

Outsourcing Community Service Delivery

Organisation: Carers NSW

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The Committee Manager
Committee on Community Services
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Re: Inquiry into Outsourcing Government Community Service Delivery

Carers NSW welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to the Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services Inquiry into Outsourcing Government Community Service Delivery. Our submission will address the outcomes and impacts of transferring services from Government agencies to community service providers. In particular, the impact any such transfer of services may have on carers' ability to access support for themselves and the people they care for. This submission will also address the opportunities for technology and how online tools can improve carers' access to services and information.

About Carers NSW

Carers NSW is the peak organisation for carers in NSW. It is a member of the national Network of Carers Associations and has an exclusive focus on supporting and advocating for all carers in the state.

The vision of Carers NSW is that caring is accepted as a shared community responsibility and that all carers in NSW are recognised, valued and supported by their communities and by governments. The goal of Carers NSW is for carers to have improved opportunities and access to services that meet their needs regardless of their age, gender, circumstances, location or cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

About Carers

Carers NSW defines a carer as any individual who provides unpaid care and support to a family member or friend who has a disability, mental illness, drug and alcohol dependencies, chronic condition, terminal illness or who is frail. Carers come from all walks of life, cultural backgrounds and age groups. For many, caring is a 24 hour job that is often emotionally, physically and financially stressful.

According to the ABS there are 850,000 carers in NSW, representing 12 per cent of the population, and 264,300 people are classified as primary carers and provide the majority of assistance to the person in their care.¹ Fifty-five per cent of all carers in Australia are women and 67.8 per cent of primary carers are women.² Forty four per cent of carers in NSW care

for their partner or spouse, 24.5 per cent care for a son or daughter and 21.3 per cent care for a parent.³

Carer awareness and recognition

Carers and the role they play in supporting family members should be recognised by providers of community services regardless of whether services are being delivered by Government or non-Government organisations. Currently, government agencies must comply with state carer legislation, however there is no similar requirement for the community sector.

The *Carers (Recognition) Act 2010* requires government agencies and government service providers to be aware of carers and respect their rights and needs. Section 7 of the Act outlines the obligations of public sector agencies to “take all reasonable steps to ensure that the members of staff and agents of the agency have an awareness and understanding of the NSW Carers Charter.”⁴ The NSW Carers Charter states that carers should be recognised for their contribution to the community and that they should be referred to appropriate services to assist them in their caring role.⁵ Importantly, the Charter outlines that carers views must be taken into account in the assessment, planning and delivery of services that are provided to the person they support.

In the *Carers (Recognition) Act 2010*, there is no such provision for non-government agencies or organisations to recognise carers when providing services. Thus, any services currently being delivered by government that are outsourced to community based service providers would no longer be subject to this requirement.

Referral to appropriate, carer focused services is vital if carers are to maintain their health and wellbeing and manage in their caring role. Carers have experienced difficulty in finding and accessing services due to the complexities of the community services system. Over one quarter of carers surveyed in the 2010 Carers NSW Carer Survey did not access formal services and the primary reason for this was that they did not know where to find services.⁶

Non-government agencies contracted to provide services previously delivered by Government should be required to consider the views of carers when providing services for the person they support and refer carers to appropriate services as outlined in the NSW Carers Charter. Carers NSW recommends that the NSW Government require community based service providers to act in accordance with the principles outlined in the NSW Carers Charter. This could be achieved by stipulating in service contracts that services need to include and consider carers where practicable, in accordance with the NSW Carers Charter.

Carers NSW recognises that there are benefits to non-government service provision of community services. Non-government organisations are able to provide services that are directly catered to the needs of their local community. Some carers may prefer to access services through local, non-government organisations if carers feel these services are more approachable than larger organisations. Carers from Aboriginal or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds especially may feel local culturally specific organisations are better equipped to support them and the person they care for.

Recommendation 1: Carers NSW recommends that both non-government and Government service providers uphold the principles of the NSW Carers Charter. Where community based organisations are providing services that have been outsourced by Government, contracts should require community based organisations to include and consider carers as per the NSW Carers Charter.

The use of technology to improve service delivery

Technology, and internet based resources, can make accessing information and support easier for carers. Caring places great demands on carers' time with 33.9 per cent of primary carers caring for more than forty hours per week.⁷ Many carers are time poor and must balance their caring role with other family, work, community or study responsibilities. Carers can access electronic and online resources from their home, privately, at their leisure.

Specifically, carers of people with a mental illness may prefer not to discuss their problems with people in their community due to the stigma associated with mental illness. Carers NSW has developed an online tool, *Mental Health Foundations for Carers*, which is designed to assist carers looking after someone with a mental illness.⁸ It is focused on helping carers to access resources and gain knowledge that will help them in their caring role. The *Mental Health Foundations for Carers* website features resource pages that list available services. The interactive part of the site uses video clips to share carers' stories and explore issues that are relevant to carers of people with a mental illness.

The benefit of the Mental Health Foundations for Carers is that the resources and interactive portal can be accessed from home. The privacy and safety of the home allows carers to access information that they might not have had the confidence to access otherwise. Carers NSW also provides individual and group phone counselling sessions for carers who are unable to access in face-to-face counselling services.

Carers NSW believes that the increasing use of online resources offers people using community services greater flexibility and privacy. There are opportunities to complement existing face-to-face service provision with online services to allow people to access services and resources at their own convenience. For carers who are time poor, being able to access a resource online, or talk to someone over the phone, is of great benefit.

Recommendation 2: Carers NSW recommends that the use of technology in service provision, including internet and telephone based services, be encouraged as a way to connect with time poor service users.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Carers NSW recommends that both non-government and Government service providers uphold the principles of the NSW Carers Charter. Where community based organisations are providing services that have been outsourced by Government, contracts should require community based organisations to include and consider carers as per the NSW Carers Charter.

Recommendation 2: Carers NSW recommends that the use of technology in service provision, including internet and telephone based services, be encouraged as a way to connect with time poor service users.

Conclusion

Carers NSW would like to thank the Committee on Community Services for the opportunity to provide comment on outsourcing government community service delivery. For carers to have the support and access to services they require all service providers, both Government or non-Government organisations, should recognise and value the role and work of carers.

Yours sincerely,

Elena Katrakis
Chief Executive Officer

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2009", Canberra, 2010

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ *NSW Carers (Recognition) Act 2010*

⁵ *NSW Carers (Recognition) Act 2010*, Schedule 1 NSW Carers Charter

⁶ Carers NSW, "Carers NSW 2010 Carer Survey", Sydney, 2010 p. 4

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2009", Canberra, 2010

⁸ Mental Health Foundations for Carers is available online <http://www.foundationsforcarers.org.au/>