

18 February 2019

Productivity Commission  
GPO Box 1428  
Canberra City, ACT 2601

## A Better Way to Support Veterans Draft Report

Carers NSW welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *Better Way to Support Veterans Draft Report*. This submission addresses the critical role carers play in the support and rehabilitation of veterans as well as the importance of consulting carers regarding policy and service reforms for veterans and their families. It draws upon feedback from veteran carers provided to Carers NSW and our experience delivering services to carers, including carers of veterans.

Carers NSW is the peak non-government organisation for carers in New South Wales (NSW). A carer is any individual who provides care and support to a family member or friend who has a disability, mental illness, drug and/or alcohol dependency, chronic condition, terminal illness or who is frail. Our vision is an Australia that values and supports all carers, and our goals are to:

- Be a leading carer organisation in which carers have confidence
- Actively promote carer recognition and support
- Actively support carers to navigate a changing service landscape that will be characterised by ongoing policy reform
- Promote connected community experiences and opportunities for carers that are inclusive of diverse carer groups
- Lead and advocate for carer-specific and carer-inclusive policy making, research and service delivery
- Continue to be a quality-driven, responsive and carer-focused organisation.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, there are approximately 37,400 people with disability receiving a Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) entitlement card in NSW.<sup>1</sup> More than one in three receive assistance from a family member or friend.<sup>2</sup>

Research indicates that carers of veterans play a critical role in supporting their rehabilitation and reintegration following injuries sustained from service.<sup>3</sup> Due to the nature of combat, veterans are more likely to experience polytrauma – requiring intensive care and support. In addition to physical injuries, veterans commonly experience posttraumatic stress disorder which often causes significant changes in behaviour and personality, adding to the complexity of the caring role.

While the DVA recognises the role of families and dependents in supporting veterans, Carers NSW was disappointed to find limited direct references to carers in this draft report. Carers of veterans are often faced with unique challenges, including managing re-integration and navigating complex

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017) Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017)

<sup>3</sup> Eason, L., Wang, K., Moore, R., Wang, H. and Bauer, L. (2018), 'Operation family caregiver: Problem-solving training for military caregivers in a community setting', *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, vol. 74, no. 4, pp. 536-553; Griffin, J., Lee, M., Bangerter, L., Van Houtven, C, Friedemann-Sánchez, Phelan, S., Carlson, K. and Meis, L. (2017), 'Burden and Mental Health Among Caregivers of Veterans With Traumatic Brain Injury/Polytrauma', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, vol. 87, no. 2, pp. 139-148.

systems.<sup>4</sup> International research also shows that carers of veterans tend to have more prolonged caring roles due to the younger age at which veterans experience injuries or trauma.<sup>5</sup> As a result, carers of veterans commonly report anxiety, and depression, low self-esteem and chronic distress.<sup>6</sup> Research has also highlighted the incidence of secondary traumatic stress experienced by carers of people with PTSD.<sup>7</sup>

Research conducted in Australia and the United States has identified that carer inclusive veteran support can reduce rates of depression and anxiety among carers and increase the sustainability of their caring role. While the draft report identifies the need for services to have a stronger focus on veteran well-being, carers of veterans have not been included in this focus. Carer outcomes are particularly important given the DVA's obligations under the *Carer Recognition Act (2010)* to reflect the principles of the Statement for Australia's carers are reflected in the effective development, implementation and provision of services.

As carers of veterans are often accessing and navigating services with, or on behalf of, the person they care for, services and systems should be designed for both veteran and carer accessibility. Carers should be included in consultations to ensure that the design of the system is accessible for both the carer and the veteran being cared for, and identified carer positions to support carers of veterans in navigating the system and accessing support should be considered.

Thank you for accepting our submission. For further information regarding this submission, please contact Grace Cherrington, Policy Officer .

Yours sincerely

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<sup>4</sup> Easom et al (2018)

<sup>5</sup> Carlozzi, N., Brickell, T., French, L., Sander, A., Kratz, A., Tulsy, D., Chiaravalloti, N., Hahn, E., Kallen, M., Austin, A., Miner, J. and Lange, R. (2016), 'Caring for our wounded warriors: A qualitative examination of health-related quality of life in caregivers of individuals with military-related traumatic brain injury', *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development*, vol.53, no. 6, pp. 669-67; Easom et al. (2018)

<sup>6</sup> Waddell et al (2016)

<sup>7</sup> Bride, B. and Figley, C. (2009), 'Secondary Trauma and Military Veteran Caregivers', *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, vol. 79, no. 3-4, pp, 314-329; Waddell et al. (2016)