

Department of Human Services
Proposal for a Victorian carers reward card
Options for the implementation and delivery of the card

Consultation Paper

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Association for Children with a Disability

Suite 8, 98 Moran Road, Hawthorn 3122

www.acd.org.au

Contact: Elizabeth McGarry, Chief Executive Officer
Phone (03) 9818 2000 or 0419 595 468

Introduction

The Association for Children with a Disability is a non-profit community based organisation representing families of children with a disability living in Victoria. Our current membership includes over 3,500 families.

Purpose and Principles

Our Association exists to assist families of children with a disability through the provision of information, support and advocacy.

Statement of Purpose

- ✚ To empower parents of children with a disability to be as self-sufficient as possible in advocating on behalf of their child and family.
- ✚ To promote and advance the rights of children with a disability and their families.
- ✚ To advocate on behalf of children with a disability and their families to ensure the best possible support and services are available.
- ✚ To work collaboratively with other organisations to improve the service system for children with a disability and their families.

Guiding Principles

- ✚ To be responsive to the needs of families of children with a disability.
- ✚ To provide a professional, quality service.
- ✚ To be proactive by raising ideas with government and awareness in the community about the needs of families of children with a disability.

Introduction

Our Association applauds the Victorian Government's decision to recognise the contribution made by individuals who provide care to others, whether the recipients of such care are children, parents, relatives or friends. Although providing such informal care pertains to the circumstances in which carers find themselves, for some the financial constraints resulting from a reduced capacity to participate in the paid workforce are significant. The benefits derived from access to the proposed card, will provide opportunities to participate in activities that for many carers, are currently beyond their reach.

Across Australia, the concept of the carer card is not new. It is our understanding that a card for foster carers exists in South Australia, a carer business discount card operates in Queensland and introduction of similar programs is under consideration in other jurisdictions. Implementation of a Victorian carer card would create greater consistency in the supports available to a broader range of Australian carers.

The universal success of the Seniors Card highlights the value the business sector places on participation in such schemes. Clearly mutual benefits flow from the introduction of such schemes = good for carers – good for business.

There are many factors that are vital to supporting carers in their role, none the least of which is recognition of occupational health and safety issues within the home environment. OH&S is universally identified as a critical factor in safeguarding the paid health and disability support workforce whereas no safeguards are extended to unpaid primary carers. The need for working age carers to be adequately supported to undertake both roles successfully also requires urgent attention. The development of the carer card along with a charter of carer rights would constitute greater validation of the carer role and achieve real benefits where they are most needed.

Our Association's position in relation to the concept of the carer card and associated factors relating to its implementation are set out below -

Discussion Questions

Title

The current title – 'Carer Reward Card' is not favoured by members of our Association. Many parents provide ongoing care to their children for long periods of time and in this context a card to 'reward' this level of care, greater benefits would need to be included. 'Recognition' rather than reward would appear more appropriate, however our Association recommends that the card be known as "The Carer Card".

Equally if eligibility is determined by applying an income assessment test, then the concept of 'reward' becomes irrelevant as a person is only rewarded for the care they provide if they are deemed financially disadvantaged. The emphasis shifts to financial status rather than acknowledging the care that is being provided.

1. What definition of “carer” is considered the most appropriate by your organisation for the purposes of the Carers Reward Card?

Our Association believes that in defining who constitutes a ‘carer’, emphasis should be placed on the level of care provided rather than eligibility being determined by a medical diagnosis. Whether the recipient of care has a life long or acquired disability, episodic mental illness or chronic or terminal illness does not accurately capture the level of care provided.

Some individuals provide care to more than one person, for example a parent simultaneously caring for a child and an ageing parent.

Using residential status as a determining factor for establishing eligibility also fails to recognise the level of care provided. Many carers provide high levels of support to adult children and others who do not share the same living arrangements. Therefore adopting the ABS definition for “primary carer” – stipulating that the carer lives with a person requiring care, is inappropriate.

2. What are your priority focus areas and why?

As our Association’s name suggests, we support families who have a child/ren with a disability and who reside in Victoria. Our Statement of Purpose outlined above provides an overview of our focus.

3. What benefits/rewards are likely to be of most value to carers?

For those parents of children with a disability who find themselves financially disadvantaged, the card would be far more beneficial if it attracted discounts on utilities, motor vehicle registration and other essential items. Health Care Cards are issued to the recipients of care. In the instance where the recipient of care is a child, it is not possible for families to access the usual concessions the card attracts.

In the case of children with a disability, it is our belief that all those who provide care should have access to the benefits of the carer card. Therefore shared care arrangements could be acknowledged by the card recording the names of all carers, similar to the multiple names that appear on a Medicare card. However it would be important to set in place a process that provides flexibility for shared care arrangements, where the issuing of individual cards may be more appropriate.

4. Which of the three eligibility models is favoured?

Model 3 is the most appropriate however our Association has reservations about the manner in which eligibility would be determined. If automatic eligibility was granted to recipients of Carer Payment or to a person caring for a recipient of the Companion Card,

the need to undergo another parallel application process to prove similar eligibility would be eliminated.

If the application for the carer card is aligned with the new application process for Carer Payment (child) and Carer Allowance (child), the requirement to provide further evidence above and beyond that already requested for Carer Payment (child) would seem unnecessary.

5. *Is there an alternative model that your organisation would like considered?*

The discussion paper outlines the principles underpinning the introduction of the carer card –

“The Carers Reward Card is considered to be a way in which carers can be recognised for the significant level of care and commitment they provide supporting family members and friends who are frail/aged or have disabilities or to children who require foster placements.”

In determining eligibility, once the focus shifts from an assessment of the level of care provided, to the income and assets of the carer, the purpose of reward and/or recognition is lost. The socio economic profile of a carer does not equate with the level of care provided. When income considerations become the determinant of eligibility, carers are divided into two groups – those who are eligible to receive recognition and those who are not.

Therefore our Association believes that assessment tools used to determine eligibility for the carer card should focus on recognising the level of care provided.