

**Have your say!**



# Action Kit



**For carers in the ACT**



### **Action Kit**

- This Action Kit assists with self and group advocacy when approaching MEDIA, POLITICIANS – all levels and parties and SERVICES
- This Action Kit assists anyone who is a carer to access a broader voice for: MEDIA, POLITICIANS – all levels and parties and SERVICES
- This Action Kit provides step by step suggestions on how to communicate with: MEDIA, POLITICIANS – all levels and parties and SERVICES
- This Action Kit guides you with sample letters to: MEDIA, POLITICIANS – all levels and parties and SERVICES
- This Action Kit provides references for complaints to: MEDIA, POLITICIANS – all levels and parties and SERVICES
- This Action Kit explores ways you can access INTERNET facilities
- This Action Kit gives a simple explanation of SOCIAL MEDIA and its components
- This Action Kit provides a comprehensive FACTSHEET for you to reference to back up your statements and issues.

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## **Definition of a carer:**

A carer provides unpaid care and support to family members or friends who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition, terminal illness, or who are frail aged or are drug or alcohol dependent. In the ACT there are an estimated 43,000 carers.

# About this Action Kit

**Carers ACT is a member based community organisation and supports around 7,500 caring families in the ACT. We are the only family carer-centred focussed service provider in the ACT.**

## **Mission**

We campaign with and for carers to advocate for the changes they need. We help carers connect to services and supports that meet their needs and the needs of the people they care for.

## **Our Vision**

An Australia that values and supports carers (and the people they care for).

## **Message from Carers ACT CEO, Dee McGrath**

Carers ACT is constitutionally mandated to represent the views and concerns with and for carers. We constantly engage with carers in all aspects of our work and are governed by a committed and skilled board of directors – mostly family carers themselves.

Carers ACT has observed committed change and improved outcomes for carers over the years and this is due to persistent lobbying and strong advocacy from community organisations and individuals. However the increase of carer issues in the media and social media and evidence of a growing carer population has highlighted the need for further action.

We appreciate Carers Victoria's permission to adapt their Action Kit, which was developed in consultation with many carers. This kit is to assist members of Carers ACT and members of the public to channel carer concerns to: politicians, media and services. Navigating these three avenues can at times be a confusing maze and this Action Kit provides practical tips and suggestions to assist with the process.

Carers ACT understands that often the role of caring is demanding and frustrating and we encourage you to seek support from Carers ACT through membership and the diverse services we offer like this Action Kit.



Dee McGrath

# Working with the media

The media encompasses publications like: newspapers, magazines, news sites on the internet, television news and current affairs, radio news various shows and applications such as social media Twitter, blogs, Facebook and Youtube.

People usually contact the media to:

- Raise public awareness about a particular issue
- Influence or comment on organisations or individuals
- Publicise an event.

## What is “news”?

The media report items which are current, informative or entertaining. These items are “news”.

Getting your story in the media means making a journalist see that your story is “news”. Here are some different ways carer stories can be “news”:

- **Reactive stories.** This is when carers are already in the news. For example, if the government cut the Carer Payment, the media would approach carers directly
- **Piggyback stories.** This is when carers take advantage of existing news events. For example, if a famous person dies after a long illness, carers could ring up a talk back show and explain what long term caring is like
- **Proactive stories.** If no “real” news has occurred, carers can make their own news. A perfect example is Carers Week. It has been organised to recognise carers and generate publicity. It provides the media with a reason to write about carers. Other examples include community arts projects and demonstrations.

## How to get in the news

People can contact the media with a media alert (for an up and coming event) or media release or an email/letter or by phoning the reporter, journalist or news department directly.

Please see guide sample media release and letter to the editor in this kit.

Your carer issue should be brief and explain:

- What you have to say
- Why you are saying it, and
- Where you can be contacted.

