



**Carers NSW**  
**Australia**



# SETTING UP A CARER SUPPORT GROUP

HANDBOOK

## DISCLAIMER

The content in Section IV. Legal Considerations is provided for information purposes in New South Wales only.

The contents of this handbook does not constitute legal advice and should not be used as such. Every care has been taken in relation to its accuracy, however no warranty is given or implied. Formal legal advice should be sought in particular matters.

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## KEY



Highlighting key takeaways for enhanced understanding and retention



Prompt for reflections on the setting up of a carer support group

# I. INTRODUCTION

Carers NSW has developed this handbook and the education workshop module 'Setting up a carer support group' to support service providers and carers in setting up a carer support group. The benefits of carer support groups are many, providing carers with information, support and social connection.

Please note that this guide covers many types of carer support groups and not all the information or ideas may apply to your group. For more specific information call Carers NSW on **02 9280 4744** or refer to the Carers NSW website [www.carersnsw.org.au](http://www.carersnsw.org.au)



## II. BACKGROUND

### WHO ARE CARERS?

A carer is any individual who provides care and support to a family member or friend who lives with a disability, mental illness, alcohol or drug dependency, chronic condition, terminal illness or who is frail due to age.

Carers come from all walks of life, cultural backgrounds and age groups.

Carers exist in all communities, including Aboriginal communities, those of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGBTQI+\* communities, and throughout metropolitan, regional, rural and remote NSW.

Across NSW, there are approximately 854,300 carers<sup>1</sup>, including individuals as young as eight years of age through to the very elderly.

For many, caring is a 24 hour-a-day job with emotional, physical and financial impacts that can also affect participation in employment, education and community activities.

### WHAT IS A CARER SUPPORT GROUP?

A carer support group is a group of carers who come together – either in person, or through the internet – to discuss their caring situation, socialise, share information, and offer each other support. The group enables carers to meet and connect with other carers who understand the challenges of caring for a family member or friend.

*“We get together and have a laugh and a cry sometimes. Everybody understands how you feel, no matter what happens, people don’t judge, they understand.”*

*Carer for her ageing partner*

Groups can be formal, informal or a mixture of both. They can be held in a variety of places. Groups can meet at a community centre, a cafe or wherever carers are able to meet.

Carer Support Groups may be:

#### **General or condition specific**

The support group can be open to all carers or only to those caring for people living with a disability or specific condition.

A support group open to all carers offers a broad perspective on caring, allowing individuals to learn from diverse experiences and explore caring challenges from different angles. They can

\* LGBTQI+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Gender Diverse, Queer or Intersex.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2018). *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings 2018*.

provide a sense of community among carers who may have different caring experiences but share the common role of providing care for a family member or friend.

A support group focused on a particular diagnosis or condition allows carers to connect with others facing similar issues, which fosters a deeper understanding of the specific challenges they encounter. For example, someone who cares for a frail elderly person may not feel they have much in common with a parent who cares for a child on the autism spectrum.

## **Attended by the carer and the person being cared for**

Going to a support group with the person being cared for has advantages and disadvantages for the carer. It's important to think about what the carer and person being cared for need and prefer before deciding if both should attend the group.

Allowing both the carer and person being cared for in the group lets them share their thoughts and experiences. This can lead to a deeper understanding of each other's feelings and challenges. The group allows both the carer and the person being cared for to benefit from the knowledge and insights shared in the group, including coping strategies, resources, and information about the condition of the person being cared for.

Some carers might find it difficult to openly share their challenges or feelings when the person they care for is present. This could result in less open conversations. The carer and person being cared for might have different needs or interests in the group, making it hard to address everyone's concerns effectively. The presence of the person being cared for could also change how the support group feels, impacting how comfortable and open other people in the group are.

## **Community specific**

Carers come from all walks of life, with different values, beliefs, cultures, backgrounds and lived experiences. This can influence whether someone identifies as a carer and the challenges and barriers they may face in taking on a caring role. For example, the concept of caring may not exist in some communities, or there may be a lack of recognition of the role carers play in some communities.

Carers may seek to discuss their experiences with others in similar situations. Some carers may feel more comfortable discussing personal matters in a specific group, as they may perceive it as a safe space where they can relate more closely to others' experiences.

