

Submission to the Models of Care Consortium Young Peoples' Mental Health

About Carers SA

Carers SA is the peak advocacy body for Carers in South Australia. Raising the voice of Carers, recognition of Carers, their rights, wellbeing and needs is at the heart of Carers SA's efforts. We persistently advocate across governments, health and social services and systems, business and communities to prioritise appropriate and meaningful support and services for Carers.

Carers SA aims to ensure that Carers needs, wishes, values and perspectives are elevated and able to inform and influence decision-making by government, service providers, policy makers, legislators and systems and services to improve the lives and wellbeing of Carers in South Australia.

Carers SA is both a peak body and a service provider for Carers through the Carer Gateway. This provides us with a unique opportunity to understand the needs of Carers and identify and implement ways to improve the services they use. It enables us to engage with many and diverse Carers across South Australia through our broad networks and through services and supports and in so doing, positions Carers SA to raise awareness of issues facing Carers and raise the voice of Carers to inform and influence policy and decision-making about things that impact them.

Our Advocacy aims to enable Carers to:

- have their voices heard on issues that are important to them
- defend and safeguard their rights
- be at the table as partners in decision-making that impacts them and the people they care for, and
- contribute to shared planning and problem solving to improve the lives of Carers.

As one of its priority groups, Carers SA advocates for and provides services and supports to Young Carers. Young Carers are people up to 25 years old, who provide unpaid care and support to family members or friends who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition, mental illness, an alcohol or other drug issue or who are frail aged.

Carers can be any age. Anyone can become a carer at any time.¹ Carers come from all sections of society, including young people and even children.

¹ [National Carer Strategy | Department of Social Services](#)

Young People who are Carers

Of the 3 million Carers across Australia, more than 391,300 are Young Carers in Australia under the age of 25².

This is likely an under-estimate due to limitations in data collection, social perceptions about what constitutes caregiving as well as a general lack of awareness about the contribution young people make to supporting and caring for family members. A young person may be the primary carer or share caring responsibilities with others. They may care for siblings, take on additional responsibilities in the home to support a primary carer or juggle a combination of these roles.

Young carers may not identify themselves as carers as they tend to see their caring roles as a normal part of family life.

Carers may not identify as carers for a range of reasons, including cultural obligation or real or perceived stigma attached to the role of caring or to the person they are caring for, or because they do not feel the word appropriately describes their relationship. This can mean that Young Carers may not be identified and slip through the gaps of schools, community, health and mental health services.

Impact of caring on Young Carers mental health

Taking on a caring role impacts a carer's own quality of life and freedom of choice. For some people, it may mean giving up other activities or responsibilities, including work or study opportunities, which can significantly impact the carer's life, physically, psychologically and financially. Caring responsibilities can impact an entire family, placing relationships under stress and creating unmet needs for other family members, such as siblings and partners.

For young carers the potential impact on long-term life opportunities requires additional focus. Some young carers are providing excessive levels of care, impacting their education, social participation, physical and mental wellbeing and experience higher levels of emotional stress, anxiety, depression and compassion fatigue.

There is considerable impact of caring on overall psychological wellbeing. Young carers also experience additional challenges. There is a need to ensure that they can achieve developmental milestones alongside their peers and are not overburdened with excessive care responsibilities for their age.

This creates unique challenges for them in relation to participation in education and training, developing and maintaining meaningful social relationships and workforce participation.

Caring responsibilities can contribute to social isolation for young people.

Evidence shows that poor mental health in youth increases the risk of adult depression, anxiety and suicidality, and predicts low educational attainment and unemployment.³ Young carers have poorer mental health than their non-caregiving peers. Young carers report more symptoms of anxiety and depression, lower amounts of self-esteem, poorer health-related quality of life, and more antisocial behaviours than their peers.⁴

² [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)

³ [National Carer Strategy | Department of Social Services](#)

⁴ [The mental and physical health of young carers: a systematic review - The Lancet Public Health](#)

In addition to these risks, many young carers are coping with health conditions and disability themselves. Young carers were also more likely to report having a chronic mental health condition than their peers and were more likely to sleep badly, be tired, have headaches, and have back pain or have an illness or disability than their peers. There is also some evidence to suggest that physical and mental health might be poorest for Young Carers providing intense care.⁵

Carers SA supports the Summary of consortium early advice

Carers SA supports the strategies outlined in the *Summary of consortium early advice* but recognises Young Carers may not be identified for a range of reasons and may not therefore access the youth mental health services they need.

Carers SA particularly identifies that ‘care navigators’ could play a significant role in linking and supporting Young Carers to access youth mental health services and supports. We would be interested in looking at where care navigation processes within the Carer Gateway could be strengthened to support Young Carers early referral and links to youth mental health services.

Establishing links between youth mental health services, Young Carer service providers and primary health systems that

- proactively identify Young Carers
- routinely assess and refer Young Carers to youth mental health
- provide targeted information and campaigns at raising awareness of who young carers are and
- encourage young people in caring roles to actively seek and link to youth mental health services

are important strategies in ensuring Young Carers mental health is a priority and Young Carers have access to the mental health services they need.

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Contact:

Allison Willis

Principal Advocacy and Policy Advisor allison.willis@carerssa.org.au

⁵ [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)