

Mental Health Carers Australia

2017-18 Annual Report

www.mentalhealthcarersaustralia.org.au



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About this report:

This annual report covers the activities of Mental Health Carers Australia (MHCA) for the financial year 1 July 2017 to 31 June 2018. This report is structured to provide an overview of how MHCA have created value to improve the outcomes for mental health carers across Australia.

What we do:

Mental Health Carers Australia (MHCA) is a coalition of seven state and territory organisations and one national organisation, concerned with the needs of family and friends who support someone living with mental illness. The current members are Helping Minds (Western Australia), Mental Health Carers Tasmania, Tandem (Victoria), Arafmi (New South Wales and Queensland), Mental Illness Fellowship Northern Territory, and Mind Australia.

Mental Health Carers Australia advocates for systemic change to ensure the unpaid work of mental health carers and families is better valued and policies and services are developed that meet their challenges and needs, including bridging the increasing gap between unpaid care and participation in work, education and training. MHCA works closely with government at all levels, other service providers, and advocacy organisations such as Carers Australia and Mental Health Australia. We have also developed a resource for services working with carers of people with a mental illness, *A Practical Guide for Working with Carers of People with a Mental Illness*.

MHCA believes that mental health carers must be valued in their own right. We also believe that they have specific and unique needs that require policy responses different to those aimed at other carers. The persistent failure across all levels of government to recognise and value the contribution of mental health carers not only harms their physical, mental and economic wellbeing, but impacts outcomes for the people they care for.

To achieve our objectives, Mental Health Carers Australia has established a 5-year strategy which includes a key focus on two themes: Improving Mental Health Carer Experiences; and Advocating for Systemic Change.

Mental Health Carers: A Snapshot

Services and governments use the term 'carer' to describe someone who provides support to an individual who needs help. A mental health carer is a person who provides regular and sustained unpaid care to a friend or family member whose main health condition requiring support is mental illness.

Mental health carers experience different challenges to those faced by other carer cohorts. Mental illness has a younger age of onset than many other conditions such as cardiovascular, musculoskeletal and neurological disorders. This means the economic impact of caring for someone with mental illness can be experienced for much longer.

There is a strong policy framework around Australia requiring service providers to engage with mental health carers, this is not yet translated into consistent practice across the mental health sector. When carers are included by service providers, the outcomes for consumers are significantly increased. Carers know what the consumer is like when they are well, and the warning signs when they may become unwell. We often hear that confidentiality is a barrier to including carers, however, there are many ways in which carers can be included without jeopardizing confidentiality such as discussions about mental illness more broadly, side effects of medications and receiving information from carers. Carers must be included as partners in care, and this can also be managed by gaining consent from the consumer.

Improving Mental Health Carer Experiences:

Practical Guide for Working with Carers of People with a Mental Illness (the Guide)

A major focus of our activities this year has continued to be the implementation of the Guide. The Guide is based on the Triangle of Care model and outlines six partnership standards that are designed to improve outcomes for consumers by combining the knowledge and skills of staff and consumers with the knowledge and lived experience of family and other carers in a partnership approach to service planning and delivery. The Guide was developed as a partnership between Mental Health Carers Australia, Mental Health Australia, Mind, HelpingMinds, and the Private Mental Health Consumer Carer Network (Australia), and continues to be guided by a strategic working group including these members along with the National Mental Health Commission, the National Consumer Carer Forum, and Mental Health Carers NSW.

In late 2017 we held a national consultation workshop to set the direction of activities for the Guide over the next 4 years. The workshop proposed to gather key stakeholders, including acute and community mental health service providers, national mental health peak bodies, government, carers, consumers, academics and other key stakeholders and experts, to work together to develop a comprehensive, detailed and workable strategy to guide activities for implementing the Guide. The workshop informed the development of our Implementation Plan which focuses on six key objectives:

1. A suite of effective tools and resources will be developed and made readily available to assist organisations and practitioners to use the Guide.
2. Organisations and practitioners have access to support from others with experience using the Guide.
3. Key system stakeholders endorse and promote the use of the Guide.
4. Carers are aware of their rights and responsibilities.
5. The efficacy of the Guide in changing practice is established.
6. The Guide is the accepted tool used to improve carer engagement practice

Key outcomes of Guide activities over the past 12 months has included:

- Continued development and maintenance of the free Online Library to support service providers implement the Guide www.workingwithfamiliesandcarers.com.au
- Completion of four demonstration projects implemented by Mental Health Carers Tasmania and Headspace; HelpingMinds and four public mental health services; the Private Mental Health Consumer Carer Network (Australia) and Ramsay Mental Health Services; and Tandem Carers Victoria and Waiora Clinic. The final reports and associated resources developed from the demonstration projects can be found on the free online library www.workingwithfamiliesandcarers.com.au
- Development of a self-assessment App and a version for PCs developed by the Private Mental Health Consumer Carer Network (Australia) to enable service providers to self-assess against each of the six partnership standards and generate organisational reports on progress and outcomes. More information from www.carerguide.com.au

