



Carers Can Ask

A collaborative
engagement tool
for families, carers,
supporters, and staff

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DEFINITION OF A FAMILY, CARER, SUPPORTER

Carers are often family members, friends or people in the community who are in ongoing, connected and meaningful care relationships with the people they care for. Carers provide support (in many different forms) to somebody, who for reasons related to that person's physical, emotional, social and mental health circumstances, needs support at home or in the community. This document is designed to assist carers to support individuals with alcohol and/or other drug use and mental health issues and the related health and social issues impacting them.

The original Carers Can Ask was so named because 'carers' was the term used by the Department of Health and was a recognisable word for referring to people who provide unpaid care to others. The Carers Can Ask has now been globally distributed and the name is well recognised.

Carers have rights under the Mental Health Act 2022 and Victorian Charter of Human Rights. They are recognised as partners in care and have access to support for their own needs. This resource supports those rights.

PURPOSE OF RESOURCE

The purpose of this resource is to help you, as a carer, have informed conversations with health services about treatment, discharge planning and post discharge support. This resource provides questions that may help you (carer) to find out about treatment and discharge planning. Some of these questions can take time to answer due to the often complex nature of mental health and alcohol or other drug issues. The questions are suggestions only and not intended as an exhaustive or prescriptive list.

Have a read through the resource prior to appointments and think about what questions are most relevant to your situation. As a carer, your well-being is important. This resource can help you identify and access support for yourself. Please see the 'Carer Supports Section' for available services.

This resource is also useful to services to assist them to understand the information needs of carers and to encourage carer engagement in treatment and discharge planning.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

Information Sharing

- Has the individual receiving care recognised me as a family member, carer or supporter? Eg. as a Nominated Person or in their Advance statement of preferences?
- What information have they consented to share with me?
- How do I share information that I believe is relevant with the service provider?
- Will the information I share with the treating team be shared with others? Who and what for?
- Will the information I provide be treated confidentially?

Discharge Planning

- Has the individual receiving care been asked whether they are prepared for discharge?
- Have they consented to my involvement in the discharge planning process?
- Can you explain why they are being discharged?
- Who has been involved in making the decision?
- Are both mental illness and drug and/or alcohol issues being addressed in an integrated manner? What support services are in place?
- Has their culture and background been taken into consideration?

Strengths

- Can we talk about the individual's strengths and how I can support them?
- What decisions and choices have they made about their journey?
- What goals have they been pursuing through this service? I'd like to support them to achieve their goals.

Service Provision

- How can I be involved in services provided?
- Can you explain the diagnosis and prognosis?
- How might the treatment they are receiving affect their behaviour?
- Has an assessment of the interaction between their alcohol and/or other drug use and their mental health (dual diagnosis assessment) been done?
- What treatment or service have they received for both their alcohol and/or other drug use and their mental health issues? How does it work?
- How do we know if the treatment is working?
- Have they agreed to the treatment plan?
- What specific ways can I contribute to or participate in the treatment process?
- Is this treatment compulsory? If yes, what does that mean?
- Are there any legal issues I need to be aware of?
- Will treatment be in the public or private system? How much will it cost?

Medications

- Can you explain how the medication/s works, any side effects and any interactions it may have?
- What should I do if they seem to be having a bad reaction?
- If they do not take their medications, what will I do?
- Is there a record of what medications have been tried? Has this been shared to avoid any mistakes?
- Is there a record of their reactions to past medications?

Physical Health

- Do any physical health concerns require attention?
- Do they need to see a physiotherapist or other allied health disciplines?
- Have blood tests been conducted to assess physical health conditions?
- Are there any further tests required? How can I support this process?
- How, if at all, will the treatment impact on their physical health?
- Could you provide me with recommendations or suggestions as a family member, carer, or supporter on how I can assist this individual in maintaining their physical health? This could include advice on aspects such as sleep, diet, exercise, relaxation techniques and establishing healthy routines.

Relapse

- How will I know if they are starting to become unwell again?
- What might the early warning signs be?
- What do I do if I notice these early warning signs?
- Who should I contact?
- Is there a written relapse plan?
- Have they made a written plan about what they want to happen if they become unwell? Eg. Advance statement of preferences.

Discharge Summary

- Is there a written discharge summary?
- Who will receive the discharge summary? Eg. GP, other services?
- Will I get a copy?
- Do the referring services know what they need to do next?

