

## Key Messages

According to a 2010 research paper (Pirkis, J. et al), approximately 15% of the Australian adult population, or 2.4 million people play a crucial role every day in the ongoing care and support of people with a mental illness.

State, Territories and the Australian Government are all committed to adoption of a Recovery Framework (2013) for service delivery where all staff, consumers and carers have the opportunity to participate as equal partners in the delivery of care for people with a mental illness. Progress has been primarily focused on consumer participation, however carers are also a crucial component of any partnership approach to service delivery.

Legislation, carer rights and other key documents listed below, all encourage the delivery of services in a partnership manner.

- State and Territory Mental Health Legislation
- State, Territory and Australian Government Carers' Rights Legislation
- State/Territory and Community Managed Organisation policies and procedures
- Accreditation processes
- The national adoption of a Recovery Framework (2013)
- RANZCP Guidelines

The Guide has been developed to assist staff across public, private hospital and community settings in Australia in the recognition and support of carers to enable them to continue in their role as partners in recovery.

## Acknowledgements

We wish to thank all those who have shared their experiences and provided information to support the development of the Guide.

The national consultations provided an opportunity for people to have input into it. We thank them for their valuable contribution and to the members of the Guide Development Committee who all provided rich perspectives and information into its development.

The Guide has been a partnership between consumers and carers, representative staff of public and private mental health services and the community managed organisation sector. It reflects the desire of all stakeholders to deliver services in a manner that recognises the expertise of all partners united in a journey toward recovery.

**We wish to thank Mind Australia and Mental Health Carers Arafmi (WA) Inc. trading as Helping Minds 2016 for funding the project to develop the Guide and their generous support throughout the process.**

### Download the Guide from:

[www.helpingminds.org.au](http://www.helpingminds.org.au)  
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**Mental Health  
Australia**



# A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR WORKING WITH CARERS OF PEOPLE WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS

*Recovery-oriented practice and service delivery recognises the unique role of personal and family relationships in promoting wellbeing, providing care, and fostering recovery across the life span, and recognises the needs of families and support givers themselves*

## Partnership Standards

The Partnership Standards provide clinicians, providers and organisations with a way forward so that therapeutic alliances can be developed between service providers, consumers, families and other carers. This promotes safety, supports recovery and helps to sustain wellbeing.

### The Six Partnership Standards

1. Carers and the essential role they play are identified at first contact, or as soon as possible thereafter.
2. Staff are carer aware and trained in carer engagement strategies.
3. Policy and practice protocols regarding confidentiality and sharing of information are in place.
4. Defined staff positions are allocated for carers in all service settings.
5. A carer introduction to the service and staff is available, with a relevant range of information across the care settings.
6. A range of carer support services is available.

### What does the Guide do?

The Guide draws on previous work undertaken in Australia and internationally. Practical partnership models have become common practice in the UK over the last several years using a 'Triangle of Care' model. We have examined how this model can be used in Australia with the aim of having national agreement on a model that all staff and organisations use.

Each Partnership Standard in the Guide includes a self-assessment tool so that staff and organisations can rate at individual and organisational levels their progress towards meeting each Standard. It provides an opportunity to highlight priority areas and create action plans to make improvements in each Standard.

The goal of the Guide is to enhance practice, particularly in engaging, supporting and working with carers in all areas in which mental health care is provided. It aims to create systemic change that influences organisational policies, procedures and protocols.

### The Guide will allow all parties to have input into:

- Early intervention
- Monitoring drug side effects
- Crisis intervention
- All discharge processes
- General management of the person's mental illness
- Supporting best practice

It is anticipated that using the guide will create better outcomes for persons with lived experience of mental illness and psychosocial disability and provide guidance for system change.

### Benefits for Staff

- It creates a more helpful, supportive relationship with carers.
- It gives carers and consumers realistic expectations.
- It ensures staff have information about consumer's moods, behaviours and the best way to interact with them.
- If the consumer exhibits challenging behaviour, the carer may be able to provide assistance by influencing their behaviour.
- It can reduce admissions. A carer can often recognise the signs that a consumer is becoming unwell. By listening to cares, steps can be taken to intervene and reduce admissions.

### Benefits for Carers

- Recognition of the role carers play. This can help carers feel that they are taken seriously and that their contributions are acknowledged.
- An appreciation of carers' unique knowledge about the person they care for.
- Receiving information about the person they care for including their illness, medication and prognosis.
- Emotional and practical support - enabling carers to have a life of their own alongside their caring role.
- Assistance with care planning and knowing who to contact in a crisis or emergency.
- Helping carers to feel part of a team and less isolated.
- Helping carers to feel stronger, more resilient and better able to cope with their role.

### Benefits for Consumers

- Comprehensive care and support from home and other service settings.
- A more personal service, where consumers' views and feelings are respected and acknowledged.
- Reducing the need to repeat information again and again.
- A more stable and calmer home environment for consumers and their family/carers.
- Less need for consumers to act as a 'go between' with mental health staff and their carer/s.

### Benefits for Organisations

Implementation of the Partnership Standards and use of the Guide (including self assessment tools) provides evidence to Accreditation Agencies such as ACHS and ISO of the organisation's ability to meet Carer Standard 7, National Standards for Mental Health Services. It also assists in driving the national safety and quality improvements in a cost effective manner.