

2024-2027 Strategic Plan





A Message from the Minister

As Minister for Mental Health, my primary concern is safeguarding the mental health and wellbeing of Canberrans; including those experiencing mental ill health and the tens of thousands of Canberra's carers who support them.

The unwavering and unpaid support that mental health carers provide every day deserves to be acknowledged and respected in all areas of the mental health system. The MHCV 2024-2027 Strategic Plan is an important resource that has carefully set out the priorities and goals required to achieve positive change for carers, while attentively considering the complexities of the ACT's mental health system.

I would like to thank Canberra's carers for their generosity in sharing their experiences and their hopes for the future of mental health in the ACT. This Strategic Plan is the product of extensive consultation, and I would like to commend MHVC for using stakeholder feedback so diligently to shape a plan that uses a strengths-based and multi-sectoral approach to problem-solving.

The MHCV Strategic Plan comes at a particularly important time in mental health, as our local system shifts its approach to supporting people with mental ill health to remain in the community, an approach that will rely heavily on the unpaid efforts of carers to be successful.

I sincerely look forward to further working with MHCV as this Strategic Plan comes to fruition so that we can foster a mental health system and a Canberra community that not only acknowledges mental health carers, but values and includes them.

Minister Emma Davidson

[Minister for Mental Health](#)

[Minister for Population Health](#)

[Minister for Corrections and Justice Health](#)

[Minister for Community Services, Seniors, and Veterans](#)



A Message from our Board Chair

As the peak body for carers, Carers ACT has remained steadfast in its commitment to enhancing the lives of carers and those they care for. Over the last four years, I've had the honour of serving as Chair at Carers ACT, gaining deeper insight into the daily challenges faced by carers and reinforcing my commitment to improving their wellbeing. I have simultaneously reaffirmed my belief that meaningful change is achieved not solely through individual efforts, but through the collective commitment of our entire community.

As we embark on this new chapter with Mental Health Carers Voice (MHCV), I am optimistic about the future. Our focus on supporting carers, advocating for their rights, and amplifying their voices remains a constant in this work towards meaningful change. The launch of MHCV's 2024-2027 Strategic Plan represents a significant step forward, and I am confident that the dedicated efforts of our team will result in tangible improvements in the lives of mental health carers across our region.

I want to acknowledge and appreciate our CEO, the MHCV team, and the entire Carers ACT organisation for their tireless dedication and hard work. I extend this gratitude to the

Board, funding and service partners, and wider community of supporters and stakeholders for their collaboration and support. Our work together has achieved significant milestones already, and I am confident that we will continue to make important strides in the future.

Most of all, I want to thank the carers who have been part of this process. I thank the carers who have involved themselves in Carers ACT's advocacy work and those that are tireless advocates in their day to day lives. Whether you've been caring for someone with mental ill health for years or you're just beginning your journey as a mental health carer, your dedication and resilience are the backbone of our community. Your unwavering commitment inspires us every day and drives our mission for meaningful change forward.

Thili Perera

Chair, Carers ACT

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Our vision is to create a community that not only recognises and values but actively supports and includes mental health carers."



Foreword



As the CEO of Carers ACT, I've had the privilege of engaging with and supporting carers from diverse backgrounds, including those providing care for individuals with mental ill health. Through these conversations, one truth has consistently emerged: navigating the current care systems can often feel like an uphill battle. This is where the concept of a 'peak' body resonates most with me. What we need is a map to guide us as we walk alongside carers in this ascent, making the journey less tiresome. It is, therefore, with great pleasure that I introduce the Mental Health Carers Voice (MHCV) Strategic Plan for 2024-2027—a roadmap that captures the collective aspirations, dedication, and resilience of the ACT's mental health carer community.

Established under Carers ACT as the peak body for mental health carers in the ACT, MHCV has been committed to championing the rights and wellbeing of mental health carers since its inception. At Carers ACT, we walk alongside this commitment and aspire to be a trusted partner in care, embodying the core values of Courage, Innovation, Connection, and Carer-Centred Practice in everything we do. These principles underpin the work of MHCV; whether it be in the courage it takes to advocate for change, the innovation employed in addressing the needs of mental health carers in an ever-evolving sector, the connection fostered within our community, the unwavering commitment to carer-centred practices.

