



blindness and low vision services

Submission No. 570
(Inq into better support for carers)

A.O.C. 7/7/08

4 July 2008

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth
PO Box 6021
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email: fchy.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Sirs,

Vision Australia was formed in 2004 through the merger of several leading Australian agencies that provided services to people who are blind or have low vision. We are now Australia's largest blindness and low vision agency, with a long history of professional service delivery. Our organisation's purpose is to provide assistance to people who are blind or have low vision so that they can access, and fully participate in, all facets of life. Vision Australia promotes awareness to government, government departments, community services and the general public about the barriers faced by people, who are blind or have low vision in a predominantly sight orientated society.

Vision Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide input into the inquiry on better support for carers. The role that carers play in our society has not been well recognised, either in the community or by government. While Vision Australia's main focus is around delivering services to people who are blind or have low vision our services are also focussed on families and carers.

The definition of carer for the purpose of this enquiry is:

"individuals providing unpaid support for others with ongoing needs due to a long-term medical condition, a mental illness, a disability or frailty".

Vision Australia appreciates the use of the term "unpaid support" in preference to the term "carer". Vision Australia works with its clients to promote the independence of a person who is blind or has low vision. However, although this person does not need the 24 hour fulltime attendant carer support that is implied by the term "carer", they do still need support as they are living in a sight orientated society.

Vision Australia's clients have mentioned that there is not a structured approach towards supplying information to individuals who will be providing unpaid support for a person who is blind or has low vision. In the instance of a person, or family, suddenly being required to take on this role, all the information they need is often not immediately made available. Furthermore, information on how and where to get this information is not clear.

It is not only information relating to support services which should be made more readily available. The tight timeframes surrounding backdating provisions of the Carers allowance means that information relating to this allowance needs to be given to the family or support person as soon as possible. However, if an adult or child is suddenly diagnosed with vision loss, this diagnosis comes with huge emotional ramifications, to both them and their family or other support person. It is unjustifiable to expect somebody in such an emotionally vulnerable situation to be contemplating eligibility for a Centrelink allowance. However this is a necessity due to the reduction in backdating provisions, which is, without a doubt, detrimental to people with disability and their carers.

Carers play a vital role in our society and we look forward to government implementing policy, which will afford carers the best opportunity to engage fully with the community, as well as meeting their carer roles.

Yours faithfully

Sue Crane
Policy & Advocacy
Vision Australia