Specific groups can include:

- young carers
- male carers
- former carers
- Aboriginal carers
- carers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds
- parents of children living with a disability
- lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, queer, intersex (LGBTQI+) carers.

## **Formal and informal groups**

An informal group may meet indefinitely for a cup of tea and a chat. A formal group may meet regularly with structured discussions and regular guest speakers.

Many groups are a combination of both formal and informal structures.

## Face to face or online

The support group may meet face-to-face or online using a video conferencing system such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Running a peer support group online allows the group to reach carers across a greater geographic region and access carers that may not otherwise be able to meet in a physical location.

## BENEFITS OF A CARER SUPPORT GROUP

Carers report many benefits from attending a carer support group. Benefits may include feeling connected, heard and understood by peers, reducing isolation and increasing wellbeing.

Carers who feel recognised and valued in their caring role by the community, service providers, government, friends and family have higher levels of wellbeing.

*2022 National Carer Survey*

Carer support groups provide a space for carers to express themselves with confidence that they will be understood and accepted by other carers, with similar lived experience. The group provides a safe space for carers to share their experiences and learn from others. It can help carers to realise they are not alone, and that there are others who are in similar caring situations.

Gaining perspective and recognising the similarities of their challenges, carers benefit from hearing about others' experiences and comparing them to their own, realising that their frustrations and difficulties are common within their caring role.

*Greenwood et. al. 2013*

Carers within groups often exchange tips and advice on how to deal with varying situations including sharing knowledge of local services. They can be a valuable source of information to people new to the caring role, as well as to individuals who have been caring for an extended period of time.



For carers, belonging to a carer support group can offer the opportunity to:

- learn practical aspects of care
- gain support through sharing experiences and feelings with others in a similar role
- discover ways of alleviating stress and relaxing
- learn about community services and how to use them
- understand more about the condition and needs of the person being cared for
- have social contact away from the continual demands of caring.



## WHO JOINS A CARER SUPPORT GROUP?

Anyone who provides care and support to a family member or friend living with a disability, mental illness, drug and/or alcohol dependency, chronic condition, terminal illness or who is frail can join a carer support group.

The three main motivations for carers in joining a group are: support, respite and information. As carers continue to attend the benefit of exchanging caring experiences with one another, being able to assist other carers and establish friendships, became for many, the most valuable aspects of being a member of a carer support group.

*together Program: Evaluation Report, 2016*

## WHO RUNS A CARER SUPPORT GROUP?

A carer support group can be run by different individuals or entities, depending on its structure and purpose. Some carer support groups are coordinated by a paid support worker, while others are run voluntarily by carers.

### Carer run groups

Some carer support groups are set up and run by carers who have a strong interest in supporting other carers. The carer may identify a lack of support in the local community for carers support and establish a group to meet this unmet need.

### Carer Support Workers

A paid support worker may be employed by a local community service organisation or a public health service organisation within a Local Health District. They assist carers with information, referrals, support and resources on a range of carer-related topics.

Carers need support services that create social connection in and beyond the caring role. Care services that recognise the contribution of the carer and work with them as partner in care significantly improve carer wellbeing.

