



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH AFFAIRS
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Youth Mental Health in the ACT

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Inquiry into Youth Mental Health in the ACT

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ABOUT CARERS ACT

Carers ACT is the leading body for Carers in the ACT. We work to ensure that carers enjoy improved outcomes in health, wellbeing, resilience and financial security. We also work to ensure that caring is acknowledged and recognised as a shared responsibility of family, community and government.

Our purpose is to support, connect and empower carers to maintain their caring role and personal wellbeing.

The Carer Recognition Act 2010 defines carers as people who provide personal care, support and assistance to people with disability, medical condition (including terminal or chronic illness), mental illness or frail age. Carers include family members, friends, relatives, siblings or neighbours.

In the ACT nearly 50,000 people provide care. Carers provide an important role in the family and in the broader community, supporting the quality of life of the person they care for. A carer's role can include help with daily living activities such as housework, transport, health care, shopping and meals, reading and writing, emotional and mental support and personal care.

Carers identify many positive aspects to their caring role, including the opportunity for personal growth, development of new skills, companionship, fulfilment, satisfaction of knowing you have helped someone who needs you, and the opportunity to improve the person's quality of life (Hill and Broady, 2019).

Whilst rewarding, the informal caring role often has personal costs for the carer. Caring can be stressful — emotionally, physically, mentally and financially. It can impact on a carer's ability to participate in everyday activities, their relationships, their health and wellbeing. Caring can lead to social isolation and loneliness and over time it can be difficult for the carer to maintain their identity as an individual and to fulfil other valued roles in life.

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CONTEXT

Carers ACT provides specific supports to young people who undertake a caring role in their families. There are approximately 4,000 young carers in the ACT of which 1,000 are aged under 15 years. Young carers have lower education levels and workforce participation than young people who are not carers. Young carers are also more likely to experience social isolation and mental health conditions. Young carers are a vulnerable group due to the roles they undertake and the pressures they experience. Young carers have some of the highest rates of anxiety and depression.

Carers ACT is the peak body for Mental Health Carers in the ACT. We advocate with carers to improve the mental health service system and to enhance the health and wellbeing of carers. Some mental health carers start their journey as a carer early with the onset of a mental health condition in their adolescent children. For these carers the journey can be long, hard, demanding and have a significant impact on their health and wellbeing.

RESPONSE TO THE INQUIRY

Rather than make a full submission into this Inquiry, Carers ACT respectfully refers the Committee members to the Review of Children and Young People in the ACT Report undertaken in 2019 by the Office of Mental Health and Wellbeing. This report was the culmination of extensive consultation and co-design. The report articulates the gaps and potential solutions for young people in relation to their mental health and wellbeing. Nearly 900 people contributed to the development of this report.

Carers ACT supports the approach that the Office of Mental Health and Wellbeing undertook and believes the report is a current record of the voices of young people in the ACT.

Carers ACT however would like to highlight to the Committee members that the current lack of an adolescent inpatient unit within the ACT has an impact on young people and their family carers. Whilst there are current plans for a unit it is estimated that this will not be operational until mid to late 2022. The Model of Care for the Adolescent Inpatient Unit includes the operation of a day program and an intensive inhome family support program. Carers ACT supports calls for these two components of the Model of Care to be funded and implemented independently of the Inpatient Unit and as a matter of urgency. The intensive family support has been a program called for by mental health carers for many years and should not be delayed due to the delays to the building that will house the inpatient unit.

The announcement recently of the inclusion of an adolescent inpatient service in the development of a new private mental health facility in the ACT will see an imbalance in access to inpatient care based on the financial position of the family. This imbalance will occur for as long as it takes for a public inpatient facility at the Canberra Hospital. The private unit, whilst welcome, should not replace the need for public mental health inpatient unit for adolescents.



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