

CARING FOR THE CARERS

Carers provide an essential and often overlooked service to the community – but who is caring for them?

Who are the carers?

- In Australia, there are close to 3 million unpaid carers. About two thirds of carers are female. They can be aged in their twenties or in their eighties but the majority are in their fifties.

What do carers do?

- Carers provide support to family members or friends who have a disability or illness, are frail aged or have an alcohol or drug issue that stops them caring for themselves.
- Carers are an essential and unpaid component of the health care system.

How many hours do carers work each week?

- Carers work seven days a week – every week. The hours are not regular - they may work twenty hours one week and sixty the next depending on the health of the person they're caring for.

What issues do carers face?

- Isolation – the responsibilities of being a carer means they can't plan activities or social events or have to suddenly cancel. After a while, they don't try or people stop inviting them to do things.
- Stress – Being on 24 hours call, 7 days a week creates enormous stress, often there is no respite.
- Abuse – Carers may be abused by the person they're caring for as well as friends and family who only see what isn't being done.
- Financial insecurity – from not being able to hold down a job and having to help support the person they are caring for (e.g. buying medication, transporting them etc).
- Depression – from loss of personal lifestyle and dreams for their future.

Don't carers get a government allowance?

- Some do – but many don't. The Government will only pay an allowance if certain criteria are met – they won't pay for carers to take people to appointments, cook, clean, do laundry. Many carers working 30-40 hours a week don't get a government allowance.

How can you help somebody who's a carer?

- Ask if they need a hand – often people assume family or friends are helping but this may not be the case! Maybe you can cook a meal, sweep a patio, do a load of washing or some ironing.
- Offer to spend a few hours with the person being cared for – this will give the carer some respite and if it can be done each week, the carer can plan to do something.
- Recognise times of peak stress when the carer needs more help – when the person being cared for is sick or in hospital or when the carer themselves is sick.
- If the carer can't join you to socialise, offer to go to them – maintaining contact with the outside world is important.
- If you employ somebody who is a carer consider how their job can be structured to support their carer role so they can continue to work.
- Encourage the carer to maintain their own health – physical and mental. Assist or arrange a roster of assistance so they have time to do this.
- Keep an eye out for signs of severe depression or anxiety – encourage the carer to get help.
- Acknowledge the great job the carer is doing – don't look for what isn't being done, look for what is and acknowledge it. Too often carers only hear criticism.