

MEDIA RELEASE: MENTAL HEALTH CARE WAITING TIMES PLACE STRAIN ON CARERS

Last week's Productivity Commission report on government services revealed that Canberrans waiting for mental health care are experiencing the longest waiting times in the country.

Waiting time blow outs place additional strain on family and friend carers of people with mental health conditions, creating poorer outcomes for both carers and consumers.

Emergency department wait times for mental health patients are well below the national average, with only 38 per cent of mental health patients seen on time. This is in stark contrast to figures from 2016-17, where 58 per cent of patients were seen on time.

"Waiting for extended periods of time in an Emergency Department with your family member places unbearable strain on carers and leaves a pervasive sense of helplessness" said CEO of Carers ACT, Ms Lisa Kelly

"Mental health carers are forced to fill in the gaps when care is delayed or the systems are not able to respond. This puts them under enormous stress, impacts their employment and damages their wellbeing." Ms Kelly said.

Even after they are seen, mental health consumers find it difficult to access acute care. *"Carers often tell us that there is a bed block at the hospital, so their family member cannot get admitted, even if they are extremely unwell,"* said Ms Kelly.

"Carers ACT is working with ACT Health and other community partners to create alternative options to the Emergency Department for mental health consumers. Getting this up and running should be a priority."

Carers ACT calls on the ACT government to urgently address the prioritisation of mental health in emergency departments, increase the bed capacity of acute mental health facilities in the ACT and provide increased supports for mental health carers in times of acute stress.

The report can be accessed on [the Productivity Commission website](#).

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