



## **Carers Victoria's Response to the Office of the Disability Commissioner's Occasional Paper No. 2**

Families and service providers working together: Developing policy principles  
and strategies to support families of adults with a disability and disability service  
providers to work more effectively together

**Carers Victoria**

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### **About Carers Victoria**

Carers Victoria is the state-wide peak organisation representing those who provide care. We represent more than 700,000 family carers across Victoria – people caring for a person with a disability, mental illness, chronic health issue or someone with an age-related condition. The people being cared for could be a parent, child, spouse, grandparent or a friend.

Carers Victoria is a member of the National Network of Carers Associations, as well as the Victorian Carer Services Network. Carers Victoria is a non-profit association which relies on public and private sector support to fulfil its mission with and on behalf of carers.

Carers Victoria is a membership-based organisation. Our members primarily consist of family carers, who play an important role in informing our work, contributing to advocacy and strategic aims, and distributing information more widely to other carers.

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## Introduction

Carers Victoria congratulates the Office of the Disability Services Commissioner (ODSC) on the production of its Occasional Paper No. 2, *'Families and service providers working together'*.

In collaboration with stakeholders and experts in the field, the ODSC has developed a significant resource document. It highlights a clear way forward for engaging caring families in effective partnerships with disability service providers for the benefit of people with a disability. The resource represents a welcome and constructive step in addressing dilemmas and some source of conflict in the service sector.

As well as being strong on substance, the paper is written in accessible and engaging style, which befits the material under discussion. Within this context, Carers Victoria makes the following comments, which it hopes will add some small measure of value to this important paper.

## Comments from Carers Victoria

### 1. Refinement of Policy Principle 3

Carers Victoria believes a refinement to Policy Principle 3 might be more affirming of families, more aligned with the wording of the Victorian *Carers Recognition Act 2012*<sup>1</sup> and more consistent with the logic of the other principles in the ODSC document (in terms of stating the general principle in the heading and placing any qualifications or definitional attributes in the body of the wording).

We recommend refining the existing Principle 3 from:

***'Family' means different things to different people.***  
*Family relationships are diverse, unique and almost always the most enduring relationships in a person's life. These relationships should be respected and valued.*

To:

***Family relationships should be respected and valued.***  
*Family relationships are almost always the most foundational relationships in a person's life. Family relationships are diverse, unique and the term 'family' can mean different things to different people.*

Furthermore, if the Policy Principles in the Occasional Paper are documented in some form of hierarchical order, Carers Victoria raises the question as to whether this Principle 3 might be more appropriately cited as Principle 2.

### 2. Education and training on the Victorian *Carers Recognition Act 2012*

It is recommended that the ODSC paper include within its proposed strategies specific education and training on 'Care Relationship Principles' and the 'Obligations of Care

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<sup>1</sup> Victorian Parliament, *Carers Recognition Act 2012*  
[http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web\\_Notes/LDMS/PubStatbook.nsf/51dea49770555ea6ca256da4001b90cd/023a825c23e20790ca2579c7000fb0bb/\\$FILE/12-010abookmarked.pdf](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/PubStatbook.nsf/51dea49770555ea6ca256da4001b90cd/023a825c23e20790ca2579c7000fb0bb/$FILE/12-010abookmarked.pdf).

Support Organisations' enacted in the *Carers Recognition Act 2012*.<sup>2</sup> This education and training would be delivered to service managers, staff, contractors, service users and families/carers.

### **3. A note on an effective mechanism for formal family/carer feedback**

Carers Victoria strongly supports the ODSC paper's contention that the collection and analysis of formal family feedback is critical to promoting better partnerships and continuous service improvement in family/carer engagement.

Carers Victoria suggests consideration of the development of a generic, methodologically valid and reliable family/carer experience feedback measure for disability services by either the ODSC or the Department of Human Services.

This type of data collection tool could measure the family/carer experience of those service processes critical to quality partnership (e.g. information provision, family participation in the planning, delivery and review of service supports, and the management of complaints). Any data gathered on the tool could facilitate self-monitoring and service improvement at the site level and centrally aggregated data, possibly de-identified, could be used as an overall measure of the 'Working Together' initiative over time.

### **4. Implementation questions**

#### **Resourcing for effective implementation**

In detailing high-level principles, strategies and tasks for family engagement and participation in disability service provision, the ODSC document strongly resembles both a service standards statement and a quality improvement plan for use by the disability service sector. Carers Victoria believes that the ODSC paper provides a map, almost a blueprint, for service improvement in carer-responsive service provision.

The Victorian Quality Council<sup>3</sup> forcefully warns, however, 'It is not enough to provide the tools and strategies with which to improve ... (the) quality of health care and expect success.' And again, the 'implementation of improvement projects and sustaining the resulting change can be a difficult process.'

Carers Victoria believes that the ODSC paper foreshadows and entails a range of implementation tasks, including:

- targeted education and training on a range of matters for agency management, staff, contractors, service users and families
- policy and procedure audit, review, redevelopment and training
- internal quality coordination to plan, introduce and monitor a range of improvement initiatives
- quality tool application and data evaluation, and
- ongoing communication strategy to keep all stakeholders informed and engaged.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Victorian Quality Council, *Successfully Implementing Change* February 2006  
[http://www.health.vic.gov.au/qualitycouncil/downloads/successfully\\_implementing\\_change.pdf](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/qualitycouncil/downloads/successfully_implementing_change.pdf).

Agencies, and their individual services/sites on the ground, will need the resourcing of expert consultancy services to inform and support these abovementioned tasks so as to translate the strategies in the ODSC paper into living practice.

### **Assuring implementation**

In addition to the question of resourcing implementation, the paper also invites questions of external evaluation and compliance.

Carers Victoria believes the proposed strategies and standards identified in the ODSC paper *actually need to be met*. In relation to assuring implementation, consideration should be made as to how progress will be monitored. Carers Victoria recommends that monitoring is independent, regular and across the range of service processes identified in the ODSC resource. Corrective supports may also be needed.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on this valuable ODSC document. Carers Victoria looks forward to contributing to the implementation of the innovative “Working Together” initiative.

### **References**

Victorian Parliament, *Carers Recognition Act 2012*

[http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web\\_Notes/LDMS/PubStatbook.nsf/51dea49770555ea6ca256da4001b90cd/023a825c23e20790ca2579c7000fb0bb/\\$FILE/12-010abookmarked.pdf](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/PubStatbook.nsf/51dea49770555ea6ca256da4001b90cd/023a825c23e20790ca2579c7000fb0bb/$FILE/12-010abookmarked.pdf).

Victorian Quality Council, *Successfully Implementing Change* February 2006

[http://www.health.vic.gov.au/qualitycouncil/downloads/successfully\\_implementing\\_change.pdf](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/qualitycouncil/downloads/successfully_implementing_change.pdf).