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Media Release

Carers are integral to the aged care system - where are they?

The absence of carers from the terms of references for the government's Aged Care Inquiry is a stark oversight and betrays a lack of understanding of the realities of aged care.

Carers Australia CEO, Ms Joan Hughes, said "Carers are an essential part of Australia's aged care and community care systems. Their omission from the Inquiry's terms of reference fails to address the current and increasing strain they are under. This Inquiry will be based on economic concerns rather than reality."

In 2003 the Australian Bureau of Statistics[1] identified:

- 454,000 persons over the age of 65 were carers (almost 1 in 5 people)
- People over 65 accounted for 18 per cent of all carers and 24 per cent of primary carers
- 28,000 older carers (over the age of 65) cared for an adult child
- 50 per cent of older primary carers spent 40 hours per week or more actively caring or supervising.

As these statistics show, many carers are themselves ageing and provide care at a time when their own health may be deteriorating as they become at risk of the normal range of health issues which arise for the elderly.

"As startling as these statistics are, they say nothing of the many other unpaid family carers across Australia who care for the elderly and frail aged, and who will be adversely affected by a lack of consideration from the government," Ms Hughes said.

The Inquiry's intention to support independence, social participation and social inclusion for the elderly is commendable, but an inevitable consequence of helping older people remaining in their own home for longer will be an increase in the responsibility and strain placed upon carers - something that is set to rise further as a result of the ageing population.

The lack of acknowledgement for the vital role of carers in the aged care system suggests that the government is taking carers for granted.

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