At the heart of MHCV's carer-centric endeavours lies the Advocacy and Policy Advisory Group (APAG), comprised of carers with lived experiences, whose voices resonate through MHCV's policy and advocacy work. APAG's insights serve as a guiding force, leading the peak towards the realisation of our collective vision - **an ACT community that recognises, values, and includes mental health carers.**

Over the past six months, the development of this Strategic Plan has been a journey marked by collaboration, reflection, and dedication to our cause. The team have conducted extensive consultations, including in-depth interviews and discussions with key stakeholders in the mental health sector, and with mental health carers themselves. These interactions have given us a deeper understanding of the challenges, concerns, and realities that shape the experiences of our carer community. One resounding finding has emerged from our collective research—mental health carers often find themselves at a disadvantage psychologically, financially, and socially.

The prioritisation of other's needs over their own wellbeing places carers on a challenging path, exacerbated by society's oversight of their contributions. This finding serves as a clear reminder that policies must go beyond mere recognition, extending to the active support of the emotional and psychological wellbeing of mental health carers.

I extend my deepest gratitude to all mental health carers, including the valued members of APAG, our consultant from ELM, our colleagues in the sector, and my dedicated team for their invaluable contributions to this journey. I would also like to express our appreciation to the ACT Government for their funding support, underscoring our shared commitment to enhancing the lives of carers and the mental health landscape in our region.

Together, I am happy to walk this strategic path, united in our vision to create a community that not only recognises and values but actively supports and includes mental health carers. Together, we can reach the peak.

Lisa Kelly
CEO April 2024

Environmental Analysis



Overview of Mental Health in the ACT.

The 2022 National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing highlights that **one in five Australians experience mental illness annually.**¹



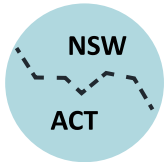
While mental illness and mental disorders have traditionally been viewed through a biomedical lens, it is essential to recognise their intricate connection to various **social determinants**, including age, socio-economic status, ethnicity, and environmental conditions.² Nationwide challenges—such as **workforce shortages** across the care sector, the **burden of living costs, limited housing availability**, and the **lasting impacts** of the **COVID-19 pandemic** and **climate change**—further impact mental health and wellbeing outcomes.



Within the ACT, these national issues intersect with complex local factors, including:



→ **Transitory metropolitan population:** The ACT has a predominantly urban population due to its limited land mass. Less than 1% of its population resides in regional or rural areas.³ Additionally, the population tends to be transient because of the ACT's role as the nation's capital. Its proximity to larger cities in neighbouring states influences service demands and workforce dynamics.



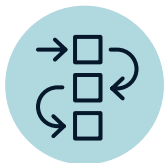
→ **Cross-border activity:** The significant transfer of care between New South Wales and the ACT poses challenges in workforce sustainability and service continuity.⁴ The legal implications of coordinating care across state borders also presents challenges for carers and consumers, particularly when working with differing jurisdictional privacy laws and two distinct Mental Health Acts.



→ **Health needs complexity:** Despite having one of the healthiest populations and highest life expectancies nationally, almost half of ACT residents live with chronic illnesses (including mental illness).⁵ Addressing this growing need necessitates a coordinated response.



→ **Housing stress and land constraints:** Secure and safe housing is essential to optimal mental health outcomes. However, the ACT faces housing stress due to its limited land area and housing stock. This also makes balancing new mental health services provision with urban planning constraints an ongoing struggle.



→ **Multifaceted, multilayered stepped system:** The ACT's mental health system involves a multitude of entities, including government-funded initiatives at both the ACT and Federal levels, community-based services, as well as private organisations. Coordinating efforts across these diverse entities presents a significant challenge due to their operation under distinct contract requirements, outcome measures, and regulatory mechanisms.



→ **Growing demand:** The ACT community is growing, aging, and becoming increasingly diverse,⁶ as is the demand for healthcare, housing, and social supports. Despite concerted efforts, **Emergency Department presentations related to mental health have doubled from 2004–05 to 2020–21.**⁷ Meeting this demand requires more effective interventions across sectors and robust support structures.

