alone.



**Morris Iemma MP**  
Premier

# Introduction

Carers provide assistance to others including frail older people, people with disabilities, people with mental health disorders, people with alcohol or other drug dependency, people with dementia, people with a terminal illness, people living with HIV/AIDS, and people with a chronic illness.

A carer is a family member, friend, neighbour or other community member who provides care and assistance to another person, often in a regular and sustained manner, without payment other than in some cases a pension or benefit. Carers improve the quality of life of the person they care for and enable them to remain in the community.

## **The national ABS Survey of Disability Ageing and Carers (SDAC) found that in NSW:**

- 748,000 people in NSW are carers, representing 11% of the population
- 20% are primary carers
- Carers are in all age groups. However, primary carers are most likely to be 45 years of age and over
- 72% of primary carers are women
- Of all primary carers, 91% were caring for a close family member, 40% care for a partner, 29% for a child and 32% for other
- Caring tends to be a long-term commitment. 33% of primary carers report that they have been caring for at least 10 years, and a further 26% for at least 5 years (national figures)
- Over one half of primary carers provide at least 20 hours of care a week
- 36% of primary carers are employed, and of these, 54% are employed part time
- Carers tend to have lower incomes than the rest of the population and more than half rely on government pensions and allowances as their principal source of income.

# NSW Carers Action Plan

NSW carers receive support from family, friends, other carers, and volunteers as well as from formal services provided through non-government organisations and government agencies. The challenge is to enable all carers to experience caring in a positive way and to minimise the negative consequences that can impact on the lives of carers. The NSW Government will contribute to carers achieving quality of life for themselves and the people they support through a commitment to the principles and key priority areas below.

This action plan describes the next five years of action to be taken by the NSW Government. The 1999 NSW Carers Statement was the first step towards recognising and supporting the valuable work of carers in NSW and the NSW Carers Program is another significant step. The growth in disability services through *Stronger Together* and in mental health services are major achievements that have significant benefit to families and carers. The NSW Carers Action Plan builds on these achievements and brings NSW closer in reaching the vision it has for carers.

## Vision

**The NSW Government will contribute to carers achieving quality of life for themselves and the people they support. In the context of their caring role, carers will be:**

- supported to achieve physical and emotional wellbeing and to participate in work and community life
- valued as key contributors to community wellbeing and as key partners and providers of care
- considered in the development of public policy in NSW.

## Principles

- Carers' physical, emotional and career needs are identified, acknowledged and responded to.
- Carers are supported by quality services that are affordable, flexible, culturally competent, coordinated, accessible and available.
- Strategies are developed to identify and support people who do not identify as carers and who may be disadvantaged by social, cultural or economic circumstances or location.
- Carers are able to exercise choice in their role as a carer and are supported in transitioning from caring when this is necessary.
- Caring relationships are recognised as diverse, dynamic, complex, with changing needs over time.
- Carers are recognised, valued and respected.
- Carers have access to information, resources and opportunities to develop their skills to provide quality care.
- Carers are included in every stage of assessment and care planning with the agreement of the care recipient and are consulted in the planning, delivery and review of services that impact on their role.
- Carers are supported by family friendly policies in the workplace.

## Priorities for Action

1. Carers are recognised, respected and valued.
2. Hidden carers are identified and supported.
3. Services for carers and the people they care for are improved.
4. Carers are partners in care.
5. Carers are supported to combine caring and work.

# Priorities for Action

The following pages provide a summary of the priorities for action and are fundamental to improving the quality of life for carers and the people they care for.

The strategies under each priority area will be either the collective responsibility of all NSW Government agencies or will be implemented by the most relevant government agency. Strategies that are the responsibility of the Australian Government have been included where NSW agencies will play a role in guiding implementation in NSW.

## 1. Carers are recognised, respected and valued

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Carers are valuable contributors to community life. However, carers report that they often feel 'invisible' or taken for granted. Carers sometimes don't recognise themselves as carers and can miss out on financial, practical and emotional support.

