



**Carers Queensland Inc.**

**Submission to the  
Commonwealth Department of Health –  
Review of Medicare Locals**

**December 2013**

**Submission Title:** Submission to the Commonwealth Department of Health  
Medicare Local Review

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**Author:** Sarah Walbank, Policy and Research Officer

**Approved by:** Debra Cottrell, Chief Executive Officer  
Carers Queensland Inc.  
15 Abbott Street  
Camp Hill  
Queensland 4152  
Phone: (07) 3900 8100  
Website: [www.carersqld.asn.au](http://www.carersqld.asn.au)  
ABN: 20 061 257 725  
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## **CARERS QUEENSLAND INC.**

Family carers provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who have a disability, mental illness, chronic medical condition, terminal illness or are frail aged.

The activity and impact of providing care is best understood in terms of its context; as a relationship between two or more individuals, rooted in family, friendship or community. Caring is a role rarely chosen by most, nor does it discriminate. Children and young people, people of working age and older people, people with a disability, people who identify as culturally and linguistically diverse, indigenous Australians and those living in rural and remote Queensland provide care to a family member or friends on a daily basis. For some caring is a short term commitment whilst for others it is a role that literally lasts a lifetime.

Carers Queensland Inc. is the peak body representing the diverse concerns, needs and interests of carers in Queensland. Carers Queensland believes that all carers regardless of their age, disability, gender identification, sexuality, religion, socioeconomic status, geographical location or their cultural and linguistic differences should have the same rights, choices and opportunities and be able to enjoy optimum health, social and economic wellbeing and participate in family and community life, employment and education like other citizens of the State. Carers Queensland's mission is to improve the quality of life of all carers throughout Queensland.

We believe we are in a unique position to advocate on behalf of, the 484,400<sup>1</sup> carers living in Queensland. We aspire to provide an independent platform from which to advance the issues and concerns of carers and believe our knowledge and expertise in carer issues means that we are able to provide the Government with relevant and trusted information that will ensure that the needs of carers will be recognised, respected and acted upon. Our ambition is to ensure that carers are recognised and included as active partners in the development of government health and social policy, legislation and service delivery practices.

This submission reflects the concerns of Queensland's carers, those citizens who provide unpaid care and support to, and advocate on behalf of, vulnerable family members and friends. This submission has been informed by consultation with Queensland's carers and Australian and international research.

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## **REFERENCES**

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2012). *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2012: Summary of findings*. No. 4430.0. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.  
Carers Queensland's submission – Review of Medicare Locals 2013

## **OVERVIEW**

One in nine or 484,400 citizens of Queensland identify as a carer providing care and support to another person who has a disability, mental illness, chronic medical condition, terminal illness or is frail aged. This is considered to be a conservative figure as many individuals, and in particular children and young adults, will see their caring role as a familial obligation and therefore not necessarily identify as a carer<sup>2</sup>.

Carers are central to the care and support of people with a disability and the frail aged and are the major providers of care in the community. The role of the carer is not always well understood by others and may encompass tasks such as personal and incontinence care, meal preparation and cleaning, financial management, medication supervision, emotional and social support and a myriad of other daily tasks.

## **THE GP PRACTICE OR HEALTH CENTRE**

For many carers and the person or people they care for and support, the GP practice or health centre is pivotal to their information needs and ongoing support. Surveys conducted by Carers Queensland indicate that the majority (68%) of carers consider the doctor's surgery or health centre to be the primary source of information across a broad range of needs.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly true in rural and remote Queensland where there is a dearth of service providers or specialist support agencies.

## **RELATIONSHIP WITH MEDICARE LOCALS**

Carers have frequently spoken about the insidious frustration, anxiety and disempowerment that occurs with the time it can take (sometimes years) to locate and secure support. Assuming that prevention is better than cure – our approach has been to facilitate a preventative approach to support rather than a crisis avoidance or crisis management approach. Often the first point of contact is, as one carer wrote; 'in the hands of overworked medical professionals'.

Recognising the opportunities provided with the introduction of the Medicare Local structure Carers Queensland has actively fostered and now enjoys a positive and growing relationship with each of the Queensland Medicare Locals. Acknowledging the pivotal role of the GP and the health centre for carers, particularly those new to their caring role, Carers Queensland has been working with Medicare Locals to increase awareness of the concerns and issues of carers; supporting GPs and practice staff to recognise and appreciate the carer role and all that it encumbers; and either provide appropriate health care support or guided referral to other specialist support services.

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<sup>2</sup> *Refugee and Migrant Young People with Caring Responsibilities: What do we know?* Victoria: Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, the Centre for Multicultural Youth, Carers Victoria.

<sup>3</sup> Carers Queensland Inc. (2013). Carer Consultation Survey, March. Unpublished data.

Responding to the local demographics and the current and emergent needs of the local populations Medicare Locals have sought the assistance of Carers Queensland in a plethora of activities including but not limited to:

- area health and service planning
- future planning to effectively respond to the ageing demographic
- carer issues and concerns in the primary and acute care interface
- the development of 'carer hospital admission and discharge' flow charts to assist health practitioners in organising and delivering effective pre and post admission care
- compiling a regional Carer Health Report detailing those issues and concerns of local carers (including the marginalised carer groups) that impact on their relationship with health practitioners; facilitating more effective relationships to improve access the health system and community based supports for carers
- the coordination of, and information sharing with, the community care sector on whom the vast majority of carers are reliant on at some point in their caring journey.

## **SUMMARY**

Carers Queensland believes that the Medicare Locals in Queensland have responded proactively to the challenge of meeting the primary health care needs of the diverse and dispersed population in the state, particularly carers and the people they care for and support. Research, both our own and from the United Kingdom, indicates that it can, and does, take considerable time to develop knowledge and expertise in such a challenging role.

While the rationale for, and potential benefits of, a reorganisation of Medicare Locals and their commissioning functions is the subject of significant discussion, one thing remains a certainty; any new commissioning body will face many of the same challenges and pressures experienced by the Medicare Locals. If Medicare Locals are to be given the greatest chance of success, it is important to reflect upon and shape learnings from their successes and failures in order not to replicate the past.