Carer's Role in Discharge

- Am I part of the individual's discharge plan?
- What am I recommended to do?
Eg. medication, relapse, transport, making appointments etc.
- Has the individual agreed to me doing those things?
- What happens if I can't do those things?
- Can I have help to support them?
What sort of help can I get and where do I go/who do I talk to, to access it?

Referrals

- Have they agreed to any referrals?
- Can you tell me about the services you have referred them to? How can I support referral(s)?
- Have they been accepted?
- How long will the referral last?
- Does everyone know what they are meant to be doing – is there a shared plan between all services referred to?
- Have they met the new clinician/ GP/support worker?

Carer and Supporter Wellbeing

- Who can I contact if I need support myself?
- Is there a family/carer peer support worker I can talk to?
- Who do I contact if things go wrong?
- What sort of support can I have?
Eg. respite, counselling, advocacy.
- Do I need a referral?
- Am I able to speak to someone who can support me?
- Am I able to access any financial support? Eg. Families where a Parent has a Mental Illness (FaPMI), Carer Support Fund, Carer Allowance etc.
- Are there any self-care strategies for me that you can recommend?

Re-accessing the Service

- Can they use this service again?
When?
- Who do we contact?
- What is the process if they need to come back?
- Can they access services in another area if they move?

I want to ask a question about...

Relevant Emergency Contacts

- Can you give me emergency contact numbers for my area?
- How do I know which one to call?
- What do I do if we are not at home in an emergency?

After Discharge

- If they don't follow the plan, what will you do?
- Will I be able to contact you or ask for advice after they're discharged?
- If not you, who or what service should I speak with?
- What psychosocial supports are available? Eg. education, employment, recreation, community managed mental health services, housing, legal, financial, National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) etc.

Risk

- Have they been educated about possible risk issues? Eg. mental health and substance use, housing, legal etc.
- What should I do in the event of an overdose?
- What is the likelihood that their mental health condition will relapse?
- What is the likelihood that they will relapse in relation to alcohol or other drug use?
- Has a risk assessment been recently completed? Do supports need to be put in place?
- Who can I contact if I feel I can't manage the risk issues?
- Has a safety plan been developed? Can I have a copy?

Anything Else?

- Is there anything else I need to know?
- Can you tell me where to get more information about any of the things we've spoken about today?
- How else can I support them once they leave here?
- Where can I find out more?

FIND A MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE IN VICTORIA

 <http://www3.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealthservices/>

PUBLIC MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN ST VINCENT'S HOSPITAL CATCHMENT AREA

St Vincent's Hospital Psychiatric Triage

1300 558 862

Austin Psychiatric Triage

Information, assessment & referral 24/7

1300 859 789

Austin CAMHS Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services

1300 859 789

Northern Hospital Psychiatric Triage

1300 874 243

FIND AN ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUG SERVICE

DirectLine

Statewide 24/7 alcohol and other drug counselling, info and referral

1800 888 236

Headspace

For young people aged 12 – 25 years old

1800 650 890

YoDDA

(Youth Drug and Alcohol Advice)


1800 458 685

As a carer, your well-being is important. These services can assist you.

CARER SUPPORT SERVICES

Mental Health and Wellbeing Connect

A free service specifically for carers of those living with mental health and substance use challenges or psychological distress. You can simply walk in, phone or link up online.

 <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/mental-health-and-wellbeing-connect#find-your-nearest-service>

Tandem Carers Support and Referral Line

Tandem provides support, information and referral for carers of people living with mental health issues.

1800 314 325

 <http://tandemcarers.org.au/>

SHARC Family Drug & Gambling Helpline – 24/7

1300 660 068

 <https://www.sharc.org.au/about-sharc/>

Mind Carer Helpline


Provides information, advice and referrals to carers.

1300 554 660

 <https://mindaustralia.org.au/support-carers>

Families where a Parent has a Mental Illness (FaPMI)

Provides a range of supports to the mental health workforce and assists peer support programs and with brokerage funds for carers including parents, children, young people and families.

 <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/research/centres/health/bouverie/practitioners/specialist-areas/fapmi>

Satellite Foundation

For children and young people supporting family members with mental health challenges.

1800 973 444

 <https://www.satellitefoundation.org.au>

Carer Gateway


Free, general support for carers.

