

MEDIA RELEASE 23 MARCH 2017

Value of mental health carers must not be diminished by federal reforms

Community Mental Health Australia (CMHA) President Liz Crowther today welcomed the release of the Mind Australia and University of Queensland report on *The economic value of informal mental health caring in Australia*.

“The report confirms what the community-managed mental health sector has been saying for many years, that the number of mental health carers in Australia is far greater than we have previously estimated, and that their economic value to the country is significant”.

“The report shows the key issues that must be taken into account when looking at support for mental health carers in that the support they provide is based on when the person they care for is well or not; they are literally on call 24//7; and a large amount of their support is emotional,” Ms Crowther said.

“The report estimates that it would cost \$13.2 billion to replace informal mental health care with formal support services. This is a fact that government’s must take into account when we talk about replacing informal carers through reforms such as the NDIS”.

CMHA’s submission to the Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS inquiry into mental health recommended support for carers be separate to the NDIS and that carers should not have their access to services, such as respite, tied to the assessment of the person they care for.

“The various reforms in mental health, in particular the NDIS, are having a major impact on mental health carers with much of the funding supporting mental health carers being transferred to the NDIS. CMHA supports the recommendation by Mental Health Carers Australia that federal funding should not be rolled into the NDIS until the full implications for consumers and carers are fully assessed”.

“CMHA urges governments at all levels – federal, state and territory – to fully consider the findings of the report. Regardless of any support for people who are eligible or not eligible for the NDIS, informal mental health carers will always be needed. To suggest that the need for informal carers will reduce is a false ideal”, Ms Crowther said.

“We must continue to provide support services specifically for mental health carers. A failure to recognise the complexities and issues particular to mental health may result in people living with a mental illness not having the support networks they need, and place additional pressure on the health and social services system.”

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