

# Carers Representation Program E Bulletin: 16 August 2011

**Welcome to the fortnightly Carer Representation Program E-Bulletin**  
Informing you of Mental Health committee updates, news, events and more. This issue:

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## Federal

### National Carer Strategy released

The National Carer Strategy was released by the Australian Government on Wednesday 3 August. At the heart of the Strategy is its vision that "Carers are valued and respected by society and that they have rights, choices, opportunities and capabilities to participate in economic, social and community life." The ten-year Strategy, which complements the *National Carers Recognition ACT 2010*, outlines six key action areas and commits \$60 million.

During the Strategy's development, Carers Australia conducted a nationwide consultation in 2010 that gathered the views of more than 300 Carers to identify priority issues. Among the many issues raised were the need for the health sector to better recognise family Carers as partners in care, the need for improved financial security, and the need for initiatives to enable Carers to work.

In an interview with ABC radio, Carers ACT's Chief Executive Officer, Dee McGrath urged the ACT Government to use the document as a framework to address urgent policy and service gaps in the Territory. These gaps include a significant shortage of accommodation options for people with disabilities and mental illness, and more options for young people with a disability when they leave school.

To find out more about the National Carers Strategy including to download a copy, visit our website: <http://www.carersact.asn.au>

### Productivity Commission– Disability Care and Support report released

The Productivity Commission presented its final report to the Australian Government on 31 July. The report was released on 10 August.

The draft report had queried whether people with mental illness should be included in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and sought specific comment from the community on this issue. As a result of significant lobbying in the form of Submissions and appearances by mental health groups at Productivity Commission hearings, the final report has recommended that people with a psychosocial disability be included in the Scheme.

The National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum has estimated that approximately 57,000 people with a psychosocial disability will be eligible for intensive support under the NDIS.

Carers Australia has welcomed the report and its President, Tim Moore, has noted the importance of people with a mental illness being included in the proposed scheme. He has also urged the Government to 'provide ample opportunity for Carers to participate

in the development and implementation of a NDIS.' A copy of the Carers Australia media release can be found on our website at <http://www.carersact.asn.au>.

A copy of the full report can be found at: <http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/disability-support/report>

### **Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee - Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services.**

The Senate Committee is inquiring into the Government's funding and administration of mental health services in Australia, with particular reference to the Government's 2011-12 Budget changes relating to mental health. One hundred and forty one Submissions have been received.

Submissions can be found at: [http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac\\_ctte/comm\\_fund\\_men\\_hlth/submissions.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/comm_fund_men_hlth/submissions.htm)

## **ACT**

### **Human Rights Act – Possible New Inclusions**

We have just been advised that the ACT Government is undertaking a public consultation about the possible inclusion of economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR) into the ACT Human Rights Act 2004. Economic, social and cultural rights are human rights that belong to individuals, including the rights to housing, health, education, work and to take part in cultural life – as protected in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – which Australia is party to.

The timeline to respond to the online survey is 19th August. You can access the background paper and online survey at [www.justice.act.gov.au/review](http://www.justice.act.gov.au/review). Alternatively you could send your suggestions to [escr.consultation@act.gov.au](mailto:escr.consultation@act.gov.au).

Bringing together the evidence of key issues of concern for Carers, we will request Carers and consumers right to appropriate housing, right to work place participation and support as well as Carers' being treated as part of the care team in the mental health system. We will seek to have these issues of recommended for inclusion in the legislation or as part

of the policy that will ultimately support the legislation. The initial report paper recommending these inclusions can be found: <http://acthra.anu.edu.au/PESCR/publications>

### **Mental Health and Wellbeing Report launched**

Chief Minister and Minister for Health, Katy Gallagher, launched the 'Mental Health and Wellbeing in the ACT' report on 28 July. The report showcases results from the Personality and Total Health (PATH) Through Life Project, which studied residents of Canberra and Queanbeyan over the last 12 years. The report highlighted that stressful life events, high job insecurity and strain, and financial hardship were among the most significant contributing factors to poor mental wellbeing.

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The Chief Minister said, "While a majority of Canberra residents experience good mental health, younger adults, particularly younger women, and Carers of another with a disability were also found to be vulnerable."

A copy of the report can be found at: <http://www.health.act.gov.au/publications/reports/mental-health-and-wellbeing-in-the-act>

### **Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Bill 2010 – Consultation process**

Consultation on the Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Bill 2010 commenced on 2 August. The Bill seeks to establish a regulatory framework for the background checking and risk assessment of people working- or volunteering with children or vulnerable adults accessing specific activities or services in the ACT.