It is important to be aware of the different media deadlines:

- Print – late in the day for a daily morning newspaper
- Radio – news is broadcast throughout the day. Morning news is the most important because it has the most listeners. Interviews may be done “live to air”, but are usually done about 15 minutes before each bulletin
- TV – unless there is a major incident, interviews and recordings will be completed by 2.00pm for the evening news
- Magazines – getting a story covered can take from a few weeks up to six months.

Ideally allow four months to try and get your story in a magazine.

## Letters to the editor

Letters to the editor are an important way for you to voice your opinion to the public, correct an inaccurate article or raise awareness about an issue.

To get your story in the media you need to make a journalist see that your story in “news”.

Make a list of your three major points before the interview and repeat them.

### **The interview—Radio, TV or internet media**

If you are granted television or radio time for an interview, there are several protocols to follow.

You may be given a few minutes to communicate your message so make a list of your three major points before the interview and repeat them frequently. Try to think of a “call to action”, so listeners will know what to do next.

In addition:

- Be polite, saying “good morning” and “thank you” is highly regarded
- Ask the journalist how long you will be interviewed for; who else will be interviewed and the ‘angle’ of the story
- Think about the questions you might be asked and how to respond to these questions to make your key points
- Nothing is off the record. Do not tell the media anything you would not wish to make public
- Try not to use jargon or acronyms that most people would not know, such as “ACAT”, “HACC” etc.
- Do not be discouraged if your story is dropped at the last minute. It may be included the next time and the journalist now knows you.

Appearing on screen:

- If appearing on television or video, wear neat plain clothing. It is not recommended to wear red or patterned fabric, dark sunglasses or dangly earrings. Keep eye contact with the reporter and try not look at the camera.

### **Talk-back radio**

Politicians and policy makers closely monitor talk-back radio. You can get involved by calling in and expressing your concerns.

You may only get a short time to talk – about 30 seconds to two minutes, so you will need to be prepared.

Remember:

- Familiarise yourself with the types of callers on the show, and the show's style
- Prepare your key message in advance
- Expect long delays before you get put on air
- Increase your chance of getting on air by being polite and open when questioned by the operator.

If you do not feel confident enough to speak on live radio, you may still be able to express your concerns. For example on ABC 666: phone 1300 681 666, send 666 ABC Canberra a text message via SMS on 0467 922 666, or email them here: [www.abc.net.au/canberra/contact](http://www.abc.net.au/canberra/contact)

### **Media training**

Carers ACT Communications Team can advise you on some basic media training and have contacts of professional media trainers. For assistance in contacting the media call Carers ACT on 02 6296 9900, or email: [carers@carersact.org.au](mailto:carers@carersact.org.au)

# Sample media release

This sample letter below is a guide only. It is an example media release that you can use to advise media of news, events or an issue. You may wish to view a Carers ACT media release: [www.carersact.org.au](http://www.carersact.org.au) then click on News & Events.

Your name or name of group/organisation etc

Telephone/Email

Date

logo

## Media Release

Embargoed until midnight 30 June 2012  
(This tells the publishers when you want the released issued)

**Title: Something concise and relevant eg ACT Carers crisis complicated**

Introduce the issue

Body: include one or two comments from key people wishing to be quoted and any relevant research/statistics

Summary: include your preferred resolution

Contact: Name and phone/mobile (media will use this contact so make sure you are able to answer the phone)

Include a logo for your group in here. If you don't have a logo, type your name in a strong font.

Write "Media Release" and date it. Put "For Immediate Release", or "Embargoed until ... (date and time)" so that the release will be printed at the appropriate time. Then add a short, catchy title about five words long.

Make your strongest point in the first paragraph and one sentence per line for the rest of the release.

Use quotes from your spokesperson containing your key messages, which the media can use directly.

Use wide margins and double spacing in the media release so that it is easy to read.

Keep the release to one page only. If you have additional information, attach it to a "factsheet" on a separate page.

End the release with contact details of two people (if possible) and after-hours phone numbers.