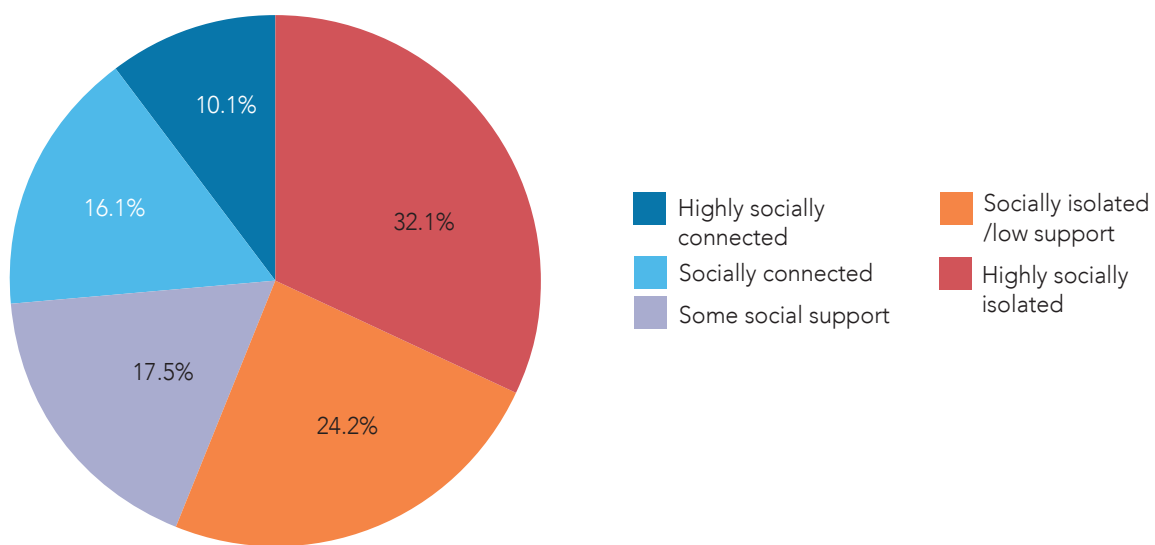
*2022 National Carer Survey*

## SOCIAL CONNECTION

Social connections refers to the quality and depth of relationships that individuals have with others. It involves the sense of belonging, feeling understood, and having a network of people with whom one can share experiences, emotions, and support. Social connections can take various forms, including friendships, family relationships, and community involvement.

The 2022 National Carer Survey revealed that nearly one third of carers experience high levels of social isolation, while an additional 24.2% reported low levels of social support alongside their social isolation. These findings emphasised how widespread social isolation is for carers and showed how much it affects their overall health and wellbeing.

**Figure 40: Social isolation/connectedness among carers (N=6,385)**



Social connection significantly contributes to carer wellbeing, with nearly three out of five individuals reporting a sense of social connectedness among those with higher levels of wellbeing, while one in five acknowledges having at least some social support.

*2022 National Carer Survey*

Finding ways to connect with others is crucial for personal wellbeing and overall happiness. Human beings have an innate need for social connection, as it provides emotional support, reduces feelings of loneliness, and contributes to mental and physical health.

## III. SETTING UP A CARER SUPPORT GROUP

### NOT ALL CARER SUPPORT GROUPS ARE THE SAME

A carer support group can take many forms, including in-person support groups, online groups, café groups, walking groups, arts and craft groups, singing groups, and general interest groups. There is no 'best way' for how a carer support group should look or run.

### WORKING TOGETHER

The first and most important consideration in starting a support group is to engage some support. There are many tasks involved in starting a group, and even the most efficient and dedicated person can burn out if they work alone.

Forming a group brings together different skills and ideas and ensures that decisions reflect the views of a range of people. Different individuals may have access to unique resources, support services, or community organisations. By pooling their resources and sharing this information within the group, individuals can tap into a wider network of assistance and support, benefiting everyone involved.

Some carer support groups prefer to keep their roles and committees very informal, while other carer support groups like to be more formal and assign roles or committees for the group.



#### **Working together**

Who can assist in setting up a carer support group?

### DISCUSSING ROLES OF GROUP MEMBERS

At the first working group meeting, each role should be discussed and a decision made about who best fits the role. The roles should be determined by the skills and characteristics of the group members. Some roles may be shared if this is more suitable for members. It's ideal to have more than one facilitator or coordinator, for example, to share the task and to help the group dynamics.



## Tasks and responsibilities

Possible tasks within the group can include:

- organising a venue
- contacting potential members
- organising tea and coffee
- promoting the carer support group
- preparing to facilitate the carer support group
- overseeing the finances
- administrative tasks

## SETTING A VISION

One of the tasks that comes with setting up a new carer support group is setting a goal for the group. Setting a goal enables the group to focus on a shared purpose for the group.

Agreeing on what the goal is and agreeing that the goal is worthwhile and beneficial will increase the clarity of the purpose of the group for everyone. Agreement will increase focus on the goal during group meetings.



### Setting a vision

What is the vision for the carer support group?

Will it be an informal group that meets regularly for a cup of tea and chat?

Will it be something more formal with structured discussions and regular guest speakers?

*Identifying the vision can impact the future direction of the carer support group.*

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

A “Terms of Reference” (TOR) is simply a description of the aims and structure of the carer support group. The aims and structure of the carer support group will depend on what the people in the carer support group want to get out of it.

What are the expectations of the group? Do members want an informal group that meets indefinitely for a cup of tea and a chat? Or do they want something more formal with structured discussions and regular guest speakers?

