



Welcome to another year of shared information, thoughts, feelings, news and ideas in our *Carers News*. I look forward to writing to you and hearing from you again this coming year. A particular welcome to all those readers who are new members of Carers NSW – there are many of you and we are delighted to have you join us not only so you can benefit from what we can provide to you but also, and very importantly, so we can benefit from what you can tell us about your carer experiences.

No matter who you are caring for, or where you live, no matter what cultural background you are from or what language you speak, your input – letters, emails, phone calls, articles for the newsletter - provides the knowledge platform for the work we do to benefit all carers across NSW.

Our membership matters. To see our numbers grow means we are successful in reaching more carers so we can provide much needed supports. But growth in membership also means we have more clout when it comes to advocacy for carers.

This is particularly important in an election year. We are always asked by politicians we talk to how many members we have, and where they live. Carers are voters too! Carers in marginal Federal seats especially will have an opportunity this year to have their voices heard, listened to and acted upon. Start now to talk to your local Federal members, invite them to your carer support groups to hear your stories. Tell them what matters most to you.

There is much to talk about – the inclusion of carers in the planning for the NDIS, the implementation of the National Carer Strategy, the poverty many carers are forced to endure. Talk about the crisis in aged care – the lack of residential care places, the lack of respite. I assure you that Carers NSW, working with Carers Australia and the Network of Carers Associations across the whole country, will be very active as the election draws closer.

Encourage your friends, family members, work colleagues, GPs and allied health professionals like physiotherapists to become members too. There really is strength in numbers. Remember you don't have to be a carer to join Carers NSW, you just have to have an interest in caring and an awareness that caring affects everyone's life at some point. Anyone, anytime, can become a carer!

While I am encouraging you to help us grow our membership numbers and think about how you can influence and educate your local Federal member about carers' issues, I have not lost sight of the fact that carers are exhausted, and suffer from physical and mental health problems themselves.

Our Carers NSW 2012 Survey Report confirmed what we have known for a very long time - caring takes a heavy toll on carers' own health and general wellbeing. During 2013 Carers NSW will be working with Medicare Locals across the state to raise awareness amongst GPs and other primary care providers of the need for greater focus on carers themselves, not just the people for whom they care.

2013 promises to be a very eventful year in many ways, especially politically. Let's make sure carers and the people for whom they care are not overlooked when the promises are being made, policies developed and priorities established.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laraine". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Laraine Toms  
President, Carers NSW