30 July 2013

Pharmacy Guild of Australia
NSW Branch

Carers NSW response to 5th Community Pharmacy Agreement Stakeholder Consultation

Carers NSW welcomes the opportunity to provide initial comment on the 5th Community Pharmacy Agreement. The primary concern for Carers NSW in responding to this consultation, is to ensure that carers are recognised within community pharmacies as partners in care under the Agreement, and have access to the primary health care services they need to maintain their own health and wellbeing.

This response will broadly examine community pharmacies engagement with carers and then specifically focus on the Home Medicines Review Program. We welcome opportunities to provide comprehensive feedback on all components of 5th Agreement (including the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme) as the consultations progress and outcomes of these initiatives are made available.

Carer Recognition Act 2010

The Carer Recognition Act 2010 aims to increase recognition and awareness of carers and to acknowledge the valuable contribution carers make to Australian society. The Act gives effect to the Statement for Australia’s Carers, which sets out ten principles to guide how public service agencies and associated providers treat and consider carers in policy development and program and service delivery.

Carers NSW encourages the use of the Statement as a tool to ensure that the Agreement reflects best practice standards in carer recognition and inclusion. In entering into funding arrangements with the Australian Government the Guild may have obligations under the Act to ensure that the Agreement is consistent with these principles.

Recommendation 1: Carers NSW recommends that the principles of the Statement of Australia’s Carers be utilised to inform the development of the 6th Community Pharmacy Agreement.
Carers and Community Pharmacies

- In what ways can the network of over 5000 community pharmacies be better utilised (thinking particularly about your own organisation’s constituency or areas of interest)?
- Are there opportunities for your organisation to partner with community pharmacy to develop new community pharmacy services or improve existing ones?

Carers NSW asserts that community pharmacists are one of the most accessible groups of health care professionals to carers, and are uniquely positioned within the health sector to support carers health and wellbeing.

It is well established that carers experience reduced physical, mental and emotional health. Australian studies have demonstrated that carers have an average rating on the depression scale that is classified as moderate depression, are more likely to be experiencing chronic pain or carrying an injury associated with caring, and are more likely to report high blood pressure and high cholesterol when compared to non-carers. Carers have been shown to be at least 40 per cent more likely to suffer from a chronic health condition than the rest of the population. The research demonstrates that more hours spent caring results in a greater decline in a carer’s health, and carers of people with chronic conditions, who frequently utilise community pharmacies, are particularly vulnerable to physical and emotional exhaustion that affects their ability to undertake their caring role.

Carers NSW advocates for community pharmacies to recognise carers reduced health and wellbeing as an unacceptable inequity, and to seek to actively address this inequity.

**Recommendation 2:** Carers NSW recommends that Pharmacy Practice Incentives are provided to community pharmacies which engage in health promotion activities targeting carers.

In order to improve health outcomes for carers, carers must be identified and supported in their caring role. The Statement of Australia’s Carers calls for carers to be:

‘considered as partners with other care providers in the provision of care, acknowledging the unique knowledge and experience of carers.’

It has been well established that carers experience stress as a result of having to understand and perform tasks relating to managing their care-recipient’s medicines. Carers are likely to be monitoring the care recipient’s use of medication and its effects, and they use this knowledge and experience to negotiate with prescribers, pharmacists, nurses and the person for whom they care.

Many carers experience uncertainty about medication issues, and carers continue to report that they are not given adequate information about medications from health care professionals. Privacy and confidentiality can be used to exclude carers from gaining information which is necessary to undertake their caring role.
The provision of Medication Management Programs which are sensitive to the specific information needs of carers are one way to reduce carer stress associated with medication management duties, and the discussion of the Home Medicines Review in the next section will highlight the importance of considering carers within Medication Management Programs.

Including carers as partners in care must go beyond specific programs if it is to achieve significant outcomes. We know that including carers as partners in care not only reduces the stress placed upon carers, but also improves health outcomes for both carers and consumers, contributing to improved compliance with health treatments.

Carers NSW would welcome the opportunity to partner with community pharmacies in NSW to deliver education and training which promotes carer awareness and draws attention to carers health needs.