It is a good idea to discuss everyone’s ideas and expectations at the first meeting. Use a whiteboard to ‘brainstorm’ ideas, or go around the circle asking what everybody would like to get out of the carer support group.



## Terms of Reference

A Terms of Reference should address:

- Vision and objectives of the carer support group (i.e. what does the group want to achieve)
- Members, roles and responsibilities (i.e. who will take part in it)
- Resources, financial plan (i.e. how it will be financed).

At the end of the discussion, it is important to agree upon the TOR and document it.

Each member of the carer support group should be given a copy.

## WHERE AND WHEN TO HOLD A CARER SUPPORT GROUP

The meeting place should be easy to access for all members.



### Choosing a venue

Considerations for when choosing a venue should include:

- wheelchair and stroller access
- proximity to public transport
- parking facilities
- accessibility to respite care facilities
- accessibility to childcare facilities
- tea/coffee making facilities
- warmth and friendliness of the venue
- security and lighting in the evening
- access to toilets and amenities.

Some councils, government services, service clubs, churches, and libraries offer their rooms free of charge.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR MEETING

### Will your group meet during the day or evening?

Depending on the needs of the members of the carer support group it may be suitable to meet in the evenings e.g. working carers. Alternatively, it may be convenient to meet during the day as the person being cared for may be in school, or in a day program or day centre.

### Will your group meet during the week or on weekends?

Holding a carer support group on a weekend may make the group more accessible to some members of the group, including working carers. However, attracting guest speakers on a weekend may prove challenging with many guests only available to attend during working hours.

### How often will your group meet?

It can be difficult for many carers to get away from home. Most carer support groups only meet once a month for a couple of hours. If more support is needed a telephone network for support between meetings could be set up.

### Will your group offer online support?

Some groups decide to set up or join a social networking group online e.g. a closed Facebook group. It is important to consider privacy and safety issues with social networking sites. Ensure all members understand the issues around privacy and agree to privacy guidelines within the social networking site.

## ONLINE SUPPORT GROUPS

While face-to-face peer support is shown to be beneficial to carers, it is not always possible for carers to attend a group in person due to the demands of their caring role, their geographic location, or other commitments such as paid work. Carers may be interested in meeting online (using Zoom, Microsoft Teams or another video conference platform).

An online carer peer support group enables carers a space to openly discuss their caring situation and have some 'time out' from caring. Carers who are unable to attend physical groups or cannot regularly attend their group can continue engagement at a regular time with other carers or seek out groups of carers with similar experiences.

To learn more about this type of carer support group contact Carers NSW on **02 9280 4744**.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Our names are an incredibly important part of our identity. Names give us a sense of who we are, the communities in which we belong, and our place in the world.

With a carer support group, a name can quickly and easily convey the focus and type of group. Whether it's on a flyer out the front of a supermarket or a brochure at a doctor's surgery, people can see the name of the group and know something about the group. It can also convey something practical, like where or when the group will meet.

On the other hand, it doesn't have to be too obvious. How does having the word "support" in the name of the group affect potential attendees? Support groups may provoke images of people sitting around a table discussing their problems. Is this the image the group wishes to portray?

### Examples of groups registered with Carers NSW:

- Carers Dare to Care – General carer support group
- "Our Time" Group – Support groups for carers of children with disability
- Singing away the Blues –Choir group for carers
- The Sunshine Group – Carer support group for carers of someone with autism
- Art and Craft Leisure Fellowship – General carer support group

## RESOURCES

An active member base is the most important resource any carer support group will have. The carer support group will also need to think about what resources and support they will need to make the group sustainable.

Additional resources can include the meeting room, funding for the group, promotional material, morning tea and coffee, and assistance from local community organisations.



### Resources

Questions to consider:

- what resources are available to the group?
- does the group have access to a meeting place?
- who will provide tea and coffee?
- will members of the group be asked to bring morning tea to each meeting?
- will the group ask for a gold coin donation?

## IV. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Many carer support groups thrive in an informal setting, fostering a sense of connection and mutual support. However, some groups may opt for a formal and incorporated structure enabling them to access additional resources such as fundraising opportunities and grant applications. Before starting a carer support group it's important to have a clear idea about the proposed structure of the group.

