



**Submission to the  
WA Mental Health Commission**

**Youth Psychosocial Support Packages Model of Service**

**April 2022**

## About Carers WA

Carers WA is the peak body representing the needs and interests of carers in Western Australia and is part of a national network of Carers Associations. Carers provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who are living with disability, facing mental health challenges, long term health conditions (including a chronic condition or terminal illness), have an alcohol or drug dependency, or who are frail aged. The person they care for may be a parent, partner, sibling, child, relative, friend or neighbour.

Caring is a significant form of unpaid work in the community and is integral to the maintenance of our aged, disability, health, mental health, and palliative care systems.

Some important facts about carers include:

- There are currently 2.65 million unpaid carers in Australia.
- There are more than 230,000 families and friends in a caring role in Western Australia, or approximately 1 in 9 in the community.
- The replacement value of unpaid care, according to a report undertaken by Deloitte, Access Economics, “The economic value of unpaid care in Australia in 2020” is estimated at \$77.9 billion per annum.

## Enquiries

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## 1.0 Introduction

Carers WA appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the Youth Psychosocial Support Packages Model of Service, prepared by the WA Mental Health Commission. Comments are based on ongoing feedback from carers relevant to the context and content of the draft document.

## 2.0 General Feedback

### 2.1 Carer Identification and Recognition

Carers WA would like to commend the Mental Health Commission (MHC) for the development of the Youth Psychological Support Packages Model of Service (the Service) and for working to fill identified gaps in mental health supports for young people in WA.

The Association is pleased that consideration has been given to the carers of the young people anticipated to be accessing the Service, inclusive of a definition of the term 'carer' and potential provision of support to the carer where applicable.

However, the present positioning of the definition of carer and other defined terms means they are quite easy to overlook. To ensure a common understanding of these terms, Carers WA recommends the definitions be compiled into a glossary at the beginning of the document.

Carers WA also recommends the definition of 'carer' within the draft document be revised as below to also reflect the diversity of carers and care relationships, including that of Young Carers. This is supported by the definition of 'carer' within the Carers Recognition Act 2004 being recognised in the *Review of the Carers Recognition Act 2004: Report to Parliament* ([here](#)), as not describing the diversity of carers and care relationships, with Recommendation 4 of this report aiming to increase awareness of the diversity of carers and caring roles.

*'The definition of a 'carer' is a person who provides unpaid, informal and ongoing care and assistance to a person with disability, a chronic illness (which includes mental illness), or who is frail. The care they provide is not given under any formal paid work or volunteer arrangement. A carer may be caring for more than one person, be a young person or child (young carer), a family member, friend or neighbour, or other acquaintance of the person receiving care.'*

#### **Carer Diversity – Young Carers**

The inclusion of information on this carer diversity is important as due to the nature of the Service, Young Carers (carers under the age of 25) fall squarely within the target cohort of young people aged 16 to 24 years. The additional responsibilities and risk of overburdening associated with their caring role also mean Young Carers are more susceptible to mental health challenges. In addition, in 2016 the Australian Child Wellbeing Project named Young Carers as one of the four most at-risk groups of young people in Australia (Redmond and Skattebol et al, 2016).

Further, this information also assists with awareness that there are some types of caring relationships where the young person or child (Young Carer) is the primary carer, and the adult (or young person aged 16-24 years in this case) is the care recipient. Awareness of this in these cases can also assist in avoiding potential disadvantages to the Young Carer in situations where they may strive for independence, commencing employment or education, etc. These may include the potential impact on any government benefits being claimed by the adult member of the household.

Due to these factors, Carers WA further recommends the term 'young carer' be included in the recommended glossary as an additional and separate definition, as per the below, as well as inclusion of consideration of and provisions for young carers within the draft document.

*'The definition of a 'young carer' means a young person or child aged 25 years and under, who provides unpaid, informal and ongoing care and assistance to a person with disability, a chronic illness (which includes mental illness), or who is frail. This includes a caring relationship in which the child is the primary carer and the adult is the care recipient.'*

## **2.2 Funding & Resourcing**

While recognising that the Service is specified as not providing emergency or crisis services, Carers WA is concerned it will run the risk of doing so if not adequately funded and resourced.

Amidst high demand for mental health services (AIHW, 2022), coupled with staffing concerns in many sectors and existing high demand being experienced by many service providers, this risk becomes more prevalent. Young people needing emergency or crisis services could potentially turn to the Service should they be experiencing delays or waitlists with other providers, which could in theory be feasible given the stated decision criteria on page 4 for *'the intake process should ensure that young people with the highest needs for this service are able to access it'*.

This brings into focus a larger issue with ensuring the health and community services sectors have enough staff to meet demand, with the funding required to appropriately attract and compensate this workforce.

While recognising that some steps have already been taken towards addressing this issue, Carers WA recommends further investigation into where skills shortages are being experienced in the WA health and community services sectors and mechanisms which could be deployed to relieve these shortages. E.g. By placement of identified occupations on the Priority Migration Skilled Occupation List; increased accessibility and/or affordability of training courses; etc.

## 2.3 Other Feedback

### Scope of Service

While recognizing that the development of a dedicated youth stream is in progress, Carers WA is concerned that in the meantime young people and children aged under the specified 16 to 24 years of the Service, will continue to fall through the cracks in relation to services and supports for mental health and persons with AOD issues. Further clarification is recommended on mental health supports and strategies for these out-of-scope ages within the draft document, as well as anticipated timings for delivery of the dedicated youth stream, and whether the Service is intended to be an interim measure while the dedicated youth stream developed. Carers WA would also recommend the Service be expanded to include ages 12 – 24 years.

### Service Monitoring and Governance

Carers WA recommends the Service, staff and providers be also required to comply with The National Principles of Child Safe Organisations ([here](#)), in addition to compliance with The Child Safe Standards.

### Staffing

Carers WA recommends that the draft document require staff to comply with the MHC's Suicide Prevention Framework 2021-25 ([here](#)), in addition to having appropriate knowledge and experience in suicide prevention.

### Providers

Carers WA recommends the panel which is to be convened by an independent contractor, also be required to include a young carer or carer with lived experience of being a young carer.

## Summary of Recommendations

- Definitions be compiled into a glossary at the beginning of the document.
- The definition of 'carer' within the draft document be revised as below to also reflect the diversity of carers and care relationships, including that of Young Carers.
- The term 'young carer' be included in the recommended glossary as an additional and separate definition, as well as inclusion of consideration of and provisions for young carers within the draft document.
- Further investigation into where skills shortages are being experienced in the WA health and community services sectors and mechanisms which could be deployed to relieve these shortages.
- Further clarification is recommended on mental health supports and strategies for these out-of-scope ages within the draft document, as well as anticipated timings for delivery of the dedicated youth stream, and whether the Service is intended to be an interim measure while the dedicated youth stream developed.
- Scope of the Service be expanded to include ages 12 – 24 years.
- The Service, staff and providers be also required to comply with The National Principles of Child Safe Organisations ([here](#)), in addition to compliance with The Child Safe Standards.
- The draft document require staff to comply with the MHC's Suicide Prevention Framework 2021-25 ([here](#)), in addition to having appropriate knowledge and experience in suicide prevention.
- The panel which is to be convened by an independent contractor, also be required to include a young carer or carer with lived experience of being a young carer.

## Conclusion

Should the WA Mental Health Commission require any further information regarding the comments included within this submission, or assistance from the perspective of WA carers, Carers WA would be delighted to assist. Please contact Carissa Gautam from Carers WA at [policy@carerswa.asn.au](mailto:policy@carerswa.asn.au).