# Letters to the editor

This sample letter below is a guide only. Letters/emails to the editor of a publication (printed or on the internet), follow protocols. The Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) provides rules and tips for submitting letters. Only a limited number of letters are published daily and the SMH support page: [www.smh.com.au/support](http://www.smh.com.au/support) gives you an idea of the specifics. Carers ACT can also assist you with writing a letter to a publication. This sample below is using the SMH guidelines, max 200 words.

Sydney Morning Herald: If you work for an organisation, belong to a political party (especially at election times), have academic links or any affiliation that may be remotely connected to the subject matter of your letter, please tell us.

Your full name (This may be published)

Home address (Full address will not be published, just suburb)

Day and evening phone numbers (These will not be published)

Dear Editor

Your letter will have a better chance if it refers to a story in the paper or on the website, or a previous letter.

I refer to letter in SMH (Letters, Sunday, June 24) from Ms Giles in Kambah who says older carers in the ACT are worse off. I am 78 and have cared for my 80 year old husband for the last four years with little to no support and recently I have been diagnosed with early dementia.

The middle paragraph deals with the issue of your letter.

It is very distressing to be an older carer living off basic payments and now having to deal with my own dementia, I am wondering who will look after my husband and me? Surely the territory government needs to provide more wisely for these common circumstances.

Check the word limit and specifications for each publication or it will not be published.

As someone who worked in Australia for 40 years as a teacher and paid my taxes, older carers need special allowances and support.

Yours sincerely

Mary Johnson

Keep a copy of your letter.

# Influencing politicians

## **Contacting a relevant political leader with your issue can result in change.**

**Level of government** – There are three levels of government in Australia: federal, state/territory and local. Different levels of government are responsible for governing and administering different matters.

**Federal government** – The Department of Health and Ageing ([www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)) which includes aged care ([www.agedcareaustralia.gov.au](http://www.agedcareaustralia.gov.au)) and mental health. Some other government departments such as FaHCSIA cover some health reform activities such as Disability and Carers ([www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/overview](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/overview)).

**Territory government** – In Canberra, the ACT Health Directorate ([www.health.act.gov.au](http://www.health.act.gov.au)) looks after health issues, and the Community Services Directorate ([www.dhcs.act.gov.au](http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au)), which includes these departments: Community Services, Children and Family Services, Housing Services, Housing Services and Disability Services.

Before approaching a department:

- Pinpoint your issue/s
- Research your issue
- Have a summary sheet
- Gather information and support
- Ask how would you solve your issue?
- Try to be assertive not aggressive
- Be willing to agree to disagree
- Have a plan B.

The ACT Legislative Assembly has fact sheets that explain the political system: Legislative Assembly factsheets:  
[www.parliament.act.gov.au/education/factsheets.asp](http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/education/factsheets.asp).

**Write a letter** – This is a very effective way of presenting your concerns to politicians. You may wish to write the letter as an individual or with members of your carer group, who can write similar letters to politicians. A sample letter to a politician can be found in this kit.

## **Meeting with a politician**

Politicians often visit shopping centres and schools and this is often advertised in local newspapers and flyers. They are also active in attending committee meetings in local venues for groups who have raised issues and invited the politician to speak.

If you have an appointment with a politician make sure you bring your paperwork to back up your issues and consider having someone accompany you. The session will be approximately 15 minutes.

## **Other avenues**

Politicians also have advisors and assistants that provide valuable feedback and input. If the politician you wish to speak to is unavailable you may be able to speak to their staff members who can also assist.

You might wish to contact other carers you know to see if they have met a politician. Or contact Carers ACT who may be able to assist with your issue:

Call Carers ACT on 02 6296 9900,  
or email: [carers@carersact.org.au](mailto:carers@carersact.org.au)

# Sample letter to politicians

This sample letter below is a guide only. Politicians like any person working fulltime are busy people so don't expect an immediate response to your letter. However, they usually respond within two to four weeks. If no one responds, give them a follow up phone call and refer to your correspondence.

Provide full details so they can respond to you.

Your full name  
Home address  
Day and evening phone numbers  
Date

Dear Minister

## **Urgent request for increase in older carer assistance**

If the subject matter is not relevant to the minister the person opening your mail or email may not forward your letter on.