Within this complex landscape, carers, and the consumers they support encounter a **fragmented system characterised by silos and bureaucratic intricacies**. Despite collective efforts over the years, the practical implementation of the “no wrong door” approach remains a challenge. We know that ultimately, a supportive and effective mental health ecosystem responsive to the needs of consumers and carers requires effective collaboration across sectors, holistic interventions, and lived experience guidance.

Impact on Carers

Carers, as essential partners, play a crucial role in shaping this path forward. They provide vital support to individuals affected by mental health issues in the ACT community. While precise data on the number of mental health carers in the ACT remains elusive, previous studies estimate that **15% of adult Australians** care for someone with mental illness.⁸ Given the Territory's current population,⁹ this figure translates to over **75,000 adult mental health carers in the ACT alone.**

The limited availability of ACT-specific data poses a barrier to fully understanding and addressing the diverse needs of mental health carers, particularly those from priority populations such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and young carers.

Anecdotal evidence and national data highlight the significant impact that caring generally can have on mental, physical, and financial wellbeing.¹⁰ Carers in the ACT are **almost twice as likely to report low levels of personal wellbeing** compared to the general population.¹¹ Additionally, they have a **higher-than-average likelihood of reporting a fair or poor general health rating.**¹²

Balancing caring responsibilities with personal and professional commitments leads to heightened stress levels and emotional strain. Carers often reduce work hours or forgo employment opportunities to provide care, with social security payments inadequately compensating for the resulting financial, professional, and social losses.¹³

Carers are **significantly more likely than other Canberrans to experience a high prevalence of loneliness and isolation**, with 12.5% of Canberra's carers reporting that they often feel lonely.¹⁴ The rates of isolation and loneliness rise as the extent of caring responsibilities increases, with those who provide more than 40 hours of care per week reporting even higher levels of loneliness and isolation.¹⁵

Navigating the complex healthcare and support systems mentioned above can be overwhelming, increasing feelings of frustration and helplessness. Carers often express dissatisfaction over the insufficient recognition and support provided by the services they engage with, further exacerbating the myriad challenges they already encounter.¹⁶

12.5% of Canberra's carers report that they often feel lonely.



Government System Response

Recognising the essential need for a multi-sectoral approach to foster a community where mental health thrives, both local and national governments have actively worked to align their policy directions. At its core, the ACT **Wellbeing Framework** underscores the interconnectedness of environmental, social, and economic factors that impact mental health and wellbeing.¹⁷ The Australian Government's recent 'Measuring What Matters' framework demonstrates a similar commitment to looking beyond fiscal gains as measures of prosperity.¹⁸

Importantly, the ACT's framework recognises carers as a priority group warranting comprehensive support and acknowledges their significant contributions to our community. The **ACT Carers Strategy** notably sets measurable objectives and actions to achieve this support and respect.¹⁹ The *Carers Recognition Act 2021 (ACT)* further strengthens the commitment to supporting carers by establishing principles to respect, recognise, and acknowledge their support needs and circumstances.²⁰ By enshrining these principles into law, the *Recognition Act* provides authority for advocacy with the aim to ensure that carers are valued and supported in their vital role across the services they interact with.²¹ The *Carer Recognition Act 2010 (Cth)* seeks to do the same at a national level.²²

The ACT's *Human Rights Act 2004* provides a broader statutory basis for respecting, protecting, and promoting fundamental human rights based on the international human rights conventions.²³

Beyond these foundational frameworks, a tapestry of plans and strategies has been woven to address specific facets of mental health and wellbeing. These initiatives, while not exhaustive, include:

- Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan,³⁰ as well as the upcoming National Stigma and Discrimination Reduction Strategy³¹
- National Housing and Homelessness Agreement,³² as well as the upcoming National Housing and Homelessness Plan³³
- ACT Regional Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan³⁴
- The ACT Disability,³⁵ Disability Health³⁶ and Disability Justice Strategies³⁷
- ACT Health Services Plan 2022-2030³⁸
- ACT Inclusive Education Strategy 2024-2034³⁹
- Office of Mental Health and Wellbeing Workplans⁴⁰

These initiatives are poised to shape how carers engage with the system and how the system acknowledges and values their contributions throughout the duration of this strategic plan. By recognising and working alongside the intricate interplay of these policy initiatives, peak bodies like MHCV illuminate a path toward a more resilient and compassionate community—one where mental health thrives, and carers are not only recognised but also genuinely valued and included.



