

# Preventative Health and Mental Health Carers

June 2017

When a person is unwell, family and friends generally provide the majority of routine day to day emotional and practical support. This is generally called “*caring*” and in the mental health sector, we refer to people who provide this level of support “*carers*”.

Carers do a lot for those they love who have mental health issues. Amongst a myriad of support, they:

- *Help to manage the illness including Identifying symptoms and working out symptom management strategies*
- *Facilitate access to treatment*
- *Providing practical or functional assistance*
- *Taking on increased household or financial responsibilities such as housework, childcare, and paying bills*
- *Provide ongoing emotional support including being available to listen, organise mutually enjoyable activities and making sure the person know that they are loved.*

Importantly, carers help prevent further severe consequences of mental health issues for those they love. They are in a unique position to contribute to a person’s recovery, knowing intimately what helps their loved one, recognising the beginnings of a bad period and providing the practical supports they know will assist the person’s needs to lead the best life that they can. Families and carers support people to live well in the community and therefore enhance the effectiveness of service delivery. This helps to decrease the risk of episodes of acute illness or avoid them altogether and therefore the need for hospital admissions.

It is vital that the role of families and carers in *relapse prevention* be recognised and that the concerns of families and carers are heard, ensuring they also get the support that they need. Family support is essential to preventing relapse and the needs of families, and especially of the children of people with mental illness, must be acknowledged and services put in place to enhance their ability to support consumers while protecting their own wellbeing. Initiatives to include families and carers in treatment and relapse planning are essential. Support and training, for example in recognition of early warning signs, is also important for families and carers. Mental health services must become more responsive to the needs and concerns of families and carers as they often are the first to realise when early intervention needs to take place.

“The needs of mental health carers must become an essential, specified part of formal planning for mental health services. Failing to do so means we overlook or fail to address carers’ needs. This in turn leads to poorer mental health and wellbeing for families and carers, which has an adverse impact on the supports available to consumers to live well in their community. An effective system of mental health care must value the myriad of ways families and carers contribute to the recovery of consumers – and it must also care for carers.”

*(NSW Mental Health Commission (2014) Living Well: A Strategic Plan for Mental Health in NSW 2014 – 2024, Sydney, NSW Mental Health Commission., p. 45.*

[https://nswmentalhealthcommission.com.au/sites/default/files/141002%20Living%20Well%20-%20A%20Strategic%20Plan%20\(1\).pdf](https://nswmentalhealthcommission.com.au/sites/default/files/141002%20Living%20Well%20-%20A%20Strategic%20Plan%20(1).pdf)

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## Our Vision:

**Carers of people affected by mental ill health are understood, respected, valued and supported to build their capacities and improve their quality of life.**

