

Integrated Carer Support Service (ICSS) Evaluation: Carer Gateway

Summary of key evaluation findings from non-Indigenous carers

Overview

Thank you for being part of the evaluation of Carer Gateway. Carer Gateway is part of the Integrated Carer Support Service. Your feedback will help inform policy decisions to make Carer Gateway better.

This summary shows what we learned about Carer Gateway relevant to non-Indigenous carers and service providers.

Findings

Overall, the evaluation findings suggested Carer Gateway has been helpful for many carers. Many carers were positive about their experience of Carer Gateway and the services provided. Stakeholders highlighted the new structure was better than the previous system. Carer Gateway generally had a positive impact on the service system.

- Carer Gateway provides a more streamlined and accessible entry point for carers into the service system and provides access to a range of services.
- Most carers benefited from Carer Gateway services for example reduction in stress and improved wellbeing and there were similar improvements for different groups of carers.
- Access to information and courses helped carers to continue to care and provided them with skills to assist in their caring role.
- Services such as counselling and peer support contributed to carers' positive outcomes in terms of wellbeing, resilience and social participation.
- Carers noted the support service system is complex and difficult to navigate, with varying eligibility criteria for different schemes (including disability, aged-care, veterans supports and carers).
- Some services, especially emergency respite, appeared difficult to access particularly in regional and remote areas.
- Access to respite and emergency respite remain extremely important services for carers with high needs and at times of crisis helped carers to continue to provide support.
- Some carers were reportedly accessing Carer Gateway because of delays or problems accessing the NDIS. Carers' involvement with My Aged Care seemed to be much better.

- Overall, it appears the coordination between Carer Gateway and the NDIS is not working well for carers.

Carers Star™ assessment

- Carers who could recall their Carers Star™ assessment described varied experiences.
- Some carers found undertaking the Carers Star™ increased their knowledge about caring because it helped them to reflect on and assess their daily caring role.
- For some carers, their experience of the assessment process was impacted by the complexity of their needs and their caring situation.
- Carers who contacted Carer Gateway during a crisis found the time between the assessment and provision of support was too long, although staff were considered helpful.
- A few carers commented on whether services and the service system had mechanisms in place to reduce duplication in assessment processes of different service providers.
- Interviews with stakeholder and carers indicated the Carers Star™ assessment is not always appropriately tailored for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, young carers, and some CALD carers, and it may be appropriate for the assessment to be tailored specifically for these groups of carers.

Impact of different types of services

Some carers experienced multiple benefits from the different supports. Carer Gateway programs helped carers better manage their stress at difficult times or when in a crisis. Carers accessed tools to manage stress through counselling and online forums which often alleviate carers' feeling of guilt by helping them understand the importance of taking care of themselves.

Access to counselling had increased carers' knowledge and skills they needed to manage their caring role. Practical help, such as a support worker once a month, alleviated some of the pressure associated with caring responsibilities.

Factors that affected outcomes

Different factors were reported by stakeholders and carers to affect outcomes. These factors include COVID-19 and its impact on care service systems, and some aspects of Carer Gateway itself. The short term nature of Carer Gateway interventions and the inadequacy of tailored support packages for carers in regional and remote areas have limited access to services for some groups of carers.

Workforce challenges which affected the availability and timeliness of services were barriers for many carers to improve their wellbeing. Carers reported that well trained staff who could help them to access appropriate support contributed to positive outcomes.

Evaluation approach

The evaluation used different methods including reviews of performance monitoring reports, analysis of program data, surveys, interviews with carers, service providers and stakeholders.

The Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC), UNSW Sydney, UNSW Canberra, the Social Research Centre (SRC), and Ipsos Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Unit conducted the evaluation.