MHCV's Policy and Advocacy Response

Over the past four years, MHCV has leveraged its strategic plan to seek formidable outcomes in the advocacy for mental health carers, driving impactful changes in the field. Collective efforts, driven by Carers ACT, led to the creation and enactment of the *Carers Recognition Act 2021 (ACT)*, which legislated recognition of carers in the ACT. Our contribution to the national issues like school refusal have ignited broader discussions about the stigma faced by carers and the need for enhanced supports at the school level.²⁴ Carer feedback concerning often-traumatic experiences at the Emergency Department has led to our active participation in service design committees such as Safe Haven.

MHCV has addressed spotlighted issues, including forensic mental health care, insisting on the inclusion and recognition of carers' concerns in this crucial area. Beyond policy influence, we've made significant strides in offering practical support for carers, such as our MHCV Navigator website,²⁵ a key resource hub that assists carers in understanding the stepped care system in the ACT. These outcomes represent the beginning of what is anticipated to be comprehensive and continuous efforts in our work. In the ever-evolving landscape of mental health in the ACT, MHCV adopts an approach of **adaptive advocacy** to ensure that carers' voices are heard, and their concerns effectively addressed. This strategic stance equips MHCV to respond effectively to both foreseeable and unforeseeable changes in the mental health landscape over the next four years. Anticipated shifts —such as *Territory and Federal elections, Budget allocations, commissioning of mental health services,*²⁶ *formation of the national mental health lived experience peak bodies, and the development of a National Carer Strategy*²⁷ — will be defining opportunities over the lifespan of this strategic plan.

National and territory-based inquiries will serve as catalysts for government response and policy shifts. For example, the recent Disability Royal Commission²⁸ and the NDIS review²⁹ will likely lead to changes in current care support agencies, foundational supports provided to carers, as well as regulations and inclusion protocols across various sectors over the next four years. MHCV will likewise leverage these opportunities to advocate for changes that align with carers' diverse needs.

By actively engaging with decision-makers and stakeholders during these critical junctures, MHCV can advocate for the implementation of policies that prioritise the wellbeing of mental health carers and the individuals they support. Likewise, as plans and strategies progress and relatively recent legislative instruments like the *Carers Recognition Act* continue to shape the community, the upcoming years promise ample opportunity to influence the mental health landscape. MHCV stands ready to champion the wellbeing of mental health carers and support an ACT community where mental health thrives.



Introduction



Vision



**Our vision is an
ACT community
that recognises,
values, and includes
mental health carers.**

Scope

MHCV's primary focus is on mental health carers in the ACT. Mental health carers are individuals providing care and support to those experiencing mental ill health, acknowledging that there are often intersections with caring for people with disability, chronic illness, neurodiversity, or alcohol and other substance abuse.

We understand that not everyone identifies with the term 'carer' for various reasons. However, we promote the use of this terminology to align with existing beneficial frameworks associated with the title. Our scope extends to a diverse range of mental health carers, acknowledging the unique needs and perspectives that arise across different age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, and identities.

Principles

Mental health carers are central to MHCV's work

- 1 Mental health carers are at the core of MHCV's work, and their voices play a central role in shaping our initiatives. We operate on the principle that the insights, experiences, and needs of mental health carers inform every aspect of our advocacy and support efforts.

Decision-making is carer focused

- 2 Decision-making within MHCV is anchored in a carer-focused approach. We recognise that decisions made at every level of the organisation must start and end with carers, and we are committed to ensuring their perspectives guide our strategic and operational directions.

Mental health carer wellbeing is central

- 3 The wellbeing of mental health carers is at the core of all we do. Our strategies aim to address the psychological, financial, and social challenges faced by carers, prioritising their needs in every engagement activity and recognising the need for societal acknowledgment of their invaluable contributions.

Work is informed by lived experience and evidence-informed research

- 4 MHCV's work is shaped by both lived experiences and evidence-informed research. We value the unique insights that come from lived experience, through avenues such as APAG, while ensuring our advocacy and support efforts align with the latest research and best practices in the mental health sector.

