

Media Release



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Tough Times Mean Tough Choices for Carers

The global economic crisis is hitting home in the Territory and nowhere is this more evident than in the ACT Governments 2009-2010 Budget. Tough times call for tough decisions, but the biggest priority of all for any budget must be those people who are the most vulnerable in our community.

From everyday working people caring for a parent who is frail and aged, to young parents struggling with a child with a disability, or aged parents caring for a son or daughter with a mental illness - an estimated 43,000 Carers serve our local community everyday in an unpaid capacity. If Carers didn't care, every hospital bed and residential care bed in the ACT would be quickly filled beyond existing capacity, and there would still be many thousands of people queuing in corridors waiting for more beds than any government could ever provide.

Yet research shows that the caring role often leaves Carers more vulnerable to poor health, depression and poverty due to the physical, mental and financial costs involved in providing care to another person. Injuries, poverty, homelessness, depression and isolation are the negative outcomes of unsupported care. Specialist support is vital to help Carers keep healthy while caring.

"The ACT Budget contains a number of positive initiatives which will benefit some of the ACT's Carers, but we are very concerned that others are still missing out," said Annemarie Ashton, Policy Advisor for Carers ACT. *"Greater support for children with Autism and children needing speech therapy will be a huge advantage for many families. If your child can't speak and there is a limited window where it is possible for them to learn, then you can't afford to spend 18 months on a waiting list."*

Announcement of a Companion Card for Carers of people with disabilities will help Carers who need to support a person with a disability to attend social activities. *"Not having to find money for two tickets will really help those Carers who can still afford to go out,"* said Ms Ashton. *"We really hope that businesses in Canberra will get on board to support the 'two for one' model promoted by the Companion Card scheme."*

Yet, Carers ACT is concerned that two critical election promises made in 2008 did not make it into the Budget announcements. Funding for a Carer advocacy service and a scheme to support grandparents who were primary carers for grandchildren (each promised at \$800,000 over 4 years) seemed to be missing from the Budget papers. *"We are hoping that these vital initiatives, recognised as essential supports by the Labor Government during the election campaign, are still going to be delivered to the Canberra community as promised,"* said Ms Ashton. *"Carer advocacy is a core issue, as the right help at the right time often prevents small issues from becoming big problems - problems that inevitably cost governments more to fix up in the long term."*

Mental Health services for Canberra have been well supported in the Budget, due to the priorities determined by the Parliamentary Agreement between the ACT Greens and the Stanhope Government. Carers ACT welcomes the new funding to support people with mental illness, especially the allocation for increased training for police, emergency services and teachers. *"Families caring for someone with mental illness are often very concerned about calling for help in an emergency,"* said Ms. Ashton. *"Families need to have confidence that the person they care for will be treated well, with respect for their dignity and safety. I anticipate that this increased training will be welcomed by emergency workers and police officers too."*

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