RURAL CARERS: A SNAPSHOT

In response to a Carers’ Therapy Access Survey conducted from November 2012 until July 2013, 166 carers shared their insights on the therapy access requirements of people with a disability or developmental delay in western New South Wales (NSW). Questions in the survey included what therapy services were used, how they were paid for and what equipment and technology was used by carers and people with a disability.

93% of respondents were female.

Respondents’ average age was 47 years, with all aged between 18 and 83 years.

Carers had been living in Western NSW for an average of 31 years.

A BALANCING ACT

Many factors impact how and why carers and people with a disability access services. This includes factors such as travel time, cost and appropriateness of service. Waiting time was the leading factor (77%) influencing carers’ choices to use a service or not, even if it cost more. This is an important finding for future planning of service provision in rural and remote areas across Australia.

EQUIPMENT

Ninety-seven respondents (58%) reported that the person(s) they cared for needed aids or equipment. Access to equipment was important for both carers and the person they cared for. Some pieces of equipment, such as wheelchairs or communication devices are crucial for a person with a disability to be mobile and participate in everyday life. Table 1 below shows respondents’ experiences with getting equipment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We received the aids or equipment we needed</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We received the aids or equipment in a timely manner</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We received adequate support to use the aids or equipment</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Respondents experiences of getting equipment.
CARING AND THERAPY SERVICES

Twenty four respondents cared for more than one person with a disability. For 138 (84%) respondents the primary person they cared for was a son or daughter with a disability or developmental delay. Others cared for a sibling, grandchild, foster child, friend, or other relative.

The average age of the person with a disability or developmental delay was 18 years, however ages ranged from 1 to 69 years.

Seventy four percent of the people respondents cared for received at least one of the following therapies in the previous two years: physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology, or psychology. People waited the longest to access speech therapy and travelled the furthest to access physiotherapy, as shown in Figure 1 on the right.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology may be one way for rural people with a disability to regularly access therapy services. By understanding how people currently use technology, we can better plan for and develop appropriate models of rural therapy service delivery. An overwhelming 96% of respondents used technology on a day-to-day basis.

NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a major change in the way people with a disability will access the supports they need. Many carers were hopeful about the change the NDIS would bring to rural areas, yet apprehensive about how this would be translated in day to day life.

“...We are hoping that the NDIS will allow for greater integration into our community helping him to be more independent and give him life skills so that he feels like a contributing member of society.”

Carer, western NSW

One hundred and thirteen (72%) respondents would consider using technology to receive therapy.

Ninety three percent of respondents could access the internet at the place where the person(s) they care for lives.

COST

There are many costs involved in caring for a person with a disability. On average, respondents reported paying $2,749 in the previous two years for all therapy including out-of-pocket expenses, equipment, travel, accommodation, and lost wages.

Importantly, 76 respondents (46%) received at least one individual funding package (e.g., Helping Children with Autism or Better Start) for the person(s) they care for.

FIND OUT MORE

These results are important to future planning and design of therapy services to best meet the needs of people with a disability and their carers in rural and remote areas.

If you would like to learn more about the Wobbly Hub and Double Spokes project, please visit our website via bit.ly/WobblyHub or contact us via email.

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