Effective advocacy leads to reform

- 5 Our advocacy efforts are geared towards effecting positive reform in the mental health landscape. By actively engaging with policymakers, stakeholders, and the broader community, we strive to drive change that enhances the delivery of quality services in the ACT.

Approach



Fostering carer and sector partnership

1

MHCV actively engage with mental health carers, working in collaboration with the sector to translate carer needs and aspirations into practical changes. Our purpose is to give voice to carer perspectives in the spaces they feel unheard, influencing decisions that profoundly impact mental health carers.

Sector development

2

We work closely with and provide advice and support to the sector, aiming to enhance the quality, accessibility, and sustainability of services for mental health carers.

Research, advocacy, and leadership

3

Our role is to deeply understand what works best for mental health carers and translate this knowledge into policies and practices that drive better outcomes.

Underpinned by adaptive advocacy, our strategic approach harmonises with established principles and frameworks, notably the ACT Wellbeing Framework, the ACT Carers Strategy, and the *Carers Recognition Act 2021 (ACT)*. We recognise that mental health is influenced by a myriad of factors across various domains of life, including health, education, employment, and housing. By embracing a holistic view, we aim to address the multifaceted nature of care challenges faced by mental health carers in the ACT. Our commitment to the wellbeing framework ensures that our initiatives resonate with government-wide priorities, contributing to a Canberra where mental wellbeing thrives.

Additionally, we align with and endorse the *Carers Recognition Act (2021)*, which supports, recognises, and acknowledges the invaluable contributions of carers in ACT law. This comprehensive and integrated approach is vital to achieving our vision of an inclusive community that values and supports mental health carers.

Governance

Governance over the Strategic Plan is guided by a commitment to transparency, accountability, and adherence to the strategic plan, ensuring our actions align with our principles and approach to support and advocate for mental health carers in the ACT. As the contracting body, the ACT Government maintains oversight over the peak body's activities and ensures their alignment with desired outcomes. Each year, MHCV undertake a thorough review process to select internal workplan projects, ensuring they contribute effectively to our vision and strategic priorities. This process takes into consideration the ever-changing landscape and priority shifts within the mental health sector. Every activity listed in our plan comes with detailed measures of success, which are reviewed annually. Internally, the executive team approves and monitors MHCV's progress. Independent oversight on progress is conducted by APAG members, who receive regular updates on activities completed under each strategic priority ahead of meetings. Members also receive annual updates on progress made against success measures, reviewing any recalibration that may be needed in upcoming workplans. Alongside the work of the wider Policy and Advocacy team, Carers ACT Board oversee overall measures of success at the end of each Strategic Plan.



Strategic Priority 1

Enhancing recognition and support for mental health carers

Carers commonly express that their needs are often considered secondary to those of the individuals they care for in all aspects of life. They highlight the importance of services that are cognisant of the unique challenges faced by carers and their capacity when creating care plans. Carers often feel that both mental health professionals and the broader community have a limited understanding of their role, although there have been signs of improvement over the years.⁴¹ Carers report only **experiencing inclusion, respect, and communication with mental health services occasionally or approximately half the time in the last 2 years.**⁴² We know that recovery is better facilitated when carers are actively involved in the journey,⁴³ however carers have repeatedly reported that they feel excluded by services.

In response to the prevalent sentiment that mental health carers often feel invisible or disregarded within the community and service interactions, our strategic priority focuses on enhancing recognition and support for carers. Acknowledging the profound impact of invisibility on carers' wellbeing, we aim to foster acceptance of their integral role within the care team. This initiative extends beyond traditional settings, seeking to establish a more inclusive and supportive environment for mental health carers in all environments that they interact with. We recognise the necessity for a robust alliance between the service sector and mental health carers, working collaboratively to ensure that carers are both visible and receive the support they rightfully deserve.

Goal 1.1

Carers are seen, valued, and supported in their workplaces and education.

What this would look like for carers:

- Having a say in the choices that affect them.
- Having their needs met by the services they interact with.

What success would look like in the long term:

- A 5% increase in the number of carers who report feeling confident in having a say and being heard.
- A 20% increase in the number of carers reporting inclusion, respect, and communication with mental health services.

Goal 1.2

The *Carers Recognition Act 2021 (ACT)* is integrated into the mental health system, with mental health workers, clinicians, and GPs knowledgeable about carers and know how to support them.

