

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION, MENTAL HEALTH, INQUIRY REPORT CARERS VICTORIA ANALYSIS



On Monday 16 November the Australian Government made public the Final Report (the Report) from the Productivity Commission's (the Commission) Inquiry into Mental Health. The Prime Minister has stated that it will inform next year's Federal Budget.

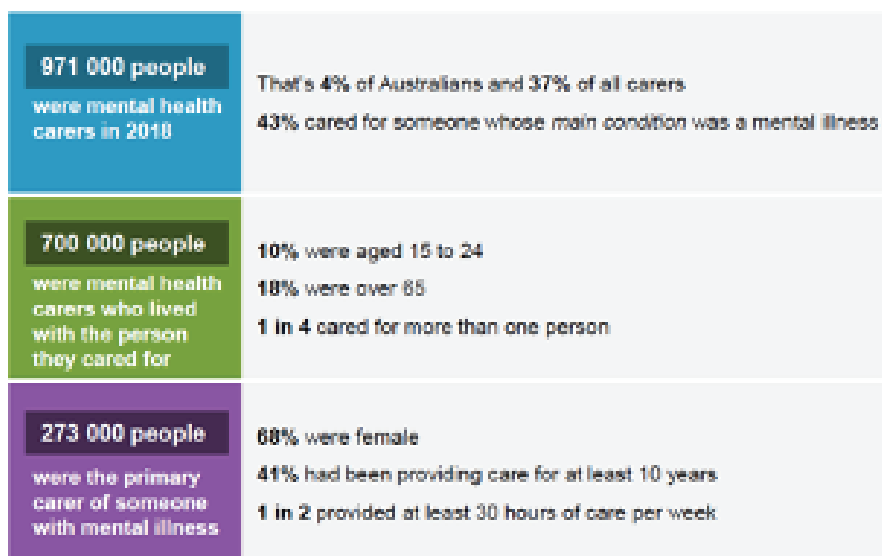
The full report and sections can be found [here](#). Chapter 18 is specifically about carers and families and Carers Victoria was encouraged to see the Commission reference our submission and other publications throughout.

The Commission has demonstrated that it recognises the enormous contributions made by carers across Australia as well as the many challenges carers experience. The Report contains many direct quotes from carers provided through submissions and contributions online. A key theme is the way that carers want to but are often prevented from contributing to the mental health treatment of people receiving care.

Family and carers often hold a lifetime of information about the consumer, which service providers frequently overlook in forming a diagnosis and care plan for the consumer.¹

The infographic below² provides an overview of mental health carers in Australia

Figure 18.1 Who are Australia's mental health carers?



Source: ABS (Microdata: Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia, 2018, Cat. no. 4430.0.30.002).

The Commission recognised the additional challenges that are often experienced by carers from a range of diverse backgrounds as well as young carers. Our submission was directly quoted:

Carers Victoria (sub. 664) stated that LGBTIQ carers can experience additional difficulties in the healthcare system if staff do not recognise or support their relationship.³

1 Productivity Commission 2020, *Mental Health*, p. 870.

2 Productivity Commission 2020, *Mental Health*, p. 873.

3 Productivity Commission 2020, *Mental Health*, pp. 875-76.

HEALTH

We were also particularly pleased to see the Commission acknowledge the impacts that being a carer can have on a carer's mental health and that the health needs of carers also need to be recognised.⁴

Regarding mental health treatment, the Commission states what is widely known but often not practiced: carers are to be recognised as partners in care.⁵ The Commission acknowledges the impacts where this doesn't happen and articulates the National Standards for Mental Health Services for how this can happen without breaching trust.⁶

Furthermore, the Commission states:

'The Australian Government should amend the Medicare Benefits Schedule to provide rebates for family and carer consultations'.⁷

INCOME SUPPORT PAYMENTS

The Commission heard from many that the assessment process for income support payments is weighted against mental health carers. It recommends a review of eligibility requirements as well as a review of the Adult Disability Assessment Tool (ADAT).⁸

The Commission addressed the 25 hour rule:

'Carers Victoria (sub. 664) has long advocated for the removal of the 25 hour rule.'⁹

as well as:

'The 25 hour rule should not continue in its current form. The costs of preventing a mental health carer willing and able to invest in their education are difficult to justify. Similarly, volunteering can be an important stepping stone to employment. Maintaining a restriction on work hours only may assist with managing risks to the integrity of Carer Payment. However, there is need to allow more flexibility for people providing episodic care. A change to the time period over which work is assessed would achieve this — that is, a change from 25 hours per week to 100 hours per month.'¹⁰

4 Productivity Commission 2020, *Mental Health*, p. 884.

5 Productivity Commission 2020, *Mental Health*, p. 886.

6 Productivity Commission 2020, *Mental Health*, pp. 887-88.

7 Productivity Commission 2020, *Mental Health, Report no. 95, Canberra*, p. 868.

8 Productivity Commission 2020, *Mental Health*, p. 922.

9 Productivity Commission 2020, *Mental Health*, p. 919.

10 Productivity Commission 2020, *Mental Health*, p. 920.