

## Overview - NSW Health Carer Program Carer Support Services

### Background

In January 2003 under the NSW Carer Program the Ministry of Health commenced annual recurrent funding to establish and maintain NSW Health Carer Support Services to provide professional support for carers in the public health system and to initiate local level strategies to improve the responsiveness of the system to the needs of carers. Funds provided to each then Area Health Service employ a minimum of one full time equivalent Carer Support Officer and, in larger Districts, support a small team as the Carer Support Service.

### Policy Directions

The work of the Carer Support Services in Local Health Districts is underpinned by statewide and NSW Health policy; the NSW State Health Plan – Towards 2021, NSW Carers (Recognition) Act 2010 and the NSW Carers Strategy 2014 – 2019.

Direction Two of the NSW State Health Plan –Towards 2021, *Providing World Class Clinical Care*, notes that NSW Health must continue to support and develop hospital avoidance and post discharge care to reduce acute demand. Carers save the Australian Government \$40.9 billion annually<sup>1</sup>. Approximately 11% of the NSW population provide informal care for a person with a disability, mental, chronic or terminal illness or who is frail and aged, minimising the risk of unnecessary hospital admissions, extended lengths of stay in hospital and enabling the person that they care for to remain at home. Unpaid caring is integral to the sustainability of the NSW health and community care systems. Carer Support Services work system wide to ensure that carers are better recognised, included and supported in their caring role.

Direction Three of the NSW State Health Plan – Towards 2021, *Delivering Truly Integrated Care*, notes that carers are partners in the delivery of seamless, effective and efficient care that reflects the whole of a person's health needs. The third direction of the Plan seeks to transform the health system to one that is connected and focused on care that is integrated. Strong partnerships are integral to a connected health system. Carer Support Services develop strategic partnerships between consumers, carers and state, Australian Government and non-government service providers and stakeholders in order to improve the health system to better respond to carer needs.

The devolution of authority and responsibility for service planning and delivery is a health system reform that sought to drive integration at a local level. Carer Support Services are a locally led, centrally facilitated statewide initiative.

While Carer Support Service positions may work directly with carers they also build capacity across sectors of the public health system through staff development and training, provision of strategic advice, information and analysis.

Carer policy, planning and intervention across NSW Health is guided by the NSW Carers (Recognition) Act 2010. Carer Support Services play a leadership role in implementation of the Act which commits public sector and human service agencies to key obligations to carers, as clients, the carers of clients and employees.

The NSW Carers Strategy 2014 – 2019 reinforces key priorities for action across NSW Health including improving; access by carers to health care services for themselves, targeted information for carers and the involvement of carers in decision making and as partners in care.

## **Responsibilities**

The specific responsibilities of Carer Support Service roles include:

- a) Consultancy
  - to health management and staff on issues, policy, projects and best practice relating to carers,
  - to external agencies on statewide carer initiatives.
  
- b) Build and maintain partnerships and collaborate on carer related initiatives with groups, organisations and service providers including non-government organisations, peak bodies, primary health care organisations (Medicare Locals/Primary Health Networks) and NSW Health agencies such as the Pillar organisations.
  
- c) Education and promotion including raising awareness of the NSW Carers (Recognition) Act 2010, NSW Carers Charter and carer issues.
  - to enhance the capacity of health staff to recognise and respond to the needs of carers,
  - to carers on matters that concern them including access to services, health and wellbeing.
  
- d) Plan, develop, support, manage and/or evaluate carer specific initiatives.
  
- e) Report as required including supporting the Local Health District to report annually on action across the District to meet requirements under the NSW Carers (Recognition) Act 2010 and NSW Carers Strategy.
  
- f) Participate in the statewide NSW Health Carer Support Service Network - by teleconference as required and at the annual forum.

## **Contact**

Additional information in relation to NSW Health Carer Support Services is available on the Local Health District website or by contacting Integrated Care Branch, NSW Ministry of Health on tel: 9391 9843.

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<sup>i</sup> The economic value of informal care, Access Economics 2010