

30th June 2008

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth
PO Box 6021
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

I wish to make a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth's Inquiry into Better Support for Carers.

One thing which I find stressful as a carer is the uncoordinated system of service delivery and information access. I have worked within the aged and community services industry and I still find it a "minefield" to work through the various agencies to obtain services or information. Some examples of my recent experiences are detailed below.

Access to and information about Respite – within my home file I have information on the following agencies – Commonwealth Carers Respite Centres; Commonwealth Carelink Centres; Carers SA; Carer Support & Respite Centre Inc.; Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre; HACC; local government; plus a number of NGO's offering respite. Where do I start? I have contacted several of these government agencies without a satisfactory outcome in terms of how to obtain casual or weekly regular respite – they seem to only offer information about emergency or longer-term residential respite. I would very much appreciate having a person to keep my partner (caree) company when I go to the gym or social activities. I have registered with two NGO's offering this service with volunteers, who would "befriend" the caree, but the volunteers are very scarce. I think the Government could help carers by providing a funding service whereby we can access paid casual carers who would "befriend" our caree for casual or ongoing regular 2-3 hours per week. The Government could also help carers by making information easier to access via a one-stop shop, rather than the numerous agencies I have listed above.

Disability Equipment - My partner, Brian, and I have been involved in a lengthy process to obtain an electric wheelchair for him, originally initiated in September 2007. Since November last year, we have had visits by three different occupational therapists from three different agencies (including ILEP) to assess his eligibility and suitability for the chair. The funding was finally approved in mid-May of this year, and the chair was ordered in late May. We were told it would be delivered in 4-6 weeks. On checking progress last week (end June) with the provider of the chair, we were informed that it will be another 4-6 weeks before we can expect the chair. At

this stage we now anticipate delivery will be about September, which is 12 months after we actually started the process.

(Incidentally we believe many people wait much longer than Brian has for the provision of equipment to maintain and/or improve their quality of life.)

Whilst we understand that manufacture of such an expensive and custom made wheelchair takes time, we wonder why a more realistic delivery time frame is not advised in the first instance. We also wonder at the need for so many agencies to be involved in the process. On numerous occasions Brian has become rather disheartened and expressed the feeling that he will never get the chair. Obviously the lengthy process and wait means he does not have optimum use of the chair when he can most begin to benefit from it. This is a drain on my energy and ability to support him.

We believe the Government could better assist carers (and indeed people with disabilities) by streamlining this kind of service delivery. This would not only save valuable \$\$\$ which could be put to better use, but it would also save the anxious wait and emotional let down when the expected outcome is delayed.

The two key points I wish to make are –

- ✓ Consider a review of the above-mentioned agencies (vis-à-vis respite), and establish of a “one-stop shop” central agency which can provide straight forward but comprehensive information about services to carers – and which is widely advertised so it is easy for carers to access.
- ✓ A more integrated, streamlined and faster process for services and equipment for people with disabilities
- ✓ Both of these would help to eliminate the “minefield” which currently exists, resulting in a feeling of constant “run around”, helplessness and perhaps ultimate abandonment of the search for help. It would reduce our already heavy stress burden.

Thank you for taking my views into consideration as part of the Committee’s inquiry. I look forward to reviewing any recommendations you make to improve life for Carers in Australia.

Yours sincerely,

Colleen