- Submission of a funding application to develop a Carer Guide Quality Mark where service providers can be recognised as ‘accredited’ demonstrating successful implementation of each of the 6 partnership standards.
- Submission of a funding application to create webinars and national, state-based communities of practice to support service providers engage with and implement the Guide.
- This year has seen the take up of the guide in a diverse range of provider settings - from small to larger scale. It is significant and encouraging to see so many organisations across Australia begin to embrace and apply the Guide to improve engagement and support with carers and family members. We have established a register to track this important next step in the implementation of the Guide nationally. Please share your implementation stories with us via eo@mentalhealthcarersaustralia.org.au

National Carers Helpline

This year we have continued to provide a National Carers Helpline 1300 554 660. The helpline provides free and confidential information, support and referral for family, carers, and friends of people with a mental illness

Advocating for Systemic Change:

Our emerging advocacy agenda

In November 2017 MHCA member organisations came together to develop a strategic plan focusing on a 3-year advocacy agenda. Our mission is to be the voice of mental health carers to enable the best life possible and our vision is to be the leading national voice for mental health carers.

Our key objectives to reach our vision includes:

1. Improving mental health carer experiences by changing community, government and provider practice
2. Advocating for systemic change by influencing change in government and provider policy
3. Develop a sustainable business model by expanding our reputation as a known, respected and influential organisation.

A summary of our Strategic Plan is provided at the end of this Annual Report.

Conference presentations

- International Carers Conference, October 2017 – Symposium on “A Practical Guide for Working with Carers of People with a Mental Illness”
- Royal and Australian College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) Congress, May 2018 - Presentation “Partnering with Mental Health Carers: Changing Practice, Improving Outcomes”
- NDIS Conference, November 2017 – Presentation on “Mental Health Carers and The NDIS: What are the risks?”

Caring Fairly Coalition

Mental Health Carers Australia and our member organisations played a significant role in the establishment and launch of the Caring Fairly campaign and coalition throughout 2018. Most member organisations attended the launch of the campaign in Canberra, on 21st August 2018. Members of Mind, Tandem, Arafmi Ltd (QLD) and HelpingMinds formed a central part of the key

campaign advocacy team. Together we worked on producing video campaign content and engaged with key ministers and policy makers from all sides of politics to present the policy changes the campaign is seeking.

✿ Mental Health Australia Board Membership

Patrick Hardwick, MHCA President represented Mental Health Carers Australia and the carer voice on the Board of Mental Health Australia during the 2017-18 year.

✿ National Mental Health Consumer Carer Forum (NMHCCF)

Kristine Havron represented Mental Health Carers Australia on the NMHCCF and was on working groups to progress the strategic objectives of this group and ensure the voice of carers is included.

2017-18 Financial Summary:

This year was a strong year for Mental Health Carers Australia with an increase in membership fees and a focus on cost saving options.

The key areas of expenditure related to the national face to face meetings with our member organisations, presentations at conferences, travel with a focus on strategic relationships, and the national carers helpline. A key outcome this year was to invest funds into the development of a new website for MHCA which is expected to be launched in early 2019.

The year ended with a modest surplus which has added to our reserves. The next financial year will focus broadening our membership base and investment to expand our strategic reach, advocacy agenda and support sustainability into the future.

Our Members:

Mind Australia Limited (National Member)

Mind is one of the country's leading community-managed specialist mental health service providers. They have been supporting people dealing with the day-to-day impacts of mental illness, as well as their families, friends and carers for over 40 years.

They provide practical and motivational support that helps people to develop the skills they need to move on, thrive and improve the quality of their lives. This includes helping people with the things that make them feel strong and healthy, such as being in control of their life, being resilient and participating in their community. They also work with people to address poverty, housing, education and employment. It is an approach to mental health and wellbeing that looks at the whole person in the context of their daily life.

www.mindaustralia.org.au

HelpingMinds (WA Member)

HelpingMinds support children, young people, adults and families that are affected by mental illness. They have a professional and compassionate team of staff who provide quality, confidential support and services to children, youth, adults and families who are caring for someone with a mental illness or individuals who are affected by a mental illness.

