

Claire Thorn
A/Director, Youth and Disability
Department of Health and Human Services

Dear Claire

Thank you for extending an invitation to Carers Victoria to participate in the sector reference group for the new youth policy, and for the opportunity to comment on the discussion paper *What's Important to YOUth?*

According to the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Ageing, Disability and Carers (SDAC) in 2012, there are 81,400 young carers in Victoria, meaning around four percent of Victorians aged under 25 years have caring responsibilities. Young carers provide care for a family member or friend who has a disability, chronic illness, who is aged, affected by mental illness or who has a drug or alcohol dependency. This figure is likely to be an underestimate as not all carers identify themselves as a carer and therefore do not access services that are available to them. In addition, service professionals may not be aware of an individual's caring role and therefore do not identify the need for help and assistance. Carers Victoria has a range of initiatives underway to assist with carer identification and referral to Carers Victoria, so that we can be 'the place to go' for all carers.

Caring can be a rewarding experience and improve family wellbeing. Young carers have described how their caring role can lead to close relationships and a range of other benefits. However, caring can bring the potential for significant and long lasting negative social, physical, emotional and financial effects for young carers and their families.

The discussion paper (page 10) outlines a range of issues that are facing Victorian young people. All of these issues are pertinent to young carers. In particular young carers can experience marginalisation and discrimination because of their caring role, and are less likely than non-carers of the same age to be in employment and education.

Carers Victoria supports young carers by providing information, support and respite, as well as raising awareness of young carers within the community. This important work means that young carers can connect with other young carers, as well as getting the breaks they need to continue in their caring role.

However, more can be done by government to ensure that young carers do not miss out on life opportunities or have reduced choices because they are not well supported. As outlined in the discussion paper (page 14) ensuring universal services and programs are responsive to young people can improve outcomes. For young carers, removing barriers through means such as better targeting or increasing the flexibility of services could mean young carers access and receive the services they need in a way that understands and supports their caring role.

The issues facing young carers are broad and will require a well-coordinated whole of government response to improve outcomes. Carers Victoria would encourage the Government's new youth policy to emphasise the challenges faced by Victorian young carers, and take the opportunity to ensure young carers are supported to meet their potential. This could be accomplished by including young carers as one of the groups facing challenges (as identified on page 12 of the discussion paper), and including specific government action items that will be undertaken to address the unique needs of young carers in the resulting implementation plan.

Finally, in our 2015-16 pre-budget submission to the Victorian Government we called for the development a whole-of-government state-wide Victorian Carer Strategy. While this proposal was not adopted in the 2015-16 budget, we believe it is a way for the Government to set the direction for policy actions to ensure all carers are respected, valued and supported, while having the same rights, choices and opportunities as other members of the community. Therefore, the development of a whole-of-government Victoria Carer Strategy could form part of the Government's response to the issues raised in this letter.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to be involved in the development of the Government's new youth policy. Carers Victoria staff are available to meet with you and your staff to discuss this response if required.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caroline Mulcahy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C' and a long, sweeping underline.

Caroline Mulcahy
Chief Executive Officer
Carers Victoria
6 November 2015