

28 April 2023

Early Years Strategy
GPO Box 9820
Department of Social Services
Canberra ACT 2601

Carers NSW welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Early Years Strategy (the Strategy). This brief submission will address the importance of identifying and including young carers and their families in the Strategy, and will draw on existing evidence that supports this recommendation. This submission will highlight the unique experiences of young carers living in Australia, in turn demonstrating the need for their appropriate support and recognition.

Carers NSW is the peak non-government organisation for carers in New South Wales (NSW). A carer is any individual who provides care and support to a family member or friend who has a disability, mental illness, drug and/or alcohol dependency, chronic condition, terminal illness or who is frail. Carers NSW is part of the National Carer Network and a member of Carers Australia. Our vision is an Australia that values and supports all carers, and our goals are to:

- Be a leading carer organisation in which carers have confidence
- Actively promote carer recognition and support
- Actively support carers to navigate a changing service landscape that will be characterised by ongoing policy reform
- Promote connected community experiences and opportunities for carers that are inclusive of diverse carer groups
- Lead and advocate for carer-specific and carer-inclusive policy making, research and service delivery
- Continue to be a quality-driven, responsive and carer-focused organisation.

Thank you for accepting our submission. For further information, please contact [REDACTED], [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] or on [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Carers NSW

Introduction

The Strategy presents a unique opportunity for the needs of young carers to be identified and prioritised at a critical point in their lives and development. Carers NSW acknowledges that the care responsibilities may be limited within the first five years of a child's life, but believes early identification and intervention is critical to ensuring young carers are adequately supported to reach the same outcomes as their peers.

This submission will address the unique needs and experiences of young carers and will highlight how caring for a family member or friend may lead to disproportionate disadvantage, especially in instances where appropriate recognition and support has not been provided. This submission will recommend that young carers should be identified as a specific cohort of children and young people who should be supported in the Strategy.

About young carers

Young carers are children and young people, aged 25 years or under, who help to support a family member or friend living with a disability, mental illness, drug or alcohol dependency, chronic condition, terminal illness or who is frail.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates that there are 83,700 young carers aged 25 years or under living in NSW and 260,700 young carers in Australia (more than 3% of all people under 25).¹ Across Australia, there are approximately 46,300 young carers aged 15 years or under. However, these statistics are considered to significantly underestimate the number of young carers.

Impacts of caring

While there are many positive aspects of caring, having a caring role that is beyond a young person's capacity and maturity can have serious negative consequences for their health and wellbeing, educational prospects, future employment and socialisation. Young carers are more likely to live in low-income households, have lower levels of educational attainment and experience poorer mental health compared to their peers.² Furthermore, a recent report identified that young carers aged 14-15 years had lower reading and numeracy scores that equated to being more than a year behind their non-caring peers, with young female carers faring worse than young male carers.³

Caring at a younger age has been associated with significant socioeconomic disadvantage as young carers are more likely to live in low-income and lone parent households compared to their non-caring counterparts.⁴ Consequently, many young carers live in low resource households and are less likely to have access to a motor vehicle or an internet subscription, which may contribute to difficulties in work and studies.⁵ Limited finances can impact on a young carer's ability to participate in employment, education and social activities.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2018. TableBuilder Dataset*. Canberra: Australian Government. Retrieved from www.abs.gov.au/tablebuilder

² Hill, T. et al. (2016), *Carers and Social Inclusion*, Social Policy Research Centre; Cass, B. et al. (2011) *Young carers: Social policy impacts of the caring responsibilities of children and young adults*, Social Policy Research Centre; Hill, T., Thomson, C. and Cass, B. (2011), 'Young Carers: Location, Education, and Employment Disadvantage', *Australian Journal of Labour Economics*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 173-198.

³ Warren, D. and Edwards, B. (2017), 'Young Carers', *Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, Annual Statistical report 2016*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019); Cass et al. (2011)

⁵ Hill et al. (2016)

Many young carers have trouble balancing school work with their caring role. Compared to their non-caring counterparts, young carers have lower levels of educational attainment and workforce participation.⁶ Research also indicates that young carers have higher rates of absenteeism and may have difficulties in completing assignments or homework due to their caring responsibilities. Furthermore, young carers are less likely to finish year 12 and have a post-secondary education than non-carers of the same age.⁷ Without adequate support, such issues can affect students' long term educational achievement and employment prospects.⁸ Unfortunately schools often fail to recognise young carers and address their needs.

Lower levels of educational attainment are likely to have a direct impact on young carer's workforce participation with significant research indicating that many young carers are less engaged in the workforce, impacting on future career prospects.⁹ For young carers receiving the Carer Payment, the 25 hour rule can also limit their opportunities to participate in schooling and employment. Under this rule a carer cannot work, study, train or volunteer for more than 25 hours a week, including travel.

Young carers in the context of the Early Years Strategy

Carers NSW acknowledges that care responsibilities are likely to be limited within the first five years of a child's life, but believes that early identification is critical to ensuring young carers are adequately supported throughout their life. Research that examines the efficacy of young carer support services have demonstrated the importance of early intervention, considering it to be the most important preventative measure.¹⁰ As the peak organisation for carers in NSW, Carers NSW has long history of supporting young carers and their families to receive the information and support they need to assist in their caring role. Many families have cited that the early knowledge and understanding that their child is, or may become, a young carer as key to accessing timely and appropriate support.

Carers NSW is pleased to observe that the proposed Strategy is grounded in principles of early intervention and prevention, and believes these same principles can be applied to young carers and their families, particularly where their caring journey may be starting. For example, in instances where a parent, sibling or other family member in the family unit has been identified to have a disability, chronic health condition or mental illness, that holistic, family-centred carer supports are offered so as to ensure that other children who may undertake caring roles in the future are adequately supported.

As well as principles of early identification and intervention, the improved integration and interface between state and commonwealth services and systems presents a unique opportunity to improve carer identification and referral to appropriate supports. Carers NSW has commented extensively on the importance of robust integration between health, disability, aged care sectors as carers are often navigating these systems with or on behalf of the person they care for however, may not be included or recognised themselves of having their own support needs. Carers NSW believes that a key consideration to improved integration of child and family health services is the inclusion of various state and federal carer support services that carers can be referred into when engaging in other systems such as health or disability services.

⁶ Hill, T et al. (2011), 'Young Carers: Location, Education and Employment Disadvantage', *Australian Journal of Labour Economics*, vol. 14, issue 2, pp. 173-198.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Moore and McAArthur (2007); Bray, R. (2012) *Young carers in receipt of Carer Payment and Carer Allowance 2001 to 2006: characteristics, experiences and post-care outcomes*, Occasional Paper No. 47, Social Policy Evaluation, Analysis and Research Centre, Australian National University.

⁹ Cass et al. (2011).

¹⁰ Purcal, C., Hamilton, M., Thomson, C. and Cass, B. (2012), From Assistance to Prevention: Categorizing Young Carer Support Services in Australia, and International Implications. *Social Policy & Administration*, 46: 788-806. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9515.2011.00816.x>

Conclusion

Carers NSW thanks the Department of Social Services (the Department) for the opportunity respond to the *Early Years Strategy Discussion* paper and commends their commitment to support all children across Australia within their first five years of life. Carers NSW supports the proposed changes in the consultation paper are underpinned by values that seek to improve the lives of children, their families and carers, however Carers NSW wishes to ensure that proposed recommendations are also underpinned by carer recognition, inclusion and support.