



Your trusted voice in mental health

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Paper Five: 'The Language of Caring'

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Our position on the language of caring is informed by the lived experience of mental health family members and friends.

Mental health family members and friends tell us that they do not relate to the term 'carer'.

In 2018-19 Mental Health Families and Friends Tasmania (MHFFTas) asked its stakeholders about the language of caring. Families and friends told us that they supported someone experiencing mental ill health and or substance misuse conditions because of their relationship to the person. Our stakeholders perceived themselves as kin, a friend, a colleague or a neighbour rather than a 'carer' – for family members and friends, the informal support role was *'just what you do'*. Within this context, we came to understand that **the term 'carer' does not adequately reflect the relational aspects between people with mental ill health and their supporters.**

When services and supports use language that does not connect with their stakeholders' understanding of themselves, those services can become inaccessible. MHFFTas understands that **families and friends often miss out on much needed support within the Mental Health and Alcohol and Drug Sectors because they do not relate to language used within support services.** It is for this reason that MHFFTas advocates for the transition from use of the term 'carer' to 'mental health families and friends' when referring to an unpaid person who supports someone with mental ill health (including comorbidity of substance misuse conditions).

Over the past 37 years, MHFFTas has worked to advocate for and actively listen to the voices of mental health families and friends in Tasmania.

"I would prefer a title which indicates the role of the organisation and who they represent. Family and friends are usually the people who stay involved when someone is mentally ill – they are the one's seeking support."

Accordingly, in 2019, MHFFTas (formally Mental Health Carers Tas and ARAFMI Tas) adopted a new name to better reflect the views of its stakeholders. Going forward, MHFFTas welcomes the opportunity to further discuss the language of caring and the importance of language in creating accessible services and supports.

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Our Vision

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