However there is a need for further information about how carers can be included as partners in care in community pharmacy settings. There is currently limited research into carers engagement with community pharmacies, and in order to identify effective strategies to engage carers as partners in care, further research needs to be conducted with carers as well as pharmacists.

**Recommendation 3:** Carers NSW recommends that the Guild undertake further research with carers and pharmacists to identify innovative opportunities for community pharmacies to improve their engagement with carers.

**Home Medicines Review**

- Do you think existing 5th Agreement programs should be expanded and/or enhanced?
- Are you aware of any problems with existing 5th Agreement programs, and how should these be addressed?

Carers NSW recommends that the Home Medicines Review (HMR) program and other Medication Management Programs are enhanced to ensure that carers can engage with and benefit from these programs alongside consumers.

Although there has been limited research conducted with carers of people who have received or are eligible for an HMR, current evidence draws attention to the benefits of HMRs for carers, identifies barriers to carer inclusion, and highlights the potential to increase uptake through active promotion of HMRs to carers.⁶

An evaluation of the HMR undertaken by Campbell Research and Consulting found that many carers were relieved to have had the chance to be briefed fully on the medications their care recipient was using, especially when they had been excluded by the GP who was treating their loved one.⁷

Carers who have not participated in an HMR are also likely to perceive HMRs positively, particularly if they currently experience stress surrounding medication issues. Carter et al. found that carers who experience higher levels of ‘knowledge hassles’ associated with medication management were more likely to find an HMR personally beneficial, and were more likely to arrange an HMR for their loved
In a study conducted by White et al. with carers of eligible non-recipients, carers believed that an HMR would help relieve their emotional stress by sharing responsibility for consumers medicines. In 2008 Campbell Research and Consulting identified that carers were a ‘very important, but often overlooked group’ and found that HMRs could be strengthened by increasing carer awareness and promoting the positive benefits of HMRs to carers. The most recent research with carers echoes these findings, with Carter et al. concluding that:

‘Building expectations of HMR as an information resource among informal caregivers would likely increase overall consumer demand for this service and may ease the stress and burden of caregiving’.

Carter et al. found that carers stress is heightened when medication regimens are changed, representing a time when carers are most receptive to information about HMRs.

Recommendation 4: Carers NSW recommends that the Home Medicines Review Program is directly promoted to carers, especially following changes in the care-recipients medication regimen.

Research has also identified that some carers have been excluded from the HMR process, which has compromised their ongoing care for the consumer. Currently HMR Program Specific Guidelines make little reference to carers (except to advise pharmacists to include carers where appropriate) and they do not articulate clear principles of carer inclusion.

White et al. observed that their research represents a ‘timely reminder that it is necessary to review the role and status of carers in the provision of HMRs to care recipients’ and we support this request.

Early research conducted by the Guild indicated that a third of carers are present at HMRs. Carers NSW suggests that this number could be significantly increased not only by promoting HMRS to carers, but also through the development of initiatives which improve providers ability to identify and include carers consistently.

Recommendation 5: Carers NSW recommends that the role of carers within the Home Medicines Review Program should be reviewed to ensure that carers are identified and provided with specific information to assist in the caring role.

Carers NSW notes that barriers to accessing HMRs have also been identified among specific groups including people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Considering that these groups have an elevated risk of medication misadventure, Carers NSW believes that addressing these barriers should be prioritised.
Conclusion

The increase in funding for Patient Focused Services under the current Agreement has been valued by Carers NSW, and we hope that the 6th Agreement will further strengthen pharmacists’ ability to improve health outcomes for carers by harnessing opportunities for carers and pharmacists to engage together as partners in care.

If you wish to discuss or clarify any aspect of this submission please contact Carolina Simpson, Policy and Development Officer, on 02 9280 4744 or email carolinas@carersnsw.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

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Endnotes

1 Carers Australia, Australian Unity, and Deakin University, The Wellbeing of Australians: Carer Health and Wellbeing, Australian Wellbeing Index Survey 17.1, Melbourne, 2007
3 ibid.
12 ibid.
14 ibid.
17 ibid.