### INCORPORATION OF A CARER SUPPORT GROUP

#### Incorporating a carer support group

Incorporation gives a carer support group its own legal identity (the group becomes a 'separate legal entity' from its members). The incorporated carer support group can enter into contracts, apply for grants, accept donations, sign a lease, and sue and be sued.

Incorporated carer support groups are incorporated under law (which can be either state or federal) and report to the regulator responsible for their type of structure, for example the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC).

Incorporated carer support groups follow a particular structure, with group rules (or constitution), members, and a governing body (often called a board or committee).

Being incorporated has consequences for people who are going to be on the board or committee of management of a not-for-profit group, as legal duties attach to these roles.

Given the importance of the decision about whether to incorporate, this may be an issue on which the group may want to seek specific legal advice.

For more information on incorporation visit the Not-for-Profit Law website at: [www.nfplaw.org.au/free-resources/getting-started/incorporation](http://www.nfplaw.org.au/free-resources/getting-started/incorporation)

#### Deciding to incorporate

Not-for-profit Law have developed a free fact sheet to help potential groups consider the incorporation decision.

The fact sheet explains in more detail what incorporation means and provides a general overview of some of the main differences between an 'unincorporated' and an 'incorporated' group, including information on:

- what does it mean to 'incorporate'?
- what are the advantages of incorporating?
- what are the obligations of incorporated groups?
- checklists to help groups to decide whether to incorporate
- decided to incorporate, what's next?
- decided not to incorporate, what's next?
- resources to help groups with next steps.

Download the fact sheet: [How to decide whether your group should incorporate](#)



### **Please note:**

Financial and legal matters should be discussed with an accountant or solicitor. The information contained in this document is a general guide only.

## **COMMITTEE ROLES**

Some carer support groups may require a more formal structure and assign roles or committees for the group.

Below is a list of possible roles:

### **President or Chairperson**

- Runs and leads the meeting.
- Informs relevant organisations of the aims of the carer support group and asks for their support

### **Secretary**

- Looks after paperwork, types up minutes, sends out meeting reminders, etc.
- Is the contact person for the carer support group for telephone, mail and email enquiries.

### **Treasurer**

- Pays the bills, receives incoming money, keeps accurate financial records.

## **ACCOUNTING CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Australian Business Number and GST**

The carer support group may wish to apply for an Australian Business Number (ABN). This is not essential, but it may make it easier to apply for and receive funding if the group has an ABN as some organisations only fund groups that have an ABN. It may also help when a bank account is opened.

An ABN can be applied via the Australian Business Register website ([www.abr.gov.au](http://www.abr.gov.au)) or call 13 28 66. The application is free and only takes a few minutes. Most carer support groups don't have to register for Goods and Services Tax (GST) because non-profit organisations that have an annual turnover of less than \$150,000 are not required to register for GST.

For more information about an ABN, GST registration, and taxation issues contact an accountant or the Australian Taxation Office on 13 28 66.

### **Charitable fundraising and taxation**

To be able to raise money for a carer support group through fundraising activities such as cake stalls, raffles, etc. the group must have an 'authority to fundraise'. There is no cost to apply for this authority and the form can be downloaded from Services NSW by visiting their website [www.service.nsw.gov.au](http://www.service.nsw.gov.au) to download a form.

Some businesses or individuals may wish to make a donation to the carer support group. They may also request a tax-deductible receipt for their donation. To be able to provide them with such a receipt the carer support group will have to become a registered 'deductible gift recipient' with the Australian Taxation Office. However, this can be complicated without advice from the taxation office or qualified accountant or solicitor. For all financial and legal matters please contact an accountant or solicitor. The information contained in this document is a general guide only.

## INSURANCE

Your carer support group's insurance requirements depend on how your carer support group is structured, where you meet and if you are affiliated with any other organisations.

Below is an explanation of three main types of insurance:

### Public liability insurance

This type of insurance protects your carer support group against paying compensation to a third party who suffers loss or damage as a result of a mistake by your group or by one of your members.

### Personal accident insurance

This type of insurance covers the carer support group against costs that may arise from a person being injured through an accident that occurred as a result of, or while, attending your meeting.

### Directors and officers insurance or association's liability:

This policy covers the personal liability of carer support group members if they make an organisational decision that causes financial loss to another person or to the group.

*This is a basic guide only and your carer support group should seek advice from a qualified insurance broker as to the types and amounts of insurance it requires.*

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## V. RUNNING A CARER SUPPORT GROUP

Carer support groups operate in different ways, depending on the needs of the members and the skills of their leaders.

