



Carer Consultant Network Victoria

Response to Proposal for a Victorian carers reward card – options for the implementation and delivery of the card

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the 'Proposal for a Victorian carers reward card – options for the implementation and delivery of the card' consultation paper. We also acknowledge and thank you for the extension of time for which to respond.

Carer Consultant Network of Victoria

The Carer Consultant Network of Victoria (CCNV) is the professional body of Carer Consultants in Victoria. Carer Consultants are people who have previously or currently care for a family member or significant other with a mental illness and are employed by a mental health service. The State Governments newly released mental health reform strategy 'Because Mental Health Matters' supports and strengthens the Carer Consultant Program by providing funding for each area Aged, Adult and Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to employ carer consultants.

The Carer Consultants' role includes:

- Providing information and referral to families and carers (including young carers)
- Promoting partnerships between the service and families and other carers using good interpersonal and communication skills
- Advocating so that the perspectives on mental illness from other cultures are included and respected
- Support families and carers seeking information to understand services available within the service (example – Carer Support Fund), and other sources of support (example – Centrelink) that are available in the wider community
- Ensure that families and other carers are aware of their rights and responsibilities
- Provide advice to appropriate managers on areas for possible quality improvement based on carers' experiences

- Provide education and information on carer experiences, needs and support to mental health staff, community groups and other relevant services as required
- Provide direct peer support to carers through individual or group work.

As the professional body of Carer Consultants, The Carer Consultant Network of Victoria(CCNV) believes it is in a position to make comments on the proposed 'Carer Card' from the perspective of carers and having the lived experience of caring for someone with a mental illness.

1. Definition

We would agree with the definition of carer being "A person who provides unpaid primary care to a person or persons with a disability, mental illness or who are frail/aged and foster carers". However, the definition of 'primary carer' should be changed to reflect carers **may not** always live with the person with the illness but still maintain a significant caring role.

2. Priority Focus

Families and carers of people with mental illness often are not in receipt of carers payment of allowance for various reasons including:

- Inability to meet strict Centrelink criteria for diagnosis
- Inability to meet criteria for income and assets test
- Cultural beliefs – egg. it is the duty of the parent/partner to care
- Mental illness may be more episodic rather than ongoing
- Don't believe they are deserving or entitled to have their caring role acknowledge
- For families where a child under the age of 18 has a mental illness, the criteria does not fit with the diagnosis.

For this reason we believe the criteria needs to be broad to include **all** carers.

3. Benefits

- Benefits we believe would be useful include
- Travel concessions (including taxi)
- Discounts on energy bills
- 2 for 1 entertainment deals – this would enable you to take someone with you
- Discount on retailers – including supermarkets
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4. Eligibility Models

Based on the above, it is the view of Carer Consultants that Option 3 be the preferred option with an amended criteria being that the carer did not have to reside with the person with the mental illness. It also allows for the role of the carers and caring to be acknowledged with respect and without judgement that associated with having little or no income.

If however, DHS was to decide on option 1, we would suggest broadening the criteria for applications for the Carer Card to all carers not just those on Centrelink benefits or low income. Applicants regardless of what option is decided, should have letter of support from a G.P or Psychiatrist in regard to the carer's role and probable length of time the carer.

Carer Consultant Comments have included:

“I particularly dislike the concept of 'frequent flyers' reward connotation. I would like to see ALL mental health carers , regardless of financial circumstances, recognised with a carer card....especially those who deal daily with low prevalence illnesses and dual/triple diagnoses”

“I agree with the notion of "Carer's card" or as a name rather than "Carer's Reward card". I think the implication of "reward" gives it a commercial tone as in "Frequent Flyer etc. and I'm sure that many carers would not apply for it for that reason and also because they don't deem themselves to require a "reward" for what they do. I think it is vitally important to highlight the differences between caring for a person with a physical disability as opposed to one with a mental disability and have this adequately reflected in any application process selected.”

“It appears to me that neither the card nor the carer payment/allowance really meets carer needs. If you are identified as the carer of the person receiving treatment you should be eligible for the card and receive assistance whether the person is living at home or not. Most carers have no choice but to pay for most outings because the person they care for generally cannot afford to pay for outings.

If we are going to advocate that part of a person's recovery process is to reconnect, integrate in the community and develop skills of social connectedness then the card should be available to all carers.”

“CAMHS Carers are less likely to be on Centrelink benefits!”

The other issues raised is the term “reward”. The CCNV would like to see that term removed altogether.

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Chair

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