

Federal Budget Leaves Mental Health Carers Out in the Cold!!

Response to the Budget from Mental Health Carers Arafmi Australia on behalf of Mental Health Families and Carers

May 11, 2011.

The allocation of \$1.5 billion for mental health reform and growth of services is a big step forward in the development of a mental health system which meets the needs of Australians – well, most Australians, but not all.

The big splash on mental health funding, while very generous in some areas, misses out in providing anything significant to carers and families of the mentally ill. It has done little to support families and carers, who are unpaid and usually ‘the invisible’ people supporting mental health sufferers.

In many cases these are the people who are the backbone of the mental health system because of the care and support provided in the community. Without supports from carers many treatment programs will just not work. Families and carers are often central to recovery of mental health patients.

There are few resources in the community to listen to mental health carers, to understand the difficulties and complexities they face, and to provide them with encouragement and hope for the future. They are ordinary mums, dads, brothers, sisters or sometimes kids still at school who have a second job or role, more important because they provide care, cook meals, pay bills, give reassurance and organise medical support when necessary.

The Federal Budget does offer some, but far too little for families with such programs as the Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMS) and respite services.

New respite services will give, over five years, just 1,100 extra mental health carers access to respite and support. Taking into account the growing population, in five years time, there will be proportionally less support than today.

What else can be provided for mental health carers and families? Here’s just a few ideas –

- Education about mental health and wellbeing
- Education about how the medical system works
- Understanding of mental illness and its impact on devastated lives
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