Consultations close on 9 September 2011. The consultation documents can be downloaded at: <http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/home/publications/wwvpc>

## Agreement on Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Bill 2010 reached

The ACT Government has reached agreement with the Mental Health Coalition ACT and the Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Association ACT, to progress the legislation. The MHCC and ATODA had previously expressed concerns about how the Bill would impact on their employees' "lived experience."

The new checks, if passed by the Legislative Assembly in October, will be phased in over six years to allow for a smooth transition, and existing workers in the mental health and drug and alcohol sectors would be screened in the final years to allow the sectors sufficient time to prepare for the reforms. This would occur after a review of the scheme in the third year. All workers and volunteers who work with children will be screened in the first year of the scheme, expected to start next year.

## Vista Vocational Services

Vista Vocational Services (formerly the Mental Illness Fellowship of the ACT) offers two rehabilitation programs for people wishing to return to work while recovering from mental illness. These programs include – NorthSouth Contractors, a garden contracting business based in O'Connor, and Café Pazzini, a café in the ACT Health Building in Canberra City. Clients who have previously worked for NorthSouth Contractors or Café Pazzini cannot re-enter the Program.

An application form can be found at [www.mifact.org.au](http://www.mifact.org.au) using the "About us" – "Workplace Rehabilitation" links. Alternatively, you can contact Daniel Satrapa, the Assistant Executive Officer on 6205 1349, who will fax, email or mail out a copy.

## What's on in the ACT

Autism Asperger ACT is running a 1 day workshop for Carers and professionals working with adolescents and young people with an Autism spectrum disorder.

**Workshop:** Adolescents and young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder - transitioning to a Meaningful Life

**Presenter:** Katharine Annear (manager of the State wide Autism Project - Autism SA)

**Date:** Thursday 25 August 2011

**Time:** 9am-3pm

**Venue:** Southern Cross Club (JAMISON), Corner

Catchpole & Bowman Sts, Macquarie, ACT

**Price:** \$90 parent carer professional/teacher \$125 (Morning tea and lunch provided)

**Registration:** [www.autismaspergeract.com.au](http://www.autismaspergeract.com.au)

This workshop will explore the difficulties facing adolescents and young adults on the autism spectrum as they transition to a new phase in their lives. Paying particular attention to mental health and social development the workshop will outline strategies to foster resilience and increase social connections for young people.

For more information on this workshop visit [www.autismaspergeract.com.au](http://www.autismaspergeract.com.au)

## Calling for Volunteers

Have you, a relative or friend experienced a mental illness? Mental Illness Education ACT (MIEACT) is looking for volunteers to give presentations about mental illness to high school and college students as well as to the general ACT community.

All volunteers are fully trained, work in pairs, are reimbursed for expenses and enjoy access to MIEACT resources (Such as the library), training in public speaking, radio presentation and other professional development.

Come along for an information evening on: Thursday 1st September from 7.00 - 8.30pm or Tuesday 6th September from 5.30 - 7.00pm

Contact Linda for more information or to book your place on, 6257 1195 or at [linda@mieact.org.au](mailto:linda@mieact.org.au)

## Mental Health Carer Participation and Representation Program Reports

### Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Consultative Committee

One of the primary concerns to date of this committee relates to the issue of children and young people's decision-making capacity when it relates to making decisions about their mental health care. The committee was wanting to ensure that children who had identified themselves as having a mental health issue, and were assessed by a mental health

professional as needing help, would be able to access that help even if parents were not supportive of their child seeking help. At the same time, the committee was in no way wanting to be seen as interfering with parental rights. Discussion has ranged back and forth between identifying specific age groupings in which decision-making capacity would be given varying weightings to the final decision and arguing instead that decision-making capacity should be tied to developmental age and level of maturity.

There was difficulty in deciding upon a uniform statement that would work in the child's best interests with both mild-moderate and moderate to severe mental health problems. Where a child/young adult was either acutely unwell, or so severely affected by their mental illness that their decision-making capacity was felt to be impaired, the final decision regarding their treatment would probably be made by the parent in conjunction with health professionals.

I felt that the great majority of carers would want what was in the child's/young person's best interests, and this was backed up by Dr Denise Riordan, clinical directors of CAHMS. I was also able to refer the group to some material from the NSW Law Reform website specifically discussing these issues. However I would very much like feedback from other carers about their views and experiences.