1800 422 737

 <https://www.carergateway.gov.au/looking-after-yourself>

Carers Victoria

1800 514 845

 <https://www.carersvictoria.org.au/how-can-we-help-you/support-services/carer-advisory-service>

NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME SUPPORTS

National Disability Insurance Scheme

1800 800 110

 <https://www.ndis.gov.au>

Tandem Carers NDIS Support

1800 314 325

 <https://tandemcarers.org.au/Web/Web/Support/NDIS/What-is-the-NDIS.aspx>

SUICIDE SUPPORT

Lifeline

24/7 Crisis Support Line.

13 11 14

 <https://www.lifeline.org.au>



GENERAL ABORIGINAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Victorian Aboriginal Health Service Family Counselling Services

Provides a range of culturally safe health services for Aboriginal people.

03 9419 3000

 <https://www.vahs.org.au/family-counselling-service>

GENERAL MULTICULTURAL RESOURCES

Mental Health Tribunal Translating and Interpreting Service **131 450**

 <https://www.mht.vic.gov.au/other-languages>

Action on Disabilities in Ethnic Communities **03 9480 7000**

 <http://www.adec.org.au>

GENERAL LGBTIQA+ SUPPORT

Switchboard Victoria – LGBTIQA+ Resource

Switchboard provides peer-driven general support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender diverse, intersex, queer and asexual (LGBTIQA+) people, their families, allies and communities.

1800 729 367

 <http://www.switchboard.org.au>


 10.00am – 5.00pm / 7 days

These resources can help you understand mental health legislation and your rights.

LEGAL RESOURCES


Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022

 <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-and-wellbeing-act>

 <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-and-wellbeing-act-handbook/supported-decision-making/families-carers-supporters>


Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 – Advance Statements of Preferences

An advance statement is a written document that can explain a person's preferences for various areas of their life such as any care or support they want to receive if they lose capacity to make decisions.


 <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-and-wellbeing-act-handbook/advance-statements-of-preferences>

Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 – Nominated Persons

When someone gets ill they may need mandatory assessment or treatment. They can designate someone, often a carer, to support them as their 'nominated person'.

 <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-and-wellbeing-act-handbook/supported-decision-making/nominated-support-persons>

Mental Health Treatment Orders and Legal Issues

 <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-and-wellbeing-act-handbook/treatments-and-interventions/treatment-orders>


Mental Health Tribunal

Monitor and oversight of compulsory treatment.


 <https://www.mht.vic.gov.au/family-friends-and-carers-tribunal-hearings>

Carers Recognition Act 2012

Legislation that supports and values carers.

 https://www.carersvictoria.org.au/media/5334/carers-recognition-act_summary_vict-govt.pdf

Working Together with Families and Carers Chief Psychiatrist Guideline

 <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/chief-psychiatrist/working-together-with-families-and-carers>

VICTORIAN CHARTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Every person in Victoria has fundamental rights, freedoms, and obligations that are outlined in the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

1300 292 153

 <https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/human-rights>

COMPLAINTS

If you don't get the service you expect, you have the right to ask to speak with another person at the service or to make a complaint to the service or the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission (for complaints about public sector mental health services) or Health Services Complaints Commissioner (for alcohol and drug services).

In Victoria carers can contact Tandem for support if considering a complaint.

Resolving disputes with the service directly is often the most efficient and constructive approach when issues or concerns arise.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission

You can contact the commission if you have a complaint about a public mental health service.

1800 246 054

 <https://mhwc.vic.gov.au>

Health Complaints Commissioner


You can contact the commission if you have a complaint about a general health service.

1300 582 113

 <https://hcc.vic.gov.au/contact>

 9.30am – 3.00pm / Monday – Friday

FURTHER COPIES OF THIS RESOURCE CAN BE FOUND AT:

 <https://www.svhm.org.au/our-services/departments-and-services/n/nexus/carers-can-ask>

Your notes



Your notes

DEVELOPMENT OF THIS RESOURCE


This resource was originally developed in 2013. In 2024 this resource was reviewed and updated using co-design principles by lived experience workers (carer and consumer backgrounds) as well as clinicians and Nexus Integrated Care staff. Thank you to all carers, staff and agencies involved. We thank all who have contributed to this resource and hope it is of use to carers, families, supporters and staff.


If you'd like adapt the content for your service please contact Nexus Integrated Care at nexus@svha.org.au



St Vincent's Hospital

Level 1 Bolte Wing
14 Nicholson St, Fitzroy VIC 3065

 [https://www.svhm.org.au/our-services/
departments-and-services/n/nexus](https://www.svhm.org.au/our-services/departments-and-services/n/nexus)

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