I am very distressed. I am a 74 year old carer who looks after my husband who has multiple disabilities. We live off basic payments and I have been recently assessed as having early dementia. I am wondering who will look after my husband and me? Surely the ACT government needs to provide more wisely for these common circumstances.

Like many who have said before me, and as someone who has worked in Australia for 40 years as a teacher and paid my taxes, older carers and pensioners need special allowances and support.

Invite the politician to meet with you.

I would be happy to discuss my situation with you.

Keep a copy of your letter.

Yours sincerely

Mary Johnson

Carer

# Services and complaints

**As a carer you will most likely use many services for yourself and the person you care for.**

There are many ways you can help improve a service, such as through verbal feedback, attending consumer committees etc. You can also make a complaint. Well functioning services welcome complaints so they can improve the way they operate.

## Your rights and complaints

As a service user you have rights and responsibilities. Check with the service for a full list of your rights and responsibilities.

Some rights related to complaints include the right:

- To complain about any aspect of a service
- To be provided with information on how you can complain
- To have your complaint dealt with fairly and promptly
- To be informed of the outcome of your complaint.

## Reasons you may complain

If you feel you have the right to complain it is important to respond as quickly as possible. Do not feel tempted to “put up” with your dissatisfaction for fear of losing the service.

You may complain because:

- You have received poor quality service
- You have been treated unfairly or inappropriately by a worker, service or government department
- A service or government department has been unhelpful
- You have been discriminated against on the basis of your religion, culture, gender, marital status, geographical location or ability to pay
- You were refused a service without an explanation

- You refused a service in the past and believe that this is now being ‘held’ against you
- You had to wait for the service and were not informed of the need to wait
- You did not get what you thought you had paid for or what was in your service agreement.

## What you might receive:

- An apology
- A reduction in fees or a refund
- Another service
- Service improvement
- Compensation.

## Types of complaints:

- Formal – this is a complaint that follows a procedure, either within the service or by an independent body (see Useful contacts). It is usually in writing and given to a person in a position of authority
- Informal – this is a complaint that is “off the record”. It is not governed by any set procedures. For example, if your home care worker did something you were not happy with you may request that they not do the same in future.

## When to use a formal or informal complaint

It depends on the situation. If someone made a simple error or could do things better, then an informal complaint will suffice. However, if the situation does not improve you may decide to make a formal complaint.

Sometimes it is best to make a formal complaint, for example when:

- You feel intimidated by the person and feel they have more power than you or will not listen
- The complaint is serious
- You feel things will only change if you make a formal complaint.

### Who to complain to

You can complain to a number of people within a service including the coordinator of the program, or director of the service. Deciding on whom to complain to depends on how serious the complaint is and who is in the best position to respond to your complaint.

If you are complaining about a service internally you may also have the right to complain to an independent body. You may even decide to complain about the service to your local member of the ACT Legislative Assembly.

### Complaints path

- 1 If you have concerns about a service or worker, speak to the worker directly expressing how you feel. Most times problems can be resolved at this level. Document your concerns for example when you spoke to the worker and what you spoke about.
- 2 If the situation does not improve and you still have concerns speak to the service manager or coordinator.
- 3 If the situation still does not improve write to the head office of the service.
- 4 If you are still not satisfied you can make an appointment with your local government minister.

### ACT Carer Advocacy Program

[www.carersact.org.au/programs/carers-advocacy-program](http://www.carersact.org.au/programs/carers-advocacy-program)

The Carer Advocacy Program provides individual and family advocacy on a one-to-one basis to resolve difficult or complex matters on negotiating the complexity and bureaucracy of service systems, and concerns relating to the caring role. Carers will also be supported to develop the skills to self advocate where appropriate.

### How to access this service

Ring the Carer Advisory number on 1800 242 636.

### Useful contacts

#### Commonwealth Ombudsman

[www.ombudsman.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au) for complaints about government departments and authorities.

