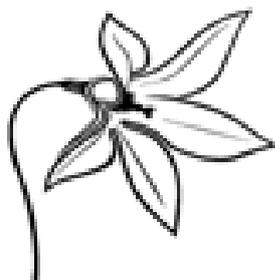


Submission to:

Strategic Policy, Department of Disability,
Housing and Community Services

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**Submission to
ACT Carers Charter
Discussion Paper and Proposed
Charter**

**Women With Disabilities ACT
(WWDACT)**

<http://wwdct09.blogspot.com>

January 2011

Women With Disabilities ACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and we pay our respects to the Elders, families and ancestors. We acknowledge that the effect of forced removal of Indigenous children from their families as well as past racist policies and actions continues today.

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Introduction

Women With Disabilities ACT (WWDACT) is an organisation for women with all types of disabilities in the Australian Capital Territory. WWDACT is an affiliate of the national peak organisation Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) and is similarly run by women with disabilities, for women with disabilities. WWDACT draws strongly upon the work and writings of WWDA and aligns its goals and strategic direction with theirs. WWDACT represents the 25,500 women and girls with disabilities in the ACT¹ and is committed to promoting and advancing the human rights and fundamental freedoms of ACT women with disabilities.

WWDACT works from a rights based framework that links gender and disability issues to a full range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. This rights based approach recognises that equal treatment, equal opportunity, and non-discrimination provide inclusive opportunities for women and girls with disabilities in society. It also seeks to create greater awareness among governments and other relevant institutions of their obligations to fulfill, respect, protect and promote human rights and to support and empower women with disabilities, both individually and collectively, to claim their rights.

WWDACT's Response to the ACT Carers Charter

WWDACT welcomes the move by the ACT Government to formally recognise the significant and diverse role that carers play within the ACT community through the ACT Carers Charter. Carers provide vital care and support for those in the community who are in need. WWDACT believes that every carer is a valued participant in the inclusive ACT community that we are all trying to build. WWDACT sees the potential benefits—both through legal recognition and community awareness—that the creation of this Charter presents.

WWDACT welcomes the opportunity to comment on the discussion paper about the proposed Carers Charter, because of the gendered nature of caring and the number of people with disabilities who receive care or may be carers themselves.

Thirteen percent (2.6 million) of all Australians are carers and over half of these - 54 percent - are women.² And in the ACT of the 25,900 carers 15,600 were women.³ In addition many of these carers provide care to a friend or family member who is disabled.

Carers are very diverse and have a variety of different experiences and circumstances and include individuals who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI), young, old and some who may have a disability themselves.

¹ ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2003.

² <http://www.qvwc.org.au/info-hub/women-and-disabilities-new>

Information from this website is reputable and reliable. The information provided has been reviewed by women and disabilities experts.

³ ABS – A profile of Carers in Australia 2008

In 2006, over one-third (35%) of all carers reported that they themselves had a disability and over three-fifths (61%) of older carers (aged 65 years and over) said that they had a disability, and one-fifth of younger carers (aged 15–34 years) had a disability.⁴

WWDACT supports and endorses the ACT Government's acknowledgment of the need to engage all partners in a caring pathway—carers, people receiving care, and carer support services—in such a way that ensures that:

- The Charter responds appropriately to the diverse needs of Carers in the ACT.
- The Charter has the projected outcome of resulting in improving the lives of Carers and their families.

1. Defining of Carers

WWDACT supports the proposed definition of a carer as “a person who provides unpaid primary care to someone else who is dependent on the person for ongoing care and assistance”.

Overall, WWDACT also endorses the recognition of the need for a diversity of carers within the proposed Carers Charter. In the proposed Charter, the needs of Carers from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds (#4), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) background (#5), Young Carers/Young Adult Carers (#6) and older Carers (#7) are specifically articulated.

However, WWDACT believes that the Charter does not adequately reflect or address the needs of all carers, particularly the female carers who themselves have disabilities and may require different care and support.

WWDACT urges that the Charter reflect the gendered nature of the caring role, and recognise that women carers with disabilities are likely to be in the lowest income percentile, to have limited financial buffers to cope with emergency situations, and to have higher health costs and disability related costs than non-disabled women carers. These financial considerations will affect their ability to provide the same level of care, and therefore, targeted programs committed to under the National Disability Agreement must sufficiently assist carers with disabilities

Like all other marginalised groups within society, women with disabilities represent a significant number of individuals who partake in the humanities sector of the labour market; and like the other marginalised groups, women with disabilities need to be recognised and acknowledged for the contributions they make within the caring role.

The ACT Caring for Carers Policy already recognises that “carers may have a disability and may require assistance themselves”. It is also essential that the Carers Charter recognises the need for access by carers with a disability to appropriate support or care themselves especially

⁴ ABS - A profile of Carers in Australia 2008

where paid support workers may need to give assistance to a primary carer with disabilities in their caring role. Support workers must not be restricted in their ability to assist the primary carer in their caring role.

Recommendation: Just as the current proposed Charter includes older carers, young carers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Carers, and carers who require cultural, linguistic or religious preferences, WWDACT recommends that the Charter be widened to also include and recognise women as well as people/women with disabilities who are carers in their own right.

The Charter should state that: “Carers with disabilities must have access to supports that recognise their individual needs”. Without this wording incorporated into the Charter, it is still too common that the needs of women with disabilities remain unacknowledged and overlooked.

2. Right to choice

Carers have increasingly been required to manage quite complex health and care needs of people with disability, mental illness, terminal illness and medical conditions. Current approaches rely on the willingness of people to provide care, and forget that carers are individuals and have their own needs and interests beyond the role of carer.

In the proposed Charter, it must also be stated that Carers have a right to choices and to choose the degree to which they become involved in the caring role.⁵ The South Australian Carers Charter for example states as its first principle that “Carers have choices within their caring roles.”

Recommendation: WWDACT urges the inclusion of choice in the caring role as one of the principles.

3. Accessibility of the Charter

The ACT Carers Charter states that it is essential that the Charter is accessible to carers, and has a role in preventing their need to navigate existing legislation “in order to determine how carers should expect to be treated by ACT Government and Government funded organisations”. A corollary of this is that the Charter also needs to be accessible to those being supported by the carers, so that they too understand the rights of primary carers.

Recommendation: WWDACT urges that a version of the Charter be provided in simple English with icons as well as in other accessible formats, including formats which are accessible to screen readers [for example JAWS] production of large print copies and transcription into audio formatting, so that the Charter is accessible to all people with disabilities.

⁵ South Australian Carers Charter.

Conclusion

Women with disabilities who take part in the caring profession are more often susceptible to remain unacknowledged and unappreciated for their contributions; therefore we need to ensure that the ACT Carers Charter does not create this unintended outcome. While WWDACT welcomes and endorses this much required—and long overdue—move, we feel that a more inclusive Charter recognising the specific needs of women with disabilities in the ACT is desirable.

To conclude, WWDACT feels that if the Charter's content is changed to highlight the gendered nature of caring and to recognise the support needs because of the social disadvantage that may be experienced by women/people with disabilities who are carers within the ACT, then it will be a more holistic Charter.

WWDACT looks forward to participating further in the consultation process, and the development of the ACT Carers Charter and other supporting policies and programs.