



**Mental Health Carers Australia**  
**Annual Report**

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# President's Report

I am pleased to present the 2018-19 Annual Report which details the advocacy and project activities undertaken by Mental Health Carers Australia (MHCA) to improve the lives of mental health carers.

The mental health service system continues to be a major focus for reform, particularly demonstrated by the commencement earlier this year of the Productivity Commission's inquiry into mental health.

The families and friends of people facing mental health challenges remain at the frontline of Australia's continuing mental health crisis - their needs must be taken into account by all levels of government when designing and implementing much needed policy change. Without a holistic approach to service delivery, Australia will continue to have a second-rate mental health system. It is critically important that mental health carers are involved in decisions that directly and indirectly affect them and the lives of the people for whom they are caring.

As noted in our summary of achievements, in early 2019 MHCA partnered with the National Disability Insurance Agency, the Private Mental Health Consumer Carer Network (Australia) and Carers Australia to identify improvements to better engage mental health carers in the NDIS Psychosocial Pathway. We applaud the NDIA's commitment to engaging carer advocacy groups in this process and we continue to urge government to adopt co-design processes as the evidence is clear that they produce significantly better policy and service delivery outcomes.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our members for their continuing support. Their unwavering commitment, time and contributions are vital to MHCA in its development and ongoing refinement of national policy priorities.

Jeremy Coggin,

**President, Mental Health Carers Australia**

# About us

MHCA is a national peak body focused solely on the needs of mental health carers. We are made up of seven state and territory organisations, including one national. Our aim is to work constructively with governments to improve policies and programs that directly and indirectly impact mental health carers. More information about our organisation is accessible at: <https://www.mentalhealthcarersaustralia.org.au/>.

Our members are:

-  HelpingMinds, Western Australia
-  Mental Health Carers Tasmania
-  Tandem, Victoria
-  Mental Health Carers NSW
-  Arafmi QLD
-  Mental Illness Fellowship Northern Territory, and
-  Mind Australia.

We believe that the long-term success of government policy decisions is dependent upon the continuing goodwill and commitment of families and carers to supplement the supports provided through formal service systems. Given the significant contribution of \$13.2B<sup>1</sup> that mental health carers provide to the economy every year, it is imperative that their needs are taken into account in the design and delivery of policies and programs that directly and indirectly impact them.

We advocate at a national level so that mental health carers are supported to continue in their vital caring role. We work closely with our member organisations to identify policy priorities and communicate these to government.

We aim to promote the adoption of carer inclusive practice in all aspects of service design and delivery. We do this by encouraging the uptake of [A practical guide to working with carers of someone with a mental illness](#), which is our key resource designed to enhance practice improvements.

As attached in our five-year strategic plan we have identified two priority areas for focus: Improving Mental Health Carer Experiences; and Advocating for Systemic Change.

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<sup>1</sup> Diminic S, Hielscher E, Lee Y, Harris M, Schess J, Kealton J, & Whiteford H, (2016) *The economic value of informal mental health caring in Australia: technical report*

# Mental Health Carers: A Snapshot

Mental health carers are everyday Australians providing significant emotional, practical and financial support to their family member or friend living with a mental illness. There are significant, well documented impacts on carers associated with the caring role, including but not limited to: emotional distress, depression, financial insecurity, employment insecurity and loss of connections with their own family, friends and community.

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.

## 2018-19 Highlights

2018-19 has been an exciting year for MHCA as a number of major mental health related initiatives roll out nationally that have direct impacts on carers.

### National Disability Insurance Scheme Psychosocial Pathway project

In 2019 MHCA was pleased to partner with the National Disability Insurance Agency, Carers Australia and the Private Mental Health Consumer Carer Network (Australia) to identify enhancements to the new NDIS psychosocial pathway to improve outcomes for mental health carers.

As part of the delivery of the project a Carer Advisory Group was established to oversight the approach to consultations with mental health carers. Workshops were facilitated with mental health carers with lived experience of the NDIS across Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia to better understand their experience of the NDIS.

Our final report is available here (insert link once published)

### Advocacy

In April 2019 MHCA member organisations came together to formulate our advocacy position across a range of key policy domains. Our reflections and discussions resulted in two key policy documents:

1. Our 2019 Federal Election Platform available at: [2019 Federal Election Platform](#)

## 2. Our Productivity Commission submission.

We are continuing to collaborate with our member organisations and key partners including Mental Health Australia, Carers Australia and the Caring Fairly Coalition - we believe that as Australia's mental health crisis deepens that the sector must continue to present a strong and united voice on key issues affecting mental health carers and the people they care for. Policies that affect one, will ultimately affect the other and it is critical that a holistic approach to policy design is undertaken to build strong and resilient communities.

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

In 2018-19 MHCA continued to support 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.

In 2018-19 we have continued to partner with Mind, HelpingMinds, and the Private Mental Health Consumer Carer Network (Australia), to facilitate a nation-wide implementation plan. We have also continued to promote carer inclusive practice as part of our advocacy submissions including our Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health submission.

### National Carers Helpline

This year we have continued to provide a free 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.

## Mental Health Australia Board Membership

Jeremy Coggin, President, MHCA 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)

The following MHCA representatives participated in the NMHCCF during the 2018-19 FY:

- Kristine Havron until December 2018
- Kerry Hawkins from January 2019 to current

## 2018-19 Financial Summary

MHCA successfully delivered its strategic objectives advocacy under budget in 2018-19.

Our main areas of expenditure were related to:

- ✿ the bi-annual national face to face meetings with our member organisations
- ✿ the development of a new website for MHCA which was launched in February 2019
- ✿ the delivery of the national Helpline.

The year ended with a modest surplus which has added to our reserves.

The next financial year will focus on ensuring that the outcomes of the Productivity Commission's inquiry into mental health will produce improved outcomes for the families and carers supporting people with mental ill-health.

# 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](http://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 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](http://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](http://www.mentalhealthcarerstas.org.au)

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

Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (NT), MIFANTA 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.tandemcarers.org.au)

# MHCA 2018-2021 Strategy

## 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