

# **Carer Respite Coming in Mental Health**

A new and exciting initiative to develop and roll out a national carer respite system that meets the needs of mental health consumers and carers is underway.

The Building Capacity in Community Mental Health Family Support and Carer Respite Project is part of the Council of Australian Governments (CoAG) National Action Plan on mental health. It is funded through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and is one of a number of service development initiatives in the mental health sector.

The initiative has adopted a national sector development approach whereby all state and territory community mental health peaks, through Community Mental Health Australia (CMHA), will collaborate on the development and roll out these respite programs. The project will be overseen by the National Project Steering Committee on which MHCC sits. Individual state and territory peaks have appointed project coordinators to work locally.

This approach will build upon existing state and territory service infrastructure as well as identifying new service opportunities. A key element of the initiative is the development of local Family Support and Carer Respite Coordination Networks.

The objectives of this eighteen-month project are to:

- investigate, evaluate and support new and innovative mental health family care and respite programs across Australia that draw on the lived experience of consumers and carers and which effectively target their diverse and changing needs,
- establish a national framework to support new service development and respite care coordination through the FaHCSIA Respite Development Fund,
- support local community mental health organisations across Australia to engage in coordination networks and to assist them to access additional funding through FaHCSIA to support their service development and activities,
- provide a cost-effective and efficient way to build a consistent and coordinated national program to support improved respite care options for Australian families living with a mental illness.

The project involves four major stages:

## **PHASE ONE –National Scoping Strategy**

This phase, commenced May 2008, involves scoping sessions, held nationally, with service providers, carer and consumer organisations to identify.

- Relevant existing respite services
- Models of support and respite for families experiencing mental illness and how they differ from other sectors
- Existing service partnership arrangements and future partnership options
- Current capacity of the sector to provide new and innovative respite models
- Key workforce and organisational issues
- Role of consumer and carer organisations in the design of services and the operation of service networks.

### **PHASE TWO – Capacity Building**

State/Territory peak bodies will work with interested services, organisations and existing networks in each jurisdiction to develop or ensure there is a Family Support and Carer Respite Coordination Network to provide mental health services that are locally relevant, sustainable and appropriately targeted.

This phase will focus on investigating relevant education and training, resources and initiatives to address workforce and organisational issues.

In NSW, MHCC will work closely with Interchange Respite Care NSW, the peak body for community based organisations providing respite care and social support services, and its existing respite provider networks.

### **PHASE THREE – Development of Carer Respite Coordination Networks and Funding Proposals**

Coordination Networks in conjunction with state/territory peak bodies will help members of the network to:

- develop local service partnerships
- prepare and submit funding proposals to the National Respite Development Fund.

Submissions for the first round are required by FaHCSIA by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2008. Second round submissions are required by 30<sup>th</sup> November 2008.

Phase 3 will include identification of outcome measurements and development of evaluation plans for their proposed new services, including measures of wellbeing, carer stress, psycho-social functioning and social inclusion.

### **PHASE FOUR – National Evaluation & Project Report**

An evaluation framework with specific indicators and targets will be developed in conjunction with the FaHCSIA.

MHCC looks forward to working closely with member organisations, consumers and carers on this exciting initiative.

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