Strategies are needed to increase the respect and recognition of carers to demonstrate their role is valued and to ensure they are not invisible or taken for granted.

### What we will do

- All relevant NSW Government agencies will:
  - Contribute to the evaluation of the five year NSW Carers Action Plan (\$90,000 per year over 5 years).
  - Be committed to incorporating the needs of carers in the development of policies and programs.
- The Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC) will continue funding Carers Week activities.
- NSW Health will:
  - Increase funding to Carers NSW (to \$556,000 recurrently).
  - Provide project funds through Carer Support Services to identify carers, raise carer awareness and respond to local carers' needs.
- The NSW Department of Housing (DoH) through the Housing and Human Services Accord will develop shared access and support to social housing for people most in need, including people with disabilities and their carers.

## 2. Hidden carers are identified and supported

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While many carers are well supported by family and friends and feel they have no need for formal services, there are carers who are isolated, providing significant amounts of care and are not receiving any support.

'Hidden' carers may not identify with the term 'carer', be unaware of supports available or may not be able to access a service appropriate to their needs. Reaching 'hidden' carers earlier can reduce the negative impact of caring on their own health and wellbeing and prevent crises. The focus is to reach carers who have specific needs or face additional barriers. These include ageing carers, carers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, young carers and Aboriginal carers.

### What we will do

- All relevant NSW Government agencies will:
  - Strengthen policies and programs to support the provision of culturally appropriate information and culturally competent service delivery.
  - Work with the Australian Government to develop and implement datasets for service provision that identify carers and assess carers' needs.
  - Support further research initiatives that increase understanding of how best to support hidden carers.
  - Develop and implement strategies to support young carers in a coordinated cross agency approach (\$200,000 one off from NSW Carers Program).
- DADHC will:
  - Expand flexible respite services for ageing carers of people with a disability through providing the infrastructure for other models of respite including centre-based respite (\$48 million over 3 years 2005/06–2007/08 and recurrent funding from 2008/09 of \$15 million — joint initiative of NSW and Australian Governments with NSW contributing half of funds).
  - Continue funding the Young Carers Project.
- NSW Health will:
  - Expand recurrent Non Government Organisation (NGO) carer grants to a total of \$1.275 million recurrent to include specific Aboriginal and CALD initiatives (\$464,000).
  - Identify carers in admission forms for acute care.
- DADHC and NSW Health will host Roundtable discussions about CALD, Aboriginal and older parent carer issues.
- The Department of Education and Training (DET) will develop a professional learning module for school counsellors around the needs of young carers who support parents with mental health issues, and incorporate the needs of young carers into the review of the NSW DET Student Welfare Policy.
- DoH, under the Housing and Human Services Accord, will include carers' needs in the assessment process for shared access to social housing and support.

### 3. Services for carers and the people they care for are improved

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Carers need support from services that address their needs and the needs of the person they are caring for. In many respects, the needs of carers and care recipients are interdependent. Many formal services are currently provided without being tailored to the specific needs of the carer or the care recipient or services are unable to meet current demand. Services need to be available, affordable, accessible, flexible, culturally competent, and of high quality.

While respite care is highly valued by carers, the demand for more respite may be masking the lack of a range of other service options. Linking carers to support is not restricted to formal services. Strategies can be put in place to extend the support provided to carers from other family members, their wider social network, other carers, employers and local communities.

