

Family and Carers

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Who is a carer?

In this context, a carer is a person (often a family member or friend) who cares for the needs of an individual living with a mental illness by providing various types of support. This support may include:

- emotional and social support,
- physical supports,
- financial support,
- providing a safe home,
- transportation, and
- supporting their mental health

Carers perform one of the most important roles in the life of someone suffering a mental illness. Most carers take on their role out of love and compassion for the person they are caring for.

Many carers juggle more than just the role of carer, including holding down a job and providing for other family members such as children or elderly parents.

While being a carer is rewarding, it can also be overwhelming and feelings like frustration, resentment, exhaustion, sadness and even anger are common.

If you are a carer and you experience any of these feelings, they do not mean you care any less for the individual - so don't be hard on yourself. It is important to recognise your limitations, put boundaries in place and seek help and support when needed.

In order to effectively care for someone else, you must first care for yourself.

Some tips for carers:

- Remember to eat well, get the right amount of sleep and make time for regular exercise.
- Try to take regular breaks from being a carer and do something you enjoy, just for you.

- Stay connected to friends and family to prevent social isolation.
- Establish realistic physical, emotional and financial boundaries around the caring role.
- Support is available and it's a good idea to get as much help as you can as early as possible.
- Remember to build and maintain your identity outside of your caring role. Be a student, an employee, a team mate and keep up with friends.
- Don't forget to talk about and do things with the person you care for which do not revolve around mental illness. This will help keep your relationship with the person balanced and interesting.

Encourage and foster self-determination

Mental illness can be disempowering. Encourage the person you are caring for to do what they can for themselves to help maintain and increase their independence. This will help create positive self-esteem and help support life skills.

Nominate person

When someone is under a compulsory treatment order they are entitled to nominate a person to help support them, represent their interest, rights and receive information about their condition and treatment. Often this person is the individual's main carer or closest family member. See you [mental health rights](#) on this website for more information or read the information in the link below.

<https://www.imha.vic.gov.au/search?query=Nominated+Persons>

Independent Mental Health Advocacy (to help support mental health consumers to understand and advocate for their rights) www.imha.vic.gov.au 1300 974 820

Have mental health and recovery plan

- have a discussion with the person you are caring for and try together to build a mental health crisis and a wellness/ recovery plan. Having a plan that where you both understand the needs and desires for the person you are caring for, as well as what support you are prepared to offer or who else can help, can be very useful in avoiding conflict, fostering self-determination on the part of the person you are caring for and avoid unwanted results and better outcomes.
- it is also important that health care providers are aware of the mental health and recovery plan.
- it is often helpful that everyone involved has a copy of the plan or at least the parts that are relevant to their involvement.
- see the tab 'Taking an active role in your own wellness and recovery' for more information.

Support for carers

The Carer's Recognition Act 2012 formally recognises and values the role of carers and the importance of care relationships in the Victorian community.

For more information on the Carers Recognition Act visit www.dhs.vic.gov.au/carersact

Carer's allowance and/or payment

As a carer you may be entitled to financial assistance. Visit your local Centrelink branch or look on line at www.centrelink.gov.au

Carers card

The Carer Card Program is collaboration between the Victorian Government, businesses and the community and is designed to give recognition, understanding and support to Victorian carers.

The program has a wide range of discounts and benefits on offer including free travel on public transport on a Sunday plus two return off-peak travel vouchers each year. See www.carercard.vic.gov.au for more information

Respite

Respite is a planned and temporary break for the carer, often provided by community service organisations. Respite can be a few hours a week, overnight, or up to a few weeks. Respite can take several forms such as in-home support, day centres and out-of-home breaks (see Helpful Links below for organisation that may be able to offer you Respite).

Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres 1800 059 059

Carer vocational support

One-to-one support is available to help carers prepare for, engage, make changes to, or maintain in study or work. If you are interested contact a support agency. Ermha Carer Vocational Support Services 1300 242 421 www.ermha.org

Are you a young person in a caring role?

It is estimated that there are over 388,000 young people in Australia helping to care for a person suffering from mental illness or other disability. This means that 1 in 10 young people in Australia are carers.

Many young carers do not see themselves as a carer, they simple consider caring for a family member as doing their part. Caring for someone is a valuable role, but it is also important to get the support you need to ensure that your emotional, physical and mental health is maintained and that you can continue to engage in your own life activities to meet your goals and milestones.

Helpful links

Copmi Children of Parents with a Mental Illness www.copmi.net.au

Young Carers 1800 242 636 www.youngcarers.net.au

Important laws and legislation

Privacy and confidentiality laws may prevent you from receiving or being invited to provide information about the person you are caring for. The person you are caring for can give consent for you to access information and allow you to provide more input. Talk with the person you are caring for and their health care providers as well as familiarising yourself with the relevant legislation.

National Disability Insurance Scheme Victoria

<https://myplace.ndis.gov.au/ndisstorefront/about-us/our-sites/vic.html>

Carers Recognition Act www.dhs.vic.gov.au/carersact

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) information for carers

https://mhaustralia.org/sites/default/files/docs/mha04022_guide_proof_151009-1335.pdf

Helpful links

For regional services near to you, please use the [Directory](#) or [Service Finder Navigational Tool](#) on this website.

Alfred Health Carer Services 1800 052 222 www.carersouth.org.au (Carer Support and 24 hour Respite)

Australian Red Cross 1800 131 701 www.redcross.org.au

Beyond Blue 'Guide for Carers' 1300 224 636 www.beyondblue.org.au

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence (03) 9438 1183 www.bsl.org.au

Care Connect 1800 116 166 www.careconnect.org.au

Carer Gateway (a national online and phone service that provides practical information and resources, including an interactive local support service finder) Ph: 1800 422 737 www.carergateway.gov.au/#/

Carers Victoria 1800 242 636 www.carersvictoria.org.au

Children of Parents with a Mental Illness (COPMI) www.copmi.net.au

Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres 1800 059 059

Every Australian Counts www.everyaustraliancounts.com.au

Grow Support Groups Ph: 1800 558 268 www.grow.org.au

HelpGuide www.HelpGuide.org

Independent Mental Health Advocacy (to help support mental health consumers to understand and advocate for their rights) www.imha.vic.gov.au 1300 974 820

Life Assist 1300 277 478 www.lifeassist.org.au/carer-wellbeing?gclid=CLeQtjiX5sgCFQyZvAod2GMArg

Wellways 1300 111 400 www.wellways.org Helpline 1300 111 500

Our Consumer Place (A resource centre for mental health consumer developed initiatives) www.ourconsumerplace.com.au

Tandem carers (03) 8803 5555 www.tandemcarers.org.au

The Department of Health (Federal Government Department): 'Rights and Responsibilities of Carers and Advocates' 1800 020 103 www.health.gov.au

The Department of Health, Victoria (State Government Department): 'The Mental Health Act (2014)' and 'The Health Records Act (2001)' www.health.vic.gov.au

Young Carers 1800 242 636 www.youngcarers.net.au

Source URL: <https://mentalhealthcompass.com.au/mhis/family-and-carers>