**Enquires** Monday to Friday 9am–5pm (AEST)

**Phone** 1300 362 072 (calls from mobile phones at mobile phone rates)

**Email** [ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au](mailto:ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au)

**Fax** 02 6276 0123

**SMS** 0413 266 662 (standard carrier rates apply)

**Postal** GPO Box 442, Canberra ACT 2601

#### ACT Ombudsman

[www.ombudsman.act.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.act.gov.au) for complaints about territory government departments and authorities.

**Enquires** Monday to Friday 9am–5pm (AEST)

**Phone** 1300 362 072 (calls from mobile phones at mobile phone rates)

**Email** [ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au](mailto:ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au)

**Fax** 02 6276 0123

**SMS** 0413 COM OMB (0413 266 662) (standard carrier rates apply)

**Postal** GPO Box 442, Canberra ACT 2601

#### Public Advocate of the ACT

[www.ombudsman.act.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.act.gov.au)

**Phone** 02 6207 0707

**Fax** 02 6207 0688

**Email** [pa@act.gov.au](mailto:pa@act.gov.au)

#### ACT Human Rights Commission

[www.hrc.act.gov.au](http://www.hrc.act.gov.au)

To make a complaint [www.hrc.act.gov.au](http://www.hrc.act.gov.au) then click on Make a complaint under Quick Links

**Phone** 02 6205 2222

**Email** [human.rights@act.gov.au](mailto:human.rights@act.gov.au)

# Sample letter of complaint

This sample letter below is a guide only.

<p>Your full name</p> <p>Home address</p> <p>Day and evening phone numbers</p> <p>Service name</p> <p>Service address</p> <p>Date</p>	<p>← Try to send the complaint out soon after the incident.</p>
<p>Dear service provider or name of director, manager etc.</p> <p>I am writing to complain about the removal of my respite service and the way it was handled.</p> <p>Between March 1 and 4, I received three “occasions” of respite. I was very happy with the service provided. I was scheduled to receive another occasion of respite on March 7, but the worker did not show up.</p> <p>I rang your service after waiting for the worker for an hour and was informed that nobody was being sent, as the previous worker had lodged a report stating that there were OH&amp;S concerns in my home.</p> <p>I was extremely upset at this news as nobody had informed me of this change of plan and I was unaware of any OH&amp;S problem in my home. When I asked what I was supposed to do I was told that there was nothing your service could do.</p> <p>I believe I should have been informed of the OH&amp;S concerns so that I had the option of attempting to resolve them, rather than losing the service. I attempted to contact you, as the service director, but was confronted continually with an answering machine and you did not return my calls.</p> <p>I have found this experience extremely stressful. I would like a clear explanation of what the OH&amp;S concerns are, an apology for the way I have been treated, and a commitment from the service that they will not pull planned respite from myself or other carers in the future without a sound, substantiated reason and advanced notification.</p>	<p>← Complaint in the first sentence.</p> <p>← Specific information helps.</p>
<p>Yours sincerely</p> <p>Ray Johnson</p>	<p>Give the service a month to respond then you may wish to formally complain through government agencies.</p> <p>Keep a copy of your letter.</p>

# Using the internet

**By now you or someone you know uses the internet. The internet is like a huge interactive electronic library and information tool that can assist you in many ways.**

Internet connection is through an electronic device such as a computer, laptop and mobile phone that is then connected to an internet service provider.

You can access free devices and internet service provision through your local library or maybe a carers group such as the Carers ACT Hub. If you already have a device you should be able to use the internet where there is a free wireless network service.

Paying for internet usage is like paying for electricity. There are internet cafes in the city or in CIT or universities and you pay for the use of their device and the internet connection. If you require internet connection at home there are many providers to choose from (like phone companies) and they can give you their fee structure.

## Training

If you are totally unfamiliar with using an electronic device and the internet you may need to get some IT training to familiarise yourself in the basics. Family and friends can assist, or other carers, and short courses are available through community services.

