

Carers in the community have important roles that are often vastly understated or overlooked, says Mike Seward, executive director of WA's mental health carer organisation, Arafmi.

"When there are problems with people who have mental health issues, it is vital to involve their carers," Mr Seward said.

This applied to authorities including hospitals, doctors and the police.

"After all, as carers know more about their loved ones' issues than anyone other than the person themselves and are motivated to help, they are in an ideal position to help," Mr Seward said.

There are more than 2 million identified carers in Australia, according to the ABS.

Mr Seward said health issues of mental health sufferers were obviously important but there were other key factors.

"Accommodation, education and employment opportunities for those with mental health issues - and respite and carer involvement for carers - are just as important as addressing the health issues," he said.

Arafmi's free services include free professional counselling, mental health support groups with peers, workshops and programs and dealing with the mental health system.

There is also an extensive school education program to fight stigma and school holiday programs for 8 – 18 years.

Arafmi issues regular mental health news and information for carers, plus briefings on advocacy - gaining full rights .

Arafmi has offices in Perth, Mandurah Carnarvon, Broome and Port Hedland.

Arafmi membership is free. Phone 94277 7100. Country callers freecall 1800 811 747.

Politicians need to wake up to the fact that there are over 2.5 million [ABS](#) identified carers in Australia.

Arafmi news4

Carers of people with mental health issues are growing in numbers, says Mike Seward, executive director of WA's mental health carer organisation, Arafmi.

Mr Seward said support services were being increased for carers who often supervised a family member and didn't see themselves as carers.

Arafmi, which has been caring for mental health carers in WA since 1976, has been building a stronger team this year.

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2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing found that:

- o Almost half the total population (45.5%) experience a mental health disorder at some point in the lifetime.

- o One in five, or 20% of the Australian population aged 16-85 years, experienced mental disorders in the previous 12 months [of their survey]. This is equivalent to 3.2 million Australians.
- o One in 16 (6.2%) had affective (mood) disorders; one in seven (14.4%) had anxiety disorders; and one in 20 (5.1%) had substance use disorders.
- o Based on these prevalence rates, it is estimated that nearly 1 million Australians have affective disorders; over 2.3 million had anxiety disorders and over 800,000 had substance use disorders in the previous 12 months.
- o The prevalence of mental disorders declines with age: from 1 in 4 young people (16-24) to 1 in 20 (75-85 years)
- o Only one third of people (34.9%) with a mental health disorder used health services for their mental health problem – and two thirds of people with a mental health disorder did not report using services for their mental health disorder.

Depression and anxiety are the most prevalent mental disorders experienced by Australians. Depression alone is predicted to be one of the world's largest health problems by 2020.¹

Around one million Australian adults and 100,000 young people live with depression each year. On average, one in five people will experience depression in their lives; one in four females and one in six males.^{2m}

Among young Australians aged 12-25 years, depression is the most common mental health problem. Around one in ten young Australians will experience an anxiety disorder in any given 12 month period.³ At least one third of young people have had an episode of mental illness by the age of 25 years.⁴

The role of carers in mental health has received greater recognition in WA since widespread media attention on mental health.

This has been partly due to more political attention to funding – both federal and State – and events associated with October’s mental health week.

This included the riverside Walk of Pride, led by Estelle Dragun, mother of the late TV newsreader Charmaine Dragun who took her own life after suffering depression.

Mrs Dragun is an ambassador for WA’s mental health carer organisation, Arafmi.

Mrs Dragun said: “Nobody with a mental health issue should walk alone”.

A 2007 national survey found that 45.5 per cent of the total population experienced a mental health disorder at some point in the lifetime.

One in five Australians aged 16-85 years - equivalent to 3.2 million people - experienced mental disorders in the previous 12 months of their survey.

And more than two million Australians are carers, says Mike Seward, executive director of WA’s mental health carer organisation, Arafmi.

Arafmi services include free professional counselling, mental health support groups with peers, workshops and programs and dealing with the mental health system.

There were special programs for school education to fight stigma and school holiday programs for students 8 to 18 years.

Arafmi regularly puts out free mental health news and information for members.

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, Mike Seward, executive director of

“Being a carer has been part of their lives, part of how their family functions. But carers burden quite a responsibility and there are support services readily available to them,” Mr Seward said.

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A comprehensive range of support services are available free for carers of WA people with mental health issues.

Mike Seward, executive director of mental health carer organisation, Arafmi, said many people were unaware of the range of services carers who may be for adults or children.

Respite for carers from their long hours of looking after or monitoring loved ones with mental health issues was seen as a priority.

“There are options, including accommodation, a range of fun activities, meetings and social occasions with people in similar situations readily available,” he said.

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Mike Seward, executive director of mental health carer organisation, Arafmi, says well-informed carers, working in co-operation with doctors, greatly assist in enforcing medical treatment for mental health consumers.

Mr Seward said mental health carers could ask themselves the following questions:

- Do you need someone to talk to?
- Not sure you are doing the right thing?
- Want to know what help you can get?
- Need time out?

Arafmi was available with full support services including online and printed newsletters, seminars and recreational activities for carers.

Arafmi (with logo) – Caring For Mental Health Carers Since 1976

The *Walk of Pride* will be led by Estelle Dragun, mother of the late TV newsreader Charmaine Dragun. Estelle is an *Arafmi* ambassador.

Mental Health Facts