The majority of their services are free of charge and focus on: advocacy, understanding the mental health system, education, counselling and support, school holiday programs and respite.

www.helpingminds.org.au

Mental Health Carers Tasmania (TAS Member)

Mental Health Carers Tas (MHCTas) is the Peak Mental Health Carers body providing systemic advocacy for and with mental health carers. MHCTas is a statewide leader in the provision of Mental Health carer support. They aim to improve the quality of life for the one in five Tasmanian families, friends, carers and people living with mental health issues and mental illness. Their vision focuses on ensuring carers of people affected by mental ill health are understood, respected, valued and supported to build their capacities and improve their quality of life.

www.mentalhealthcarerstas.org.au

Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (NT) Inc (NT Member)

Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (NT), MIFA(NT) is a non-government organisation providing services for people living with a mental illness and their carer's and families.

Their vision focuses on having a society where understanding and acceptance of mental illness is implicit and all those affected by mental illness are able to make a valued contribution. Their mission is to provide high quality recovery-based programs offering support, education, information, and respite to all people whose lives are affected by mental illness. Their goal is to reduce community restrictions experienced by all people affected by mental illness and improve their quality of life. They provide carer programs in Darwin and Alice Springs, a consumer drop in centre in Darwin and youth and family programs for young people at risk in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek.

www.mifant.org.au

Arafmi Ltd (QLD Member)

Arafmi is a not for profit community organisation that has been providing quality services to the Queensland community for over 40 years. Their vision is to enhance the wellbeing of people with mental illness, their families, carers and volunteers. Arafmi aims to: Provide emotional support for families, carers and friends of people experiencing mental illness; provide accurate information for carers to cope with the demands and pressures of caregiving; increase the community awareness and understanding of mental disorders; decrease the stigma attached to mental disorders; and convey the needs of carers and families to healthcare professionals, the government and the community.

www.arafmi.com.au

Mental Health Carers NSW (NSW Member)

Mental Health Carers NSW Inc., (formerly Arafmi NSW) is a non-government organisation that provides systemic advocacy and support for families, relatives and friends of people who experience mental illness, living in NSW. They aim to maintain and improve existing levels of support to all relatives and friends of people with a mental illness and their loved ones and to improve the culture of public mental health services in dealing with carers and consumers. As the peak body for mental health carers in NSW funded by the NSW Mental Health Commission, they influence changes in policy, legislation and service provision, and make a positive difference to the mental health system for carers by participating in numerous committees and projects with NSW Health. They currently facilitate a number of Peak Advisory Committees focused on specific issues impacting the lives of different carer communities as well as delivering the Mental Health Carer Support Worker Forum quarterly for the benefit of the Health and CMO staff that support carers. In addition MHCNB delivers a regular calendar of training and information sessions, including, 'Youth Mental Health First Aid' and 'The User's Guide to the NSW Mental Health System'. They are partnering with NSW Health to roll out the Carer Experience Survey across public mental health services and work closely with Being (peak body for consumers in NSW) and the Way Ahead (Mental Health Association).

www.mentalhealthcarersnsw.org

Tandem (VIC Member)

Tandem is the Victorian peak body representing family and friends supporting people living with mental health issues. Tandem's mission is to provide leadership and coordination for the community of individuals and organisations who seek better outcomes for Victorian mental health carers. They advocate for family and friend involvement in planning and care, participation in system change and support; promote and support the development of the Mental Health Carer Workforce and leadership; inform and empower family and friends to access the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS); promote and collaborate on the delivery of training on family inclusive practice for mental health professionals; provide information, education, and training to family and friends supporting people with mental health issues; support and advocate for the diverse needs of family, friends and other supporters of people living with mental health issues; collaborate on research and policy development on matters in relevant areas; raise community awareness about the important role of family and friends in mental health recovery; and administer the Carer Support Fund which provides financial assistance to carers of people registered with Area Mental Health Services in Victoria.

www.tandemcarers.org.au

MENTAL HEALTH CARER AUSTRALIA 2021 STRATEGY

OUR Mission: Be the voice of mental health carers to enable the best life possible

OUR Vision: The leading national voice



STRATEGIC THEMES

IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH CARER EXPERIENCES

Goal: Change community, government and provider practice.

Priorities:

- A Practical Guide to Working with Carers of People with a Mental Illness
- Information for mental health carers
- A national mental health carer helpline
- Products and services to improve service practice

ADVOCATING FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Goal: Influence systemic change in government and provider policy.

Priorities:

- A robust and inclusive carer engagement practice.
- A comprehensive government advocacy program driving systemic change on key issues
- National campaigns to improve carer experience

A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL

Goal: A known, respected and influential organisation

Priorities:

- A broadened board preserving the ARAFMI legacy, strengthened with additional mental health carer voice and expertise
- A diverse associate membership base equipped to advocate
- Genuine and effective collaborative partnerships
- Sustainable income streams