

# **Proposal for a Victorian carers reward card – options for the implementation and delivery of the card**

A submission by the Carers Network

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## **Response to the Consultation Paper**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments in relation to the proposal of a Carer Reward Card. Generally we support the concept of the Carer Reward Card and believe that it could provide welcome recognition of the role of families, friends and other carers play in supporting people with a mental illness. To do this, we believe that the benefits of holding the card need to be reasonably significant and the application process needs to be reasonably simple. Promotion of the card could also be valuable in establishing contact with carers in indigenous and CALD communities who are not aware of other support available for carers.

We have a few general comments to make before we specifically discuss the consultation paper. They are:

- It would be preferable to name the card simply “Carers Card” rather than “Carers Reward Card”.
- The consultation paper requested feedback by 19 June, but we believe that there are several areas where further discussion will be needed in order to reach the best result. As the peak body for carers of people with mental health issues in Victoria and for the organisations that support such carers, we are able to provide valuable insight from a carer’s perspective. We would be pleased to have an ongoing involvement in the development of this card.
- We would like to point out that the timelines for this consultation process were too short to allow in-depth feedback from both carer support groups and Carer Consultants. While we appreciate that timelines sometimes need to be short, the consultation process can take time and it is not reasonable to expect feedback in just a few weeks. We would request that in future allowances are made for consulting with these groups.
- While providing comment on all three options for eligibility, we find option one, with the additional arrangements outlined below, the most suitable.

### **Specific comments on the proposal document:**

#### *1. Definition of carer*

We believe that using the Centrelink definitions for eligibility for Carer Payment or Carer Allowance, with the changes outlined in option one below, would be more appropriate and relevant than the ABS definition that is offered in the proposal.

#### *2. Eligibility criteria - Option one*

Basing the eligibility for the Carers Card on receipt of Carer Payment, Carer Allowance or one of the various DHS payments has merit. For those receiving these payments, this would make for a very simple application process – simple for the applicant and simple for the administering department. However, as recognised in the consultation paper, many carers would be excluded if this were the only criterion.

We strongly agree that “additional criteria...need to be developed to ensure that carers who provide a similar level of care to those in receipt of payments.... are not excluded from the Scheme”<sup>1</sup>. There are many carers who do not receive these payments. We believe that this is particularly true for carers of people with a mental illness. This is because in some cases, the Centrelink process is complex and seems

to be geared towards those caring for people with a physical disability. Nevertheless, it should be possible to devise a reasonably simple application process for the Carers Card, based on the Centrelink definitions (not the Centrelink application forms) for the Carer Allowance e.g. (this is taken from the Centrelink web-site with suggested new words in square brackets):

*“You may receive the [Carers Card] if you personally provide care and attention for [a person] who needs a lot of additional care because of a disability or severe medical condition or because they are frail aged. You must provide care in your home, the home of the person you care for or while the person you care for is temporarily in hospital. The person you care for must be likely to suffer from the disability [or illness] permanently or for a period of at least 12 months, unless suffering from a terminal condition, and must be assessed by a medical practitioner or other approved person as being disabled [or seriously ill].”*

A medical practitioner should be able simply to sign a form confirming that the above description is valid.

Finally, this Option is described in the proposal as a “low income model”. This is not really true as the Carer Allowance is not income or asset-tested.

### *3. Eligibility criteria – Option two*

Linking the Carers Card to the Companion Card does not seem appropriate.

The Companion Card recognises the need for a person to have a companion to help them when visiting entertainment and other venues. It does not imply that in other circumstances the person needs “a lot of additional care”. It does not imply that there is one particular carer who will necessarily be the companion. We feel that the definition proposed under **option one** above should suffice.

### *4. Eligibility criteria – Option three*

This so-called “broad-based model” is described with the apparent intention that there be an application process that would be the same for everyone, requiring in all cases a doctor to certify that the carer and the cared-for person meet some definition. The consistency of this approach has some attraction at first glance, but why not short cut the whole process for those already recognised as carers by Centrelink? Further, we are disturbed at the statement “the only criteria being that the applicant provides primary care to a person with a disability or mental illness or is a foster carer”<sup>2</sup>. That requires a definition of ‘primary care’. If that means care provided by a ‘primary carer’ as defined on page 3 of the consultation paper, then it requires that the carer “lives with the person requiring care” as well as providing assistance with core activity or activities. That is a more restrictive requirement than applied for the Carer Allowance, so this model would be more narrowly based than **Option one**. It could cut out quite a lot of carers for people with a mental illness. We would strongly oppose a requirement of co-residency for eligibility for the Carers Card.

### *5. Benefits of the Carers Card*

We feel that the benefits most attractive to carers would be:

- Concession travel on public transport
- Discounts on energy bills

Also attractive would be

- Discounts from retailers of foodstuffs
- Concession entry to government venues – museums, zoos, galleries etc
- Discount prices for entertainment – movies, sport, theatre

Probably of lowest benefit to most carers would be

- Discounts from retailers

## **5. Conclusion**

The Carers Network looks forward to opportunity for further discussion on arrangements for a Carers Card. We can facilitate further discussion with carers and Carer Consultants in the mental health sector.

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<sup>1</sup> DHS, Proposal for a Victorian carers reward card – options for the implementation and delivery of the card, May 2009, Page 6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, Page 8.