This section will answer many questions about what is involved in running a carer support group and the tasks involved.

### FIRST MEETING

*So we are in a carer support group...What can we do?*

The first meeting is a significant event for the carer support group. It is the first contact carers have with other members and the group organiser. At this meeting group members may discuss and clarify the purpose and goals of the group, as well as any expectations members have.

The development and operation of the carer support group depends largely on the interest and agreements made by participants during the first few meetings. Discussions and planning are crucial. Many carers are busy and want to make the most of their time spent in the group.

### CREATING A GROUP AGREEMENT

A vital first step in running a carer support group is the development of a group agreement or group culture. A group agreement helps to establish a safe physical and emotional environment for the participants. The group agreement sets in place expectations which creates a culture of respect and safety. The group agreement allows for the opportunity of equal participation for all members.

#### Highlights of a Group Agreement

- sets up a safe and supportive environment
- increases comfort levels when dealing with potentially sensitive and challenging issues
- helps to maximise learning and participation
- develops mutual understanding of behaviour that is expected of themselves and others
- establishes facilitator parameters
- provides a strategy that enables inappropriate, sexist or racist language and behaviour to be dealt with immediately
- fosters self-responsibility and collaboration with group members
- group agreements should always be established when participants are involved in activities that may involve the sharing of a range of ideas, values and attitudes.

Have the group form their own group agreement. When group members are engaged in forming the group agreement, they are more engaged in committing to it. They feel ownership for the agreement and for the group. As more people become engaged with the agreement, greater group cohesion emerges.



### Terms of Reference

Your group agreement might include the following:

- everything shared in the group is confidential and is not to leave the room
- the group accepts members just as they are, and avoids making judgements
- all caring experiences are equal
- one person speaks at a time without interruption
- give attention to the person speaking
- sharing is encouraged, but not required
- meetings are to begin and end on time
- mobiles phones to be set to silent - carers are able to leave the room to answer calls.

**You may wish to laminate a copy of the group agreement and display it at the start of each meeting.**

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Members of the carer support group should respect each other's right to privacy. This means that no one should discuss another carer's issues outside the group. Confidentiality is especially important in smaller communities, where carers may be reluctant to attend a carer support group for fear of people divulging personal information about them outside the group.

Members should be reminded of group confidentiality at the beginning of every meeting.

**Respecting confidentiality helps build and develop trust within the carer support group.**

Promoting confidentiality within the group encourages the free flow of information between the members of the group. This creates a safe emotional environment that allows for the acknowledgement of a members' personal story without fear or judgement.

### Not all conversations are confidential

**You will need to break confidentiality if, at any time, the health or safety of a member in your group or any other person is at serious risk of harm.**

Many people experiencing distressing circumstances may have thoughts of causing harm to themselves or someone else, or even thoughts of suicide.

## Resources and referrals

Unless you are professionally trained in dealing with these issues, and managing such issues is within your professional role, we recommend that you refer the person to a service such as:

- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467
- NSW Elder Abuse Hotline 1800 628 221
- Headspace 1800 650 890
- Beyond Blue 1300 224636
- National Sexual Assault, Family & Domestic Violence Counselling Line 1800 737 732.

## HOUSEKEEPING

Housekeeping refers to the management of tasks in the running of the carer support group. Housekeeping issues and other agreements will need to be made early in the stage.

Housekeeping announcements may include:

- where the toilets are located
- the outline for the meeting
- the length of the meeting
- when there will be a break
- at what time refreshments are provided
- if there is a guest speaker presenting
- where the group will go in the case of an emergency evacuation.

Some people may not know how the carer support group meeting runs, so briefly explain this at the start of the meeting. Ask that members agree to listen to others in a non-judgmental way without interrupting. It is important to allow everyone plenty of time for introductions, talking and listening.

## GUEST SPEAKERS

A carer support group may decide that they would like more information on a specific topic, or regular information, to assist them in their caring role. Inviting a guest speaker to the group is a way of obtaining information in a relaxed and friendly environment. This may be different from the exchange that occurs between a worker and a client in a one-to-one situation.

Some carer support groups aim to have three speakers per year, others have less, and some have more. This is up to the group and the availability of guest speakers.

