

SUBMISSION

Not For Profit Sector Development Blueprint

Submission Title:	Not For Profit Sector Development Blueprint
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CARERS QUEENSLAND

The activity and impact of providing care is best understood in terms of its context; as a relationship between two or more individuals, rooted in family, friendship, or community. Caring is a role rarely chosen by most, nor does it discriminate. Children and young people, people of working age and older people, people with disability, people who identify as culturally and linguistically diverse, First Nations Australians, people with diverse bodies, genders, relationships, and sexualities and those living in rural and remote Queensland provide care to family members or friends daily. For some caring is a short-term commitment while for others, it is a role that literally lasts a lifetime.

Family and friend carers provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who have a disability, mental illness, chronic medical condition, terminal illness or are frail aged. Carers come from all walks of life.

Carers Queensland is the peak body representing the diverse concerns, needs and interests of caring families in Queensland. Carers Queensland believes that all carers regardless of their age, disability, gender or gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, geographical location, or their cultural and linguistic differences should have the same rights, choices and opportunities and be able to enjoy optimum health, social and economic wellbeing and participate in family and community life, employment, and education like other citizens. Carers Queensland's mission is to improve the quality of life of all carers throughout Queensland.

We aspire to provide an independent platform from which to advance the issues and concerns of the 533,200 carers in Queensland and believe our knowledge and expertise in carer issues means we can provide the Government with relevant and trusted information that will ensure that the needs of carers will be recognised, respected, and acted on.

Our submission is informed by national and international peer reviewed data, our own experience as a service provider and the personal and often difficult admissions of carers, those people who provide unpaid care and support.

Introduction

Carers Queensland welcomes the Government's review of the not-for-profit sector and make the following comments in support of the national discussion and for the improvement of the sector over the next ten years.

Discussion

The Not-for-Profit Sector in Australia

Carers Queensland supports the need for a ten-year vision and plan for the not-for-profit sector in Australia. We believe that the entirety of the sector does not receive the funding, value, or respect it deserves but rather that value depends upon the type of organisation and its intended recipients. We would like to advocate for the establishment and a whole of sector agreement on the underlying principles which underpin the not-for-profit sector. We believe having a base set of principles for all not-for-profit organisations would increase the visibility and value of the sector.

Carers Queensland contends that specialist knowledge of the sector is underutilized by Government and industry who fail to capitalise the significant wealth and breadth of subject matter expertise. For over a quarter of a century the not-for-profit sector has delivered, on behalf of government, essential services across urban, regional, and remote Australia, and has amassed a wealth of knowledge and expertise on service delivery development and implementation to support the sustainable social and financial inclusion of Australia's growing vulnerable population cohorts. Carers Queensland believes that the sector should be a genuine partner in social policy, service development, delivery, and evaluation. As the peak body representing informal carers in Queensland, we have often experienced policy changes which impact carers, both at the State and Federal level but have not received any attempt at consultation either with us or our service users. As a result of this, the policies have often had unintended negative consequences for our service users. We assert that, when functioning as a collaborative network underpinned by a common cause rather than a competitive edge, the not-for-profit sector can create a roadmap to achieve a closer relationship with government for the betterment of the vulnerable population cohorts we serve.

Carers Queensland is committed to delivering services that are person-centred, culturally safe, and trauma-aware and that are informed by critical self-reflection, service user feedback and service evaluation. We appreciate, however, that many not for profits are insufficiently resourced to establish and implement quality governance frameworks. To support the sector to grow and our service users to thrive, Carers Queensland recommends the establishment of standardised set of governance standards, which, when fully implemented ensure a consistency of service delivery for service users irrespective of locality and circumstances and comparative analysis and longer-term improvement. We believe there should be a minimum expectation that all not for profit organisations are culturally safe, trauma informed, and operate for a person-centred strengths-based approach.

Policy, advocacy, communications, and engagement

Systemic advocacy is an essential and valuable function of the not-for-profit sector. Representing those who are often electorally marginalised, not for profit organisations have an obligation to speak for those who do not know how or have difficulty speaking for themselves. We believe that the sector has a responsibility to provide this function, ensuring all advocacy measures are underpinned by best practice research.

In order to strengthen this function, we advocate for the establishment of sector specific reference panels to facilitate cross communication, information sharing and collaboration between organisations. The establishment of reference panels would have multiple benefits including the enrichment of systemic advocacy including a streamlining of the consultation process within government agencies; a more accurate reflection of all voices in a particular cohort irrespective of size and resourcing of the organisation; the strengthening of best practices across the sector through information sharing. This would also enable universities and other research institutions to contribute to the reference panels ensuring the sector stays up to date with the most recent research. We believe that in order to advance the not-for-profit sector Australia we must work together as a community for the betterment of the people we serve.

Government funding, contracting and tendering

The current reliance on short term government funding had led to difficulties in recruiting and retaining a well-educated, experienced and committed workforce. The short-term nature of the funding has the unintended consequence of being unable to provide the workforce with any dependable security leading to concern over job instability, greater levels of stress and ultimately those leaving the sector in search of a more dependable and secure career. This loss to the not-for-profit workforce results in lower levels of good quality service, jeopardises the ability of the organisation to meet contractual outputs and weakens organisations. We believe the ability of this sector to be able to provide longer term funding and workforce contracts are essential to its ongoing and long-term survival.

Government contracting is currently very dependent on output-based measures; data collection that refers to quantity and process rather than sustainable longer-term impacts. We believe the impact of the sector would be better reflected by using more sophisticated methods of measuring success that would enable comparisons across models between and within different service delivery streams. This is because, the not-for-profit sector is unique in that individuals may be unable to complete a program or achieve a particular outcome due to personal circumstance but still very much benefit in other ways from attending the service. As we operate in a person-centred industry, we believe recognition of this is essential. A balance between meeting the needs and best interests of service users while achieving the government stipulated outcomes must be achieved. We recognise the challenge of this and recommend the establishment of another measurement of success alongside the current outcomes approach.

Information Technology, communication, and marketing

Information technology and communication within the not-for-profit sector is a challenging consideration. In the current post Covid-19 environment the world has become more digitally reliant, with some not-for-profit services moving to exclusively digital service delivery. This poses a challenge and can exclude service users who are not digitally literate or who do not have consistent access to reliable technology. Within Queensland, 30% of the population lives in a rural or remote location in which access the internet or other digital technology is not always available or reliable. The sector has a responsibility to create a plan on how to ensure those who are not digitally literate or who do not have access to digital technologies are still able to access the services they require with not be further excluded or marginalised.

We recommend the development of a sector wide strategy pertaining to the inclusion of service user with digital literacy needs and those living in rural and remote locations.

Recommendations

In summary Carers Queensland makes the following recommendations:

- The establishment and implementation of underlying principles and expectations for the not-for-profit sector
- The establishment of sector specific reference groups for systemic advocacy, collaboration and information sharing
- The creation and implementation of a measure of success for government contracts which recognise the specific needs of the not-for-profit sector
- A sector wide strategy for the inclusion of those without digital literacy skills and those living in rural and remote locations