A.O.C. 30/5/08

Submission No. 12
(Inq into better support for carers)

- **the role and contribution of carers in society and how this should be recognised**;
- My role as carer of three people with mental illness is to maintain wellness and continued recovery. My primary function is to provide a stress free environment in every facet of their lives so they avoid hospitalisation in a hospital system that functions on a crisis only basis. It should be recognised by the whole community and all government services by validation of the job that we do and the money that we save the government and the whole community by providing intense support on a needs basis. Carers should not have to beg and campaign for basic human rights for the people we care for and for a "fair go" for ourselves. Our contribution should be acknowledged by providing us with enough money to buy essentials (nappies for consumers, without having to live on sausage sandwiches for the next fortnight as quoted in our local paper). The majority of carers live on the breadline while providing essential services that are lacking in the community.

* **the barriers to social and economic participation for carers, with a particular focus on helping carers to find and/or retain employment**;

- The barriers for carers of people with a mental illness in regard to finding and retaining employment is that the nature of mental illness is episodic and unpredictable. The ideal area for mental health carers to find flexible employment is with carer organizations that understand the impact of mental illness. Social and economic participation is compromised and virtually non existent owing to the stigma attached to our caring role and the fact that there is no money left to entertain a social life or do anything other than live day to day.

* **the practical measures required to better support carers, including key priorities for action; and**

- Practical measures for supporting carers financially would be to introduce a carer card for recognition and validation of who we are and what we do and to provide discount for health, services, entertainment etc. (similar to seniors card). As most carers are in it for the long haul with very little chance of further employment a superannuation scheme would be essential for when they are physically/mentally unable to care any longer.
- Practical measures would be the reduction of stigma in the community, educating the public health system in regards to dealing with recovery.
- Another practical measure is the provision of fully-funded annual respite (flexible, accessible) for all carers, because we cannot save up for this. Also, the provision of separate annual respite for those that we care for is essential for both parties' harmony and effectiveness.
- A practical measure to support carers would be to provide permanent, ongoing funding for equitable health/housing for carers and consumers.

* **strategies to assist carers to access the same range of opportunities and choices as the wider community, including strategies to increase the capacity for carers to make choices within their caring roles, transition into and out of caring, and effectively plan for the future.**

In order for carers to make choices within their caring roles first there needs to be scope within the government departments and private sector to accommodate flexible options that carers require given their needs at the time (everchanging).

- A suggested strategy could be that Centrelink could take over the role of provision of flexible services for carers (eg respite, employment, links to services) in lieu of constant reviewing of people with long term profound and chronic illness. Carers don't need to be reminded every 2 years that they are caring for a loved one who is profoundly and chronically ill which also ties up mental health professionals and GPs who are under resourced themselves.
- Another strategy is to eliminate all pilot programs for services and replace them with permanently funded health/ngo services which provides continuity with experienced staff and less trauma for carers and consumers.

- It would greatly assist carers and validate our roles if we are not constantly asked what we need, give emotionally disturbing input only to have no real measurable improvements in our living standards.