### Examples of possible guest speakers are:

- a community health worker to talk about strategies for carers in looking after their own health
- a local council or Home and Community Care (HACC) worker to explain relevant services and programs
- a dietician to discuss food and nutrition
- a representative from Carers NSW to talk about how Carers NSW supports carers
- a doctor or pharmacist to discuss different illnesses and medications
- a geriatrician to discuss the ageing process and healthy ageing

- local service providers, including Carer Gateway, Home Care Branch Managers, respite workers, other carer support group coordinators, Meals on Wheels coordinators, and community options coordinators
- the Fire Brigade to talk about fire safety and awareness
- a representative from relevant organisations eg. Dementia Australia, Arthritis Foundation of NSW, OneDoor Mental Health, Multiple Sclerosis Society NSW, etc.
- a Services NSW worker to explain financial entitlements for carers
- your local Member of Parliament to discuss the need for services for carers and how to lobby for them
- an Aged Care Assessment Team to talk about their role in helping older people stay at home
- a neurologist for information regarding traumatic head injury and other brain disorders
- an occupational therapist to discuss the general activities of daily living, eg. toileting, dressing, leisure, preventing falls, etc.
- people of interest to talk on leisure topics, time out, how to look after yourself
- a physiotherapist to talk about mobility, transfer or lifting techniques, and back care
- a podiatrist to talk about foot care
- a psychologist for information on behavioural problems
- a solicitor for information on legal issues.

## SHARING INFORMATION IN THE GROUP

One of the main sources of information for carers comes from other carers. By sharing their own experiences in the group, carers empower other members to access services in the community.

The carer support group may decide at the beginning of the meeting to discuss a topic, or plan for the topic to be discussed at a future meeting. By giving notice, people can prepare for the meeting, e.g. bring the contact numbers, books, and other resources they find useful, to share with others.

By giving notice, people can prepare for the meeting, e.g. bring the contact numbers, books, and other resources they find useful, to share with others.

Ideas for group discussion may include:

- the services in your area that have been the most helpful
- ways to relieve stress and relax
- ways to deal with crises related to the caring role
- resources or devices which have been found useful, e.g. videos, books, etc.
- lobbying on issues that affect the caring role
- any other information that might be useful to others.

**The group can be as inventive as it likes. Groups can speak to other carer support groups for ideas.**

## SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

The leisure time of a carer is usually limited. Social or leisure activities can strengthen bonds between members and encourage sharing in a less structured environment.

The carer support group may decide to meet on a leisure basis during the regular meeting time or, if manageable, at times outside the carer support group meeting days. This is up to everyone in the group to decide.

The carer support group may decide to allocate a particular day/evening (depending on when the group meets) as a special leisure time. Planning the event can also be fun and adds variety to the meetings.

The members of the carer support group may want to decide, whether they wish to invite partners, friends, or the people they care for, to occasional outings.

## PROMOTING THE GROUP

Some carer support groups are involved in raising community awareness. The group may decide to advertise support meetings to attract more members or to establish a community 'presence'.

Here are a few suggestions how a carer support group may go about publicising meetings and raising community awareness:

- As a carer support group, write a letter to the local newspapers about the roles of a carer in the community or about their own circumstances as a carer. Be sure to include information about the carer support group. The paper may decide to write a story or place the information in the community information column.
- Share information about the carer support group on local social media accounts. Many towns and communities have Facebook pages or groups dedicated to local activities and events. These pages are often run by a variety of individuals or organisations.
- Most local radio stations have announcements about community events, and the group might wish to place a notice about the carer support groups on a local radio station website or send it direct to the station.
- If a carer support group has access to a photocopier and paper, it might wish to create a poster or information sheet to place on community notice boards, in libraries, at neighbourhood centres, doctors surgeries, and community health centres, etc.
- Word-of-mouth is a great way to advertise.
- Local church groups can promote the carer support group.
- Let local services know about the carer support group, eg. Community nurses, Home Care workers, Respite Centres etc.
- Local council community directories may include details of carer support groups. Sometimes these are published on the internet.
- Let the local Carer Gateway (1800 422 737) know about the carer support group.

*Carer support groups need to publicise regularly and use different methods. Different people get their information from different places, so use print media, as well as social media, radio, community announcements, and other service providers.*

## WHEN THE CARING ROLE ENDS

The end of the caring role can be a difficult time for an individual. Members who no longer have a caring role may continue to attend the carer support group for a period of time.