### You can use the internet to:

- Set up an email account and send and receive emails (electronic mail) from family, friends, politicians, media and services
- Research illnesses, conditions and medication effects
- Obtain government reports on a variety of issues
- Respond to requests for submissions from government and policy makers
- Establish contact with internet support groups.

## Internet sites

Internet sites are like a house with the home page (usually the first page you see) and then tabs and links you can click on like going into different rooms. For example the Carers ACT website has an address: [www.carersact.org.au](http://www.carersact.org.au) when you click on the address you are taken to the home page. There you will see an abundant amount of information that you can read, see, click on and use.

## The internet and disabilities

Often internet sites have resources for people with disabilities such as voice recognition if you are unable to see or read. For example if you go onto the federal internet site - Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs: [www.fahcisa.gov.au](http://www.fahcisa.gov.au) then click on Our Responsibilities and there is a 'Listen' tab.

## Internet safety

Young carers may wish to access social networking sites such as Facebook. While Facebook is an extremely popular platform for sharing and responding with other young carers, friends and family members it is also an area of vulnerability.

People of all ages need to be aware of how to practice internet/online safety. This government website called Cybersmart ([www.cybersmart.gov.au](http://www.cybersmart.gov.au)) provides a variety of information for internet users.

## What is social media?

Social media refers to internet applications such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs and videos. They are used by anyone to inform, teach, chat and share.

Each application has processes to follow. Twitter for example will only allow 140 characters in each posting. One of the best ways to learn how to use each new application is to read their help section.

# Carers and the facts

There are over **43,000 carers in the ACT**. Overwhelmingly, families carry the caring responsibility in the community, providing support and assistance to their family members or friends.

Family carers support loved ones who may have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition, terminal illness or who are frail aged. Carers are diverse and include young carers, Indigenous carers, ageing carers and carers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Carers are most likely to care for their spouse or partner (45%), a parent (23%), or a child (22%).<sup>1</sup>

According to Access Economics, **carers provide 1.32 billion hours of unpaid care every year**. The replacement value of this informal care is valued at \$40 billion each year.<sup>2</sup>

The work that carers do is vital to the wellbeing of others and the broader community. The **number of carers available to provide care to family or friends is decreasing**, but the **economic value of their care is substantial and is increasing**.<sup>3</sup>

**However, it often takes its toll**. Carers have the **lowest wellbeing** of any population group researched in Australia<sup>4</sup> and many **carers feel socially isolated** because of their caring role.<sup>5</sup>

Carers also have a **higher rate of disability or long-term health conditions** than people who are not carers.<sup>6</sup> Carers are at risk of developing mental illness, and have higher levels of distress than people who are not carers.<sup>7</sup>

**Carers are also less likely to be in the paid workforce** than those who are not carers (40% of primary carers are employed compared to 66% of the population who are not carers).<sup>8</sup> This means **carers and their families are often some of the poorest families in Australia**.

**Carers need appropriate respite and community services to maintain their own health and wellbeing so they can continue their caring role.**<sup>9</sup>

Carers, people with a disability or mental illness also need information about what community services are available. Many carers have difficulty navigating the health and disability systems and need relevant information about the availability of services. With the introduction of individually funded care packages changes, carers and people with a disability will need support and training to take full advantage of reforms to the system.

## About Carers ACT

Carers ACT represents the voice of carers to government and the wider community. Carers ACT provides direct support to over 7,500 families through our counselling, information, respite support, education, social support and case coordination services.

We are a non government, not for profit association and rely on public and private sector support to fulfil our mission **to campaign with and for carers to ensure their views are heard by opinion leaders so that their lives can change for the better**.

## Carers ACT

Web	<a href="http://www.carersact.org.au">www.carersact.org.au</a>
Email	<a href="mailto:carers@carersact.org.au">carers@carersact.org.au</a>
Phone	02 6296 9900
Twitter	@CarersACT
Facebook:	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/CarersACT">www.facebook.com/CarersACT</a>
Address	2/80 Beaufort Crescent Holt ACT 2615

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