

Equality Unit
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30 September 2011

To Whom It May Concern

Law Centre (NI) is a public interest law non-governmental organisation. We work to promote social justice and provide specialist legal services to advice organisations and disadvantaged individuals through our advice line and our casework services from our two regional offices in Northern Ireland. One of our specialist areas of law is community care, hence our interest in this consultation.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation as we believe that carers have a key role to play in the design and delivery of health care services and policies that meet their needs and the needs of the people for whom they care. We are pleased to note that the Trust has consulted with carers at an early stage of the drafting process and that the strategy has based its action points on the DHSSPSNI's Caring for Carers Strategy (2006).

The Strategy aims to continue to develop a range of information on services available to carers, both through the Trust and external agencies and the strategy sets out a number of actions to achieve this. On the specific actions, we welcome the proposal to produce and disseminate leaflets containing information about Carer Assessments, Carer Co-ordinator and Carer's Register. In the preamble, however, it states that there is a total of 44,000 carers in the Northern Trust area yet the strategy outlines plans to disseminate only 7,000 leaflets per year. If so, it means a big gap between the number of leaflets and the number of carers. It would be useful for the Trust to liaise with other

support bodies to co-ordinate communications and avoid duplication given the small number of leaflets to be disseminated.

We are encouraged to see that the Trust aims to develop a system for defining, processing and recording unmet need. There will be instances where a Carer's Assessment identifies a service that is needed but cannot be provided due to financial or staffing capacity. Recording of unmet need is a vital means of identifying service needs and for informing future service planning. We also welcome the continuation of the Carer Support Grants Scheme, to support carers that are particularly vulnerable. We are pleased to see recognition of the need for emergency respite for carers and believe this should be a key priority.

The uptake of Carer's Assessments, is a key indicator of the help and support required by carers. Combined with the recording of unmet need it will give a clearer picture of what is needed to enable carers to continue in their caring role with the minimum of detriment to their health, emotional and financial wellbeing. From calls received by our advice line, we are acutely aware that carers are unsure of where to turn when accessing services. Lack of clarity about who is responsible or what is available makes their caring role more difficult than it needs to be. We would like the Trust to consider producing a succinct guide to its health and social care services which is aimed at the lay person, including carers, as part of the Strategy that would include information about carers assessments etc as is proposed to be included in an information leaflet.

The strategy has been regarded as not requiring an Equality Impact Assessment, however, it is important to note that carers are not a homogenous group. Therefore any strategy must make sure it doesn't disadvantage carers with a disability, minority ethnic or carers from any of the other Section 75 groupings.

Overall Law Centre welcomes the Strategy and are glad to see acknowledgement that Carers must be recognised and included as real and equal partners at every level of public sector planning and service delivery – from individual care planning to designing

a service. We trust you will find our comments helpful. If there is any further way in which we could contribute to this process we would welcome the opportunity to do so.

Yours faithfully

Laura Niwa
Policy Officer