

Media Release



**For Immediate Release
Wednesday, 6th May 2009**

ACT Labor Breaks its Promise to Carers

ACT Labor has broken a key election promise to provide \$800,000 over 4 years for an urgently needed Carer Advocacy Service in the ACT. An ACT Labor press release from the 2008 election campaign (dated 29th September 2008) recognised carers as some of the ACT's most vulnerable members, and Ms Katy Gallagher said *"In direct response to a request from carers, ACT Labor will provide \$800,000 to establish a Carers Advocacy Service. The service will provide a dedicated and specialist advocacy service that assists carers make better use of the many services and programs that are available across government."*

Yet the promised funding has disappeared from the 2009-10 ACT Budget, with no explanation as to why the Stanhope Government is now breaking that election promise to carers. *"We have had written confirmation today from the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services that the 2009-10 ACT Budget does not contain the promised funding,"* said Annemarie Ashton, Policy Advisor for Carers ACT.

It may be that the ACT Government has simply got some of its priorities regarding election promises wrong. *"At a time when the government is paying \$14 million for a birthday party for Canberra's Centenary, and giving ACT public servants access to the best maternity leave scheme in Australia, on top of other generous wages and conditions, it is really disappointing that they are ignoring the needs of 43,000 carers,"* said Ms Ashton.

"Carers are unpaid, ordinary people and it would cost the ACT Government over \$500 million per year to replace the care they provide. Carers don't get a day's sick leave or annual leave, let alone the luxury of 18 weeks off from their caring commitments to care for another child in their family," said Ms Ashton.

While the small increase to the Expanded Flexible Support Fund is welcomed by Carers ACT, the majority of the funding announced is a repackaging of existing annual grant funds already offered by the government. *"These grant funds only benefit small one-off projects,"* said Ms Ashton. *"They do not offer Carers access to the much-needed help they have said they need to improve access services and sort out problems. Carers are tired. Carers are stressed. Carers are getting sicker because they need the sort of help that the government recognised at election time, but appears to have forgotten today."*

Carers throughout the ACT have been let down at a time when they are highly vulnerable to increasing pressures created by the global economic crisis. The 2009-10 Budget has offered Carers a Companion Card scheme which has been welcomed by Carers ACT, but this scheme will only benefit a limited number of Carers due to tight restrictions on eligibility. The scheme also enables the ACT to catch up with the rest of Australia, where Companion Cards have been available for many years.

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