How will we likely get there:

- Carer inclusive practices are embedded into the services that are regularly used by mental health carers.
- Carer awareness training is embedded into Governments' employment induction and learning platforms.
- Any new or amended public service policy or service provision considers the impact on carers through the development of a carer impact statement, particularly for services that are regularly used by mental health carers.

Strategic Priority 2

Improving the quantity and quality of carers' personal time.

Feedback from carers during consultations has emphasised the importance of having space and opportunity for relief. This could be through self-care, returning to education and work, socialising, or the ability to engage in routine activities that most Australians enjoy without the constant shadow of anxiety. The 2023 ACT Wellbeing measures revealed that **only 13% of carers feel they make high-quality use of their personal time, compared to 28.1% of the general population in Canberra.**⁴⁴ Additionally, Canberra's carers are disproportionately affected across various domains measured in the ACT Wellbeing Framework and report lower-than-average personal wellbeing.⁴⁵ As caring demands increased, higher struggles with general health and financial wellbeing are also significantly reported among carers.⁴⁶

Understanding the heightened stress and burnout experienced by mental health carers due to the demanding nature of their roles, our strategic priority is to actively work towards improving the quantity and quality of carers' personal time. Recognising that carers often sacrifice personal time, interests, and potential pursuits due to their caring responsibilities; we aim to advocate for avenues such as respite to provide them with essential relief.

'Respite' in this sense is not limited to a service, but an outcome that includes any form of support which gives carers a break from their caring role. By facilitating breaks from the caring roles, we hope to enable mental health carers to engage in self-care, pursue personal interests, and participate in education or employment opportunities that contribute to their overall wellbeing.

Goal 2.1

The ACT community and government have a comprehensive understanding of respite, with appropriate options made available for mental health carers.

Only 13% of carers feel like they make high-quality use of their personal time

What this would look like for carers:

- Having the choice to take part in nourishing activities.

What success would look like in the long term:

- A 7% increase in carers reporting high quality use of personal time, bridging the gap between carers and non-carers.

How we will likely get there:

- An increased range of opportunities for relief from the caring role is both available and taken up by mental health carers in the ACT.

Strategic Priority 3

Equipping mental health carers with capability and confidence.

We heard numerous stories from carers who often described their journey as one filled with feelings of helplessness and a sense of being lost. Carers expressed a need for a more unified and navigable system that would lessen their administrative load. Moreover, they shared feelings of guilt and shame, often exacerbated by systemic shortcomings. Carers indicated a strong desire for educational resources regarding mental health conditions, medication options, and best care pathways to reduce the time they spend on independent research. According to the 2021 National Carer Wellbeing survey, **almost half of carers were uncertain about how to best support the person they care for (49.1%), and a significant proportion (52.2%) regularly or always felt they should be doing more.**⁴⁷

In response to feedback revealing that mental health carers often feel ill-equipped and overwhelmed when navigating the mental health system, advocating for the people they care for, and tending to their own wellbeing, our strategic priority focuses on building capability and confidence. We are committed to improving access to information, education, and self-support services that enable carers in their roles. By providing resources and support mechanisms, we aim to enhance their knowledge, navigate the complexities of the mental health system, and foster a sense of confidence in their ability to care effectively for their loved ones while prioritising their own mental wellbeing.

Goal 3.1

Carers can comfortably and confidently navigate the mental health service system.

What this would look like for carers:

- Feeling empowered to direct the course of their caring role.
- Knowing where to turn to in times of crisis.
- Having the confidence to ask for the support they need.

Goal 3.2

Mental health carers have access to appropriate, timely, and quality training programs and information resources to support them in their caring role.

What success would look like in the long term:

- An increase in personal wellbeing scores over time, with a score closer to that of non-carers.
- A 10% decrease in carers reporting uncertainty about how to best support the person/people they care for.

Goal 3.3

Mental health carers access supports that enhance their own wellbeing.

How we will likely get there:

- Advocating for the availability of integrated and/or co-located.
- Navigation and advocacy resources that meet carer needs are effectively embedded into ACT mental health systems.
- The Foundational Supports system effectively includes carers needs, including appropriate modes of mental health education and training.

