



Summary of feedback to The Western  
Australian Alcohol and Drug Interagency  
Strategy 2017-2021  
Consultation draft

August 2017

AN AUSTRALIA THAT VALUES AND SUPPORTS ALL CARERS

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## ABOUT CARERS WA

Carers WA is the peak body representing the needs and interests of carers in Western Australia and is part of a national network of Carers Associations. Carers provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who have disability, mental illness, a chronic condition, terminal illness, an alcohol or other drug issue or who are frail aged. The person they care for may be a parent, partner, sibling, child, relative, friend or neighbour. Illness and disability are non-discriminatory and the caring role can be borne by any individual at any given time, regardless of socioeconomic status, age or location. Caring is a significant form of unpaid work in the community and is integral to the maintenance of our aged, disability, health, mental health, and palliative care systems. A report undertaken by Deloitte, Access Economics, 'The economic value of unpaid care in Australia in 2015', determined the replacement value of the care undertaken by carers in Australia to cost \$60.3 billion per annum.

Some important facts about carers include:

- There are 2.7 million unpaid carers in Australia. More than 856,000 carers are primary carers.
- There are more than 320,000 family and friends in a caring role in Western Australia or approximately 1 in 8 in the community.
- Researchers suggest that only 4% of young carers between the ages of 15 to 25 are still in education, compared to 23 % of their peers.

## ENQUIRIES

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## General Comments

- Carers WA recommend the inclusion of a glossary of terms to define; community, carer [A carer is a person who provides ongoing care, support and assistance to a person with disability, a chronic illness (which includes mental illness) or who is frail, without receiving a salary or wage for the care they provide], family and consumer.
- Consistent use of the term carer needs to be supported throughout the document. Carers WA suggest that anywhere where families are cited then carers should also be mentioned as whilst families are likely to be impacted by AOD use, carers will be those who are supporting the person/s with AOD related issues. Carers are not always relatives but may be others non-relative 'family' such as in Aboriginal kinship relationships or friends who provide ongoing care and support.
- The causes of illicit and harmful licit drug use are referred but not at a level of detail to provide the reader with a comprehensive understanding of the reasons for AOD issues. In contrast there is a large proportionate number of statistics presented in the document not related to causative factors but in relation to usage etc. Carers WA believe it is important for all readers to better understand causative factors as a way of providing the prevention and treatment that is emphasised in the Strategy as well as for individuals and carers to understand the causative factors that relate to AOD use to understand personal, familial and societal issues that result. This may assist carers, families and community with debunking myth and reducing stigma.
- In relation to carers generally, there is no mention in the strategy of the importance of referring families and carers to supports that are available to them such as the Carers Association of WA Inc., part of a national network of Carers Associations. Carers WA offers information, advice, counselling, young carer programs as well as other carer specific programs and supports. Carers WA are also able to provide appropriate carer and consumer referrals to other services outside of Carers WA as required.
- It would be useful to refer specifically to targeted carer supports (including young carers) throughout the document from prevention through to treatment and support services and the role that carers/support people and families in particular can play in all of these areas see <https://www.carerswa.asn.au/>. The paper also lacks information about the risk to the carers own health and wellbeing. Research undertaken by Deakin University into the wellbeing of Australians identified that people in a caring role had the lowest levels of wellbeing of any population cohort, with more than a third showing signs of severe or extremely severe depression<sup>1</sup>.

## Comments on specific sections

- Page 15 – Breakout Box 1 – dot point three mentions fastracking guardianship and administration applications. It would be worth mentioning support for carers through this complex process.
- Page 19 - refers to families (including families as consumers) however makes no mention of state legislation for carers in relation to service provision. Many people experiencing AOD issues will

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<sup>1</sup> Deakin University and Carers Australia (2007). Australian Unity Wellbeing Index: Survey 17.1 Report 17.1, Melbourne.

intersect with the WA health system and possibly the disability system or services funded by either/or. There is no mention of carers' rights under the Carers Recognition Act 2004 to take carers views and needs into account alongside the person/s they support. There is also no mention in relation to the particular cohort of young carers, although referred to under 'Families, including alcohol and other drug using parents'. There is no mention of the National Mental Health Standards 2010 of which Standard 7 refers in particular to carers. Overall there is a lack of reference to legislation and standards that are relevant to the strategy.

- Page 26 - Carers WA recommend within the section on "School Education" to add the targeted identification of young carers and ensuring supports are put into place early rather than focusing on only prevention of young people's use of drugs. Research shows that the caring role can impact negatively on a young carer's relationships with family and friends, interrupt their engagement in education and employment, and lead to them experiencing their own wellbeing and health issues<sup>2</sup> A new report by the [Australian Institute of Family Studies \(AIFS\)](#) has highlighted how young carers in education are often disadvantaged due to the responsibilities of their caring role. The research has found that young carers in Year 9 have significantly lower performance in reading and numeracy compared to their peers. The lower educational attainment of young carers could have long-term effects on their future employment opportunities and life chances.

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<sup>2</sup> Goodyear, M., Hill, T., Allchin, B., McCormick, F., Hine, R., Cuff, R. and O'Hanlon, B. 2015. 'Standards of practice for the adult mental health workforce: Meeting the needs of families where a parent has a mental illness'. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*.