The carer support group may be able to help them through their period of loss, grief or transition. They, in turn, can contribute their own experience to other members of the group.

It may be appropriate to transition former carers out of the group at the end of their caring role. One option is for former carers to continue meeting members in a social setting outside of organised carer support group meetings.

Group guidelines should reflect the expectations of members attending the group once their caring role has ended.

### How long will former carers attend the carer support group?

## ENDING THE CARER SUPPORT GROUP

Some carer support groups continue to meet indefinitely even after participants are no longer caring. Many others come to a natural end after months or years.

Ending a support group is not a sign of failure but a reflection that participants are ready to move on to something else. If some participants are still interested in meeting, the group may transition into a less formal network of support.

Discuss the high and low points in the carer support groups' history and celebrate the carer support group meeting the natural end of the group with an activity, for example, lunch or morning tea.





## VI. RESOURCES

### **Carers NSW Resources**

Carers NSW produces resources on a wide range of issues, including information about support for carers, financial assistance and legal issues.

See [www.carersnsw.org.au/resources](http://www.carersnsw.org.au/resources)

### **Carers NSW Education Workshops**

Carers NSW offer education sessions and workshops for both carers and service providers to build participant knowledge and skills. Education workshops include Setting up a carer support group and Carers Support Groups: a workshop for facilitators.

See [www.carersnsw.org.au/training-events/upcoming-events](http://www.carersnsw.org.au/training-events/upcoming-events)

Carers NSW provide guest speakers to speak to carer support groups and events on a range of topics. Further information can be found on the Carers NSW website

See [www.carersnsw.org.au/services-and-support/programs-services/education-and-training](http://www.carersnsw.org.au/services-and-support/programs-services/education-and-training)

### **Carer support group eLearning Modules**

The Carers NSW Learning Management System (LMS) has a section devoted to carer support groups. eLearning modules include Setting up a carer support group and Promoting a carer support group.

See [lms.carersnsw.org.au](http://lms.carersnsw.org.au)

### **Media templates**

Three sample media templates can be found at Appendix A (pages 27-29).

## REFERENCES

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## APPENDIX A: MEDIA TEMPLATES

The following media templates are found on the next three pages.

1. Media Release template
2. New Group Community Event Notice template
3. Community Event Notice template

# 1. MEDIA RELEASE TEMPLATE

## Support group caring for the carer

The <CARER SUPPORT GROUP NAME> has been formed to give carers <OF CONDITION OPTIONAL> the chance to meet others in a similar situation, talk, listen, support others and be supported.

Meeting every <DATE / TIME> at <LOCATION>, the group is providing a social outlet for carers in the <INSERT REGION>.

Support Groups have been shown to be an important activity to increase the social and emotional wellbeing of people going through similar experiences. The group dynamic helps members share their experiences whilst learning from others and the sense of relief that comes with this sharing is immense.

<QUOTE FROM GROUP COORDINATOR>

<LIST ANY ADDITIONAL FEATURES/ ACTIVITIES OF GROUP >

For more information or if you're interested in joining the group, contact

<COORDINATOR NAME AND NUMBER>.

## 2. NEW GROUP COMMUNITY EVENT NOTICE TEMPLATE

Do you care for someone <WITH CONDITION OPTIONAL>?

<INSERT NAME OF PERSON OF ORGANISATION> is looking to start up a support group for carers <OF CONDITION OPTIONAL> in the <INSERT REGION / AREA>.

Meeting times and locations will be announced once interest is known. <OR IF ANY OF THESE ARE DEFINED, INSERT>

Support groups give carers the chance to meet others in a similar situation, talk, listen, support others and be supported.

For more information or if you're interested in this group, contact

<COORDINATOR NAME AND NUMBER>.

### 3. COMMUNITY EVENT NOTICE TEMPLATE

Do you care for someone <WITH CONDITION OPTIONAL>?

<CARER SUPPORT GROUP NAME> meets <DATE / TIME> at <LOCATION>.

The group gives carers the chance to meet others in a similar situation, talk, listen, support others and be supported.

<LIST ANY ADDITIONAL FEATURES/ ACTIVITIES OF GROUP >

For more information or if you're interested in joining the group, contact

<COORDINATOR NAME AND NUMBER>.



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