Strategic Priorities

1 Enhancing recognition and support for mental health carers

Goal 1.1 Carers are seen, valued, and supported in their workplaces and education

Goal 1.2 The *Carers Recognition Act 2021 (ACT)* is integrated into the mental health system, with mental health workers, clinicians, and GPs knowledgeable about carers and know how to support them.

What success would look like in the long term:

- A 5% increase in the number of carers who report feeling confident in having a say and being heard.
- A 20% increase in the number of carers reporting inclusion, respect, and communication with mental health services.

2 Improving the quantity and quality of carers' personal time.

Goal 2.1 The ACT community and government have a comprehensive understanding of respite, with appropriate options made available for mental health carers.

What success would look like in the long term:

- A 7% increase in carers reporting high quality use of personal time, bridging the gap between carers and non-carers.

3 Equipping mental health carers with capability and confidence.

Goal 3.1 Carers can comfortably and confidently navigate the mental health service system.

Goal 3.2 Mental health carers have access to appropriate, timely, and quality training programs and information resources to support them in their caring role.

Goal 3.3 Mental health carers access supports that enhance their own wellbeing.

What success would look like in the long term:

- A 5% increase in the number of carers who report feeling confident in having a say and being heard.
- A 20% increase in the number of carers reporting inclusion, respect, and communication with mental health services.



Key Stakeholders



Carers - Keeping carers at the centre of everything we do guides the voice of systemic advocacy and shapes our strategic direction.

ACT Government - Our collaboration with various Directorates and Offices allows us to contribute to the multi-sectoral approach to mental health, ensuring coordinated efforts and effective policy implementation.

Canberra Health Services (CHS) - Upholding our close working relationship with MHJHADS (Mental Health, Justice Health, Alcohol and Drug Services) and extending our support to Carers ACT's advocacy across all spaces within CHS facilitates seamless care for mental health carers.

ACT Peaks - Maintaining our collaborative alliances with organisations such as the Health Care Consumer Association (HCCA), Mental Health Consumer Network (MHCN), and Mental Health Community Coalition (MHCC) enables us to collectively advocate for the enhancement of mental health services and amplify the voices of mental health carers and consumers.

ACT Community Sector Partners - Being valued collaborators, we partner with service delivery to ensure mental health carers interact with best practices, fostering supportive environments and tailored services to meet their needs effectively.

Research Partners - Our ongoing support for research and development across various spaces, including the National Carers Network, University of Canberra, and ANU's ACACIA, promotes the establishment of a robust foundation of knowledge - identifying gaps, strengthening policy positions with data, and guiding best practices in carer support and mental health care.

ACT Human Rights Commission - We continue to value their role in setting benchmarks and standards, monitoring issues and providing pathways for us to understand and address rising concerns in matters of human rights and equality that impact carers.

Capital Health Network - Our collaborative partnership lets us work in tandem to ensure optimal commissioning outcomes and integrated, easy-to-navigate service design for mental health carers, enhancing access to quality care and support.

National Advocacy Bodies - Our strategic partnership with national bodies like Carers Australia and Mental Health Australia continues to shed light on ACT specific carer issues on the national arena, ensuring their concerns are heard and addressed at the federal level.

Federal Government - Active engagement with key influencers enables us to advocate in areas crucial to mental health carers, including leave policies, superannuation, and the development of a National Carer Strategy, ensuring the broader landscape of carer support and recognition is shaped effectively.

End notes

- 1** "National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing," *Australian Bureau of Statistics*, publication July 2022 (accessed October 2023), [National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing, 2020–21 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#).
- 2** World Health Organization, *Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2030*, (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2021), 2–3, [9789240031029-eng.pdf \(who.int\)](#).
- 3** "Regional population," *Australian Bureau of Statistics*, publication March 2024 (accessed November 2023), <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/latest-release#states-and-territories>.
- 4** Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Admitted patient care 2019–20 How much activity was there? Table S2.2: Separations, by state or territory of usual residence, public and private hospitals, states and territories*, (Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021), <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/myhospitals/sectors/admitted-patients>.
- 5** ACT Health Directorate, *ACT Chief Health Officer's Report 2020 Healthy People*, (Canberra: Government of the Australian Capital Territory, 2020), 2, https://health.act.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-05/Healthy%20People_CHO%20report%202021_4%20%20page.pdf.
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