#### What we will do

- DADHC will:
  - Significantly increase flexible respite places under *Stronger Together* through increases in recurrent funding in each of the five years from 2006/07–2010/11 for:
    - > Respite services for families with a child with a disability (\$28.4 million over the five years).
    - > Respite services for adults with a disability (\$33.4 million over the five years).
    - > Centre-based respite for people with complex health care needs (\$6.5 million over the five years).
  - Increase recurrent funding in each of the five years from 2006/07–2010/11 to support post-school programs for people with a disability (\$235.3 million over the five years).
  - Increase recurrent funding in each of the five years from 2006/07–2010/11 to expand day programs (\$33.3 million over the five years).
  - Progressively increase recurrent funding from 2006/07 to 2010/11 to provide enhanced supports for children and young people with a disability, including children with challenging behaviour, and their families (\$40.8 million over the five years).
- NSW Health will:
  - Enhance the capacity of NSW Area Health Services Carer Support Services to increase responsiveness to carers' needs and implement local initiatives.
  - Develop guidelines to ensure that carers are more effectively consulted in determining the equipment needs of the care recipient.
  - Under the Family and Carer Mental Health Program, increase support services to family and carers through NGOs (\$3 million recurrently).
  - Expand recurrent statewide NGO carer grants, including specific Aboriginal and CALD initiatives to \$1.275 million recurrently and provide project funds through Carer Support Services to identify carers, raise carer awareness and respond to local carers' needs.
- DoH, under the Housing and Human Services Accord, will:
  - Assist households with complex housing needs and develop new service models for people most in need including homeless people, older people, young people with a disability, and the unemployed or very low waged adult households.
  - Support isolated carers living in social housing, through outreach and coordination of carer specific activities (\$150,000 per year for 2 years from the NSW Carers Program).

## 4. Carers are partners in care

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Carers play a crucial role as care partners. They are often experts in the care of the person requiring care and can assist with care planning and delivery, with the agreement of the care recipient. However, carers report that they are often not consulted.

Timely provision of information, education and training of carers empowers carers, increases resilience and coping skills and provides direct health benefits to carers and the person requiring care. Service providers can identify carers, assess their needs and link them to appropriate support. Support needs change over time and are particularly important at transitional points.

Staff education is a crucial part of changing the culture from focusing solely on the client/patient/consumer and developing carer friendly services. Working with carers not only improves the quality of life of the carer but also has beneficial health outcomes for the person being cared for.

### What we will do

- NSW Health will:
  - Enhance Carer Support Services' capacity to increase the responsiveness of health services to work with carers.
  - Develop family sensitive mental health services and involve families and carers in assessment, care planning and discharge planning.
  - Develop and translate resources and broaden training for families and carers from a multilingual and Aboriginal background to cope with the issues of drugs and alcohol.
  - Provide project funds through NSW Area Health Services Carer Support Services to respond to local carers' needs, based on regional cross agency carer action plans.
  - Fund Carers NSW to target community care providers and health professionals for the bi-annual conference.
- All relevant NSW Government agencies will identify carers as a key stakeholder group for consultation and engagement in the development of relevant government policies.
- DADHC will promote and disseminate the Working with Carers package.

## 5. Carers are supported to combine caring and work

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Carers are more likely to be unemployed or not participating in the workforce than non-carers. If they are working, it is more likely to be in part-time work. Many carers who are not in the labour force would like to return to work.

Many carers give up or reduce their working hours, miss out on career or job opportunities, manage on lower incomes, and struggle to save for the future. Women are particularly disadvantaged in their ability to accumulate retirement savings.

### What we will do

- Premier's Department will:
  - Work with agencies to assist them to implement existing flexible employment policy to support mature aged employees, including those with caring responsibilities.
  - Identify gaps in existing policies and areas of potential new policy development.
  - Update the Mature Workforce Policy and Guidelines (last issued in August 1998).
- The Office of Industrial Relations will develop tools to increase carers' workplace flexibility in the NGO and private sector.
- The Office of Industrial Relations and NSW Health will investigate ways to improve web-based links to information for employers and employees managing workplace flexibility for workers with caring responsibilities, building on the Working Carers Gateway.
- Partner agencies in the Australian Research Council project Negotiating, Caring and Employment will disseminate evidence for policy development that supports carers in the workplace.
- All relevant NSW Government agencies will work with the Australian Government in progressing the Council of Australian Governments' Human Capital reforms.



