

I am a family carer for my family members who have psychiatric disabilities — my husband and 2 adult sons. I receive carer payment primarily for my youngest son who, as well, has a physical disability, following serious injury to his leg 2 years ago. I also receive carer allowance for him and for my husband, my other son is more independent, but has returned home recently to live with us again following yet another breakdown. My role is to care for, support, counsel, guide, provide therapies, supervise medications, complete regular paperwork, settle disputes (always ever-threatening), wash, cook, clean, transport (both sons now don't drive). As might be imagined, my role is very 'full on'. Because of the nature of my family's illnesses, they are unable / unwilling to access social supports within our region (few as they are in regional Qld) or accept the intrusion of any home support (again limited anyway).

For my caring role, my total income amounts to almost \$200 pw LESS than the minimum weekly wage. As a result of years (11 now) on low income, plus an inability to seek outside paid work during that time, as a result of my 24/7 caring commitments, my situation is becoming desperate. Whilst we have maintained our home as repairs became necessary, we are now in the situation where replacements are now at a critical stage. We need to replace beds (especially for the benefit of my son, following his leg injury), threadbare / peeling floor coverings, install screens to keep out insects (which cause extreme distress to my youngest son), alter our shower for the safety of both my son and myself and, most of all, we need to replace our car - purchased at a time when just my husband and I were using it and now inappropriately small for four adults - but also, it is nearly twenty years old, so can only be used for essential tasks, to prolong it's life. Even a trip to the beach for the day is 'frivolous'. To contemplate taking a holiday by car (if we could afford it) is totally out of the question. Other than an overnight stay in hospital, I have not had a day off in 8 years. This depressing outlook is contributing to a worsening of my family's mental health.

Disability Services Queensland (DSQ) have, over the years, offered 'support /lifestyle packages' . These are as scarce as hen's teeth. In my region, I think about 6 or 8 are offered every year, for about 200 vying for them! Given that psychiatric disability hasn't even been officially recognized as a disability by DSQ (in spite of it being legislated in the Health Act) until very recently, this disability is at the bottom of the list for support. Also, the paperwork required is daunting, time-consuming and in the end might still be rejected or inappropriate. As this process is not means tested, it often results in those who can most afford their own supports being provided with a package and those most in need are missing out. The more affluent, the more likelihood of being more articulate, or having better knowledge of the system and thus able to 'paint the appropriate picture' to gain a support package. This is a flawed system . Everyone in need should be given support, rather than a select few getting a lot, while others miss out totally.

For my part, as we don't access *any* outside supports, I would like to see long-term full-time carers whose commitments prevent them from seeking outside paid employment, being paid the equivalent of the minimum wage (at least). After all, new parents are to be paid that amount as part of the Parental Leave Scheme (even more under a Coalition government if elected). Caring for a new baby would be a breeze compared to the task that befalls full-time carers of people with disabilities. If I died tomorrow, there would be a lot more government money being spent on this household - why should it come to that?