

Carers Tasmania



'Under the Umbrella'
Response to the Reform
Agenda of Alcohol and
Drugs Services in
Tasmania

Introduction

Carers Tasmania is the Peak Body for carers and works to improve the health, wellbeing, resilience and financial security of carers. Our mission is to ensure caring is a shared responsibility of family, community and government.

Carers Tasmania supports informal carers who are providing, or who have provided, unpaid care and support to family members or friends who are living with a disability, mental illness, chronic condition or terminal illness or who are frail aged. There are 85,508 known carers in Tasmania. This figure is based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers.

This figure is not inclusive of carers of people with an alcohol or other addiction, and Carers Tasmania suggests this carer group can potentially be lost in the system. It is time to bring them under the caring umbrella. Carers Tasmania has been informed by the Mental Health Alcohol and Drug Directorate that family carers haven't been included or deeply considered in the planning for the delivery of services in the past.

Carers Tasmania understands the Tasmanian Government has a strong commitment and willingness to support family carers. With the first Tasmanian Carer Policy Carer Policy introduced in 2013, it is understandable Government's understanding of depth and breadth of caring and articulating this in policy and systems is in its infancy. It is Carers Tasmania's role to assist Government in this work.

Background

Carers Tasmania's funding contracts for carers over the age of 18 don't specifically mention carers of people with an alcohol or other drug addiction. The lack of acknowledgement of carers in these contracts may again be indicative of the relative infancy of carer awareness. Carers Tasmania is aware that Government services are funded to provide counselling and therapy to family and carers of people with alcohol and other drug addictions in its every day work.

However, Carers Tasmania often provides support to family members or friends who are caring for people with a range of dual diagnoses, including mental health issues and alcohol or other drug addictions. Carers Tasmania's Carer Advisory and Referral Service, provided via a Freecall number and face to face, often provides information regarding Alcohol and Other Drug services, and recently held its first information session for carers with a range of service providers from the Alcohol and Other Drug sector sharing information about their services. Carers Tasmania's

counsellors may support informal family carers in relation to addiction, however there is no requirement in the funding contracts to report this back to Government.

It must be acknowledged that carers, often under immense strain as a result of their role, could also be clients of alcohol and other drug services.

Carers Tasmania's Young Carer Program is funded by the Commonwealth Government, and clearly includes under 25 who are caring for people with alcohol or other drug addiction. It is presumed this is due to the vulnerability and need to support children in these circumstances. Young Carers have their own set of needs and issues, including maintaining engagement with their education, which should also be considered in the Reform Agenda for Alcohol and other Drug Services.

Raise the profile of carers of people with an alcohol or other drug addiction

The definition of carer used in the Tasmanian Carer Policy 2016 does not include carers of people with alcohol or other drug addictions. The National Carer Recognition Act 2010 similarly omits this group. Carers Tasmania has discussed this with key stakeholders in the alcohol and other drug sector and they are surprised. Carers Tasmania sees this as a gap in the definition, as it effectively leaves Tasmanian Government services with no imperative to further develop their carer awareness, identification, inclusion and support in its policies, programs and services for this carer group.

Carers need to be mentioned specifically in the objectives of the Reform Agenda

Carers Tasmania is pleased to see carers mentioned in the objectives of the Reform Agenda. Some times in government policy, the word can be included with client or consumer, without significant depth regarding their needs or what is to be provided. The words family and carer being separated in language is also confusing, as it is most often a family member in the role of carer. It may be more helpful to use the phrase family and friend carer or informal carer.

Carers Tasmania would be interested to see what processes Alcohol and Other Drug Services have to routinely identify and offer family and friend carers support, including external referral to Carers Tasmania for specific carer supports. Concerns regarding privacy and communication have historically stood in the way of carer inclusive practice. Alcohol and Other Drug Services could utilise Mind Australia's Practical Guide to Working with Mental Health Services for carer inclusion practices, which could be developed parallel to the work occurring in Mental Health Services.

