



# **Does anyone really care?**

## **The Inquiry into Better Support for Carers:**

### **Carers:**

### **A Case Study**

**Mary Reid**  
**Business Manager**  
**Carers Australia**



# Family carers

A carer is an individual who provides personal care, support and assistance to another individual who needs it because that other individual:

- has a disability; or
- has a medical condition (including a chronic or terminal illness); or
- has a mental illness; or
- is frail aged.

*-Carer Recognition Bill 2010*

There are 2.6 million family carers in Australia



# Carers Australia

- National peak body for carers
- We believe all carers, regardless of their cultural and linguistic differences, age, disability, religion, socioeconomic status, gender identification and geographical location should have the same rights, choices and opportunities as other Australians.
- The members of Carers Australia are the state and territory Carers Associations.



# The diversity of carers

Carers are young, of working age, older, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, they live in major cities and regional rural and remote areas and may have been born outside Australia.

These carers support our aged and community care systems.



# Overview: the inquiry process

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 14 May 2008 | Inquiry referred to Committee   |
| 1 May 2009  | Who Cares...? Report of the Inquiry into Better Support for Carers released |
| 25 May 2009 | Report tabled in Parliament   |
| 19 Oct 2009 | Government announces National Carer Recognition Legislation                 |
| 26 Oct 2009 | Government response to Who Cares...? report released                        |



# Better Support for Carers

## Terms of reference

- The role and contribution of carers in society
- How they should be recognised
- Barriers to social and economic participation for carers
- The practical measures required to better support carers
- Strategies to assist carers to access the same range of opportunities and choices as the wider community
- Specific needs of particular groups within the caring population



# Carer involvement

- Engaging with carers first-hand was crucial
- Use of state and territory carer association networks to mobilise carers
- Submission templates and inquiry information distributed through networks
- Over 1300 submissions  
1200 from individual carers



# In their own words

- *The service system is a 'dog's breakfast'. It's confusing and frustrating for carers and increases the likelihood of administrative inefficiencies.*
- *It is a hidden life because most of it occurs behind closed doors. Nobody, apart from my husband and children - not my extended family or even my closest friends and definitely not my neighbours - know what I do and how hard I work*
- *I don't have any formal training and feel there is less importance put on my role than that of paid carers who assist my daughter [...] As a carer, I need help with training to deal with the specific needs of the person I care for.*

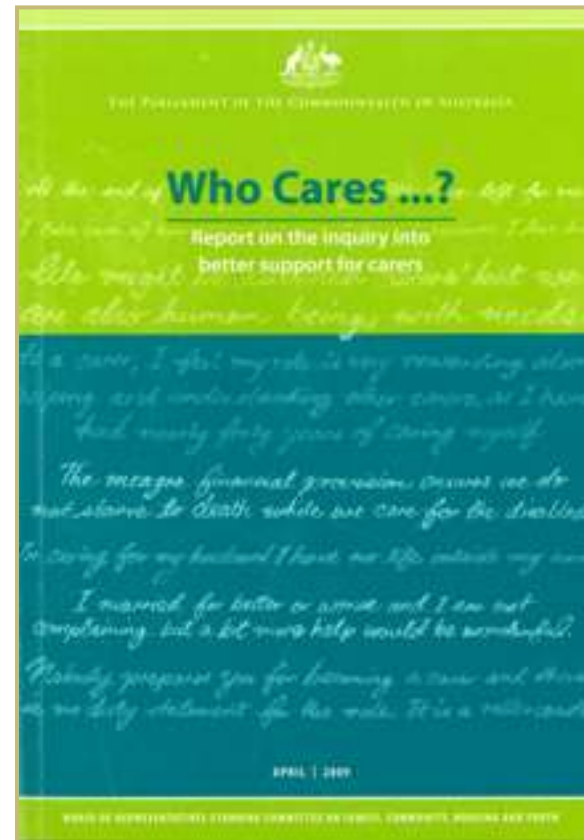
# In their own words

- *We are financially virtually destitute, just attempting to survive and keep up payments like our mortgage etc. There are a few days every fortnight, when we do not eat.*
- *It would be a total change to my life if there were more realistic help forthcoming. I eagerly look forward to stepping outside my front gate one day, knowing that I don't have to do everything on my own.*
- *I have been called a hero! I never wanted to be one [...] I love my son, so there is only one thing to do, to look after him the best I can.*
- *We work day in and day out, but we're not seen as workers [...] We are the hidden army.*

# Who Cares...? Report

- Public release 1 May 2009
  - 3 months after close of hearings
  - almost 1 year on from announcement
- 50 recommendations
- “It is my sincere hope that this report and its recommendations will act as a stimulus for action”

- Ms Annette Ellis MP  
Committee Chair



# Key recommendations

- An urgent increase in respite and in-home assistance
- More options when purchasing services
- National education/ awareness campaign
- National carer recognition legislation
- National carer action plan
- National strategy for skills and training
- Increased access to case management
- Extending flexible working arrangements
- Support to find suitable employment after a period of absence
- Extension of preventative health care initiatives
- More carer counselling services

# Government Response

- Over half (28) recommendations agreed to wholly or in part
- But only a few new commitments:
  - National Carer Recognition Framework and National Carer legislation
  - establishment of a high-level cross departmental forum
  - ‘further work’ to assist young carers to complete education
  - investigation of introduction of national carer card

# National Carer Recognition Framework

- To deliver

- National Carer Legislation
- National Carer Strategy
- National Carer Action Plan
- national training and skills strategy for carers
- review of case management and care coordination
- review of health and community care policy across jurisdictions
- steps to address the messages from Young Carers forum 2008 Bring It!

# Government response to carers 'misses the mark'

- No increases in funding for programs
- No consideration of extending right to request flexible work arrangements
- No consideration of other supports to assist carers engage in employment
- Change to '25 hour rule' not considered
- No expansion of National Carer Counselling Program or Young Carers Program
- Social isolation ignored



# Still waiting...

- Awaiting outcomes of other inquiries & processes
- Carers can't afford to wait
- Carers must be at centre of reforms
- Carers own health and wellbeing not addressed



# Rhetoric

- Responses to individual recommendations fail to address proposals
- Carers not even mentioned in many responses
- Programs 'may' assist carers
- Carers and other stakeholders unaware of programs



# Taking action

- Press conference at Parliament House:  
Joan Hughes, CEO  
2 carer representatives
- AAP ran article  
*Carers demand 'fair go' from government*
  - featured on evening news and online at a national level (nine news)
  - featured in print in several local level newspapers



# What has been delivered?

- National Carer Recognition Bill introduced but not yet passed
- Work towards a National Strategy commenced
- Overall inquiry did not deliver strong reform or clear improvements for family carers



# Other inquiries and improvements

- Other inquiry processes have taken account of carers
  - Increases in Carer Payment and carer supplements
  - Carers included as one of the six priority areas under social inclusion agenda
  - Carer Payment (child) improvements
  - Carers of a child under 16yo granted right to request flexible working arrangements
  - Improvements to Special Disability Trusts
  - Acknowledgement of young carers in National Youth Strategy

# Where to now?

- Valuable and credible findings from the report
- Continued advocacy
- Passage of carer legislation
- Productivity Commission Inquiries
  - Long-term Care & Support Scheme
  - Caring for Older Australians



**Mary Reid**  
**Carers Australia**  
[mreid@carersaustralia.com.au](mailto:mreid@carersaustralia.com.au)  
Phone: +61 2 6122 9900  
Fax: +61 2 6122 9999

