



Mr Elton Humphery
Committee Secretary
Community Affairs Legislation Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Humphery

Family Assistance, Social Security and Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment (2005 Budget and Other Measures) Bill 2005

Thank you for the invitation to comment on the above bill, which is being considered by the Community Affairs Legislation Committee.

There are 2.6 million carers in Australia who provide care to a relative or friend with a disability, mental illness, chronic condition or who is frail aged. Of this figure 340 005 carers received the Carer Allowance in 2004-05.

Identifying as a carer is not an automatic process when a person takes on the role of a carer. Therefore there is a low likelihood of carers identifying the financial entitlements which are available to them.

This suggests a great number of carers may be unaware of their entitlement to the Carer Allowance. The situation is compounded by the strict eligibility criteria that often make these payments difficult for carers to obtain.

Currently the Carer Allowance can be backdated for up to 52 weeks for payments to carers of children, and for up to 26 weeks for carers of adults.

The proposed amendment in the above bill seeks to standardise the backdating provisions of the Carer Allowance to a maximum period of up to 12 weeks, effective from 1 July 2006.

These proposed changes to the backdating measures for Carer Allowance recipients will further disadvantage and marginalise carers. The 2003 ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers indicates that carers are over-represented in the lower household income quintiles. These carers were identified as being at particular risk of low wellbeing in the Australian University Wellbeing Index Survey 2005.

Carers Australia recommends that the Australian Government:

1. make no change to the backdating measures for recipients of the Carer Allowance
2. streamline access to Carer Allowance for carers, especially those under increased stress
3. invest in quality resources and strategies to ensure carers are advised of the financial assistance available to them in the earliest stage of their caring role.

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Carers Australia looks forward to the opportunity to appear before the Senate Committee hearing on Tuesday 14 March.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. A. Hughes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Joan Hughes
Acting Chief Executive Officer

13 March 2006