If carers were routinely identified, next steps are to ensure they are provided with relevant information, support and referral, and included as a key player in the care team as appropriate.

Carers Tasmania wishes to note that a better integrated service system is not only beneficial to the consumer but to family and friends who often provide significant support in the community and through the process of accessing and navigating services.

Principles

Carers Tasmania recommends the inclusion of a separate principle regarding carers to ensure their specific needs are met, consistent with the principles of the Tasmanian Carer Policy 2016. Relevant principles of the Carer Policy for consideration in the reform agenda include are:

- Their need to be acknowledged and treated as individuals with their own needs within and beyond their caring role
- They are to be provided with relevant information and referred to appropriate services to assist them in their caring role.
- They are to be respected as valued members of the care team
- The carer and the person receiving care are to be regarded as partnership in
- could include they are routinely identified and provided with relevant information, referred to appropriate service

Carers Tasmania is particularly interested in ensuring the Reform Agenda acknowledges the role of young carers and considers their needs, and is interested there is currently no mention of children of people with alcohol or other drug addictions, and the need for family sensitive practice.

Continuum of Care Model

It is important to acknowledge the significant role family and friend carers play in supporting people whilst in the community, their experiences of navigating service systems, and through their treatment. Whilst Carers Tasmania does not have any data regarding the number of carers of someone with an alcohol or other drug addiction, or the amount of care provided, it could be presumed it may be similar to that of mental health carers, who nationally save the Government \$13.2B per year through their provision of care.

Given the degree of significance of the care provided, it may be accurate and inclusive to include the role of family carers in this Continuum of Care Model.

Carers Tasmania is also interested in the possibility of the Reform Agenda exploring its practices regarding family carer inclusion in its Residential Rehabilitation Model. Carers Tasmania is aware there are times when family are not encouraged to visit, and is interested in the rationale around

this approach and the possible review for a more family inclusive approach, where the family is provided with information and support, along with inclusion in treatment and its decisions as appropriate.

Carers connected to Carers Tasmania who have participated in the Conversations with Carers Mental Health Carers Reference Group and the recent information session regarding services for people with alcohol and other drug addictions have continually told us there are major gaps in service provision with great consequence to them.

A number of carers have said their family members have been unwilling or unable to engage with detox or rehab services due to their complex needs, and as a consequence have been sent home. While the client might be sent to hospital, carers have said they are often sent home, and end up engaged in the judicial system. In situations such as this carers often continue to provide support, not only because they love the person or they feel obliged, but sometimes because there is simply no one else left to provide that support. Carers in these circumstances tell us they receive minimal support and are incredibly grateful when they are offered counselling, advice and information and they opportunity to meet with others in similar circumstances.

Based on this and other feedback from carers, Carers Tasmania suggests there may be a need for an increased focus on the needs of people experiencing the comorbidity of mental illness and alcohol and other drug addiction, with particular skills in assertive engagement. Carers Tasmania suggests it would also be helpful to have a number of hospital beds dedicated to this client group in the future.

A client/consumer centred approach across the service

Carers Tasmania is pleased to see the Reform Agenda address the need for a client/consumer centred approach across the service and the range of associated actions, and would like to see this extend to carers.

This could be developed alongside the Rethink Long term Plan for Mental Health's review of the Consumer and Carer Participation Framework 2006.

The idea of information, support and training to increase client/consumer understanding of the service system could also be offered to carers. Carers often articulate their needs are inextricably linked to the person they care for, but can also be quite different, so providing this separate to clients/consumers is recommended. Conversely it may be beneficial to provide staff with training in client/consumer –centred practice, and carer awareness and inclusivity.

Summary

Carers Tasmania believes the first step to raise the profile and therefore identification, inclusion and support of this group of carers is for the national and state definition of carer to incorporate carers of someone with an alcohol or other drug addiction. It would be helpful to have robust data collected on this cohort of carers to identify their prevalence, and further, research on their needs. However, some simple steps to develop an approach consistent with the Tasmanian Carer Policy 2016 may assist carers of this group to feel heard, included and supported.