

Response to Carers (Scotland) Bill

Call for written views by Scottish Parliament Health and Sport Committee

About the Scottish Health Council

The Scottish Health Council was established in April 2005 to promote improvements in the quality and extent of public involvement in the NHS in Scotland. It supports and monitors work carried out by NHS Boards to involve patients and the public in the planning and development of health services and in decisions that affect the operation of those services. The Scottish Health Council has a network of 14 local offices across Scotland (one in each health board area) and a National Office in Glasgow. The Scottish Health Council is part of Healthcare Improvement Scotland.

Response to consultation questions

1. Do you support the Bill?

The Scottish Health Council welcomes the Bill. We believe that the Bill will be a significant step forward in supporting and empowering carers in Scotland. We particularly welcome:

- Introduction of the adult carer support plan and young carer statement
- Recognition of the importance of information and advice for carers
- Provisions designed to ensure support is provided to carers and that this should include consideration of the provision of short breaks
- Requirement for the development of local carer strategies including the need to consult with and involve carers and their representatives in the preparation of these
- Duties on health boards and local authorities to involve carers in carers' services where these services have not been delegated under an integration scheme in terms of the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act.

2. What do you feel would be the benefits of the provisions set out in the Bill?

We believe that carers play an invaluable role in supporting people and that their experience of health and social care services means that their views are vital in shaping how those services should be designed and delivered.

In 2014, we carried out a series of engagement activities across Scotland to inform the development of proposals designed to give a 'stronger voice'¹ to people who access health and social care services, carers and members of the public. Through those activities, we

¹ Stronger Voice: reports of engagement activity -

www.scottishhealthcouncil.org/patient_public_participation/stronger_voice/engagement_reports.aspx

heard from many carers who were keen to have their voices heard and to better understand their rights and opportunities. The Bill should help to achieve this.

3. How do you feel the Bill could be amended or strengthened?

There are a number of areas where we feel the Bill could go further in order to take account of the views expressed by carers in the Scottish Government consultation, as follows:

- The Bill requires that each local authority will specify in its carer strategy “the authority’s intended timescales for preparing adult carer support plans and young carer statements”. Carers responding to the consultation felt that there should either be a duty specifying a maximum waiting time or that a standard for a reasonable timescale should be set out in statutory guidance. Some stressed the need for a set timescale particularly for those carers who are providing end-of-life care. The Scottish Health Council believes that further specification on timescales would be welcome.
- The Bill requires that each local authority must set local eligibility criteria for the provision of support to carers, and includes a power for Scottish Ministers to set national eligibility criteria if they feel that the local eligibility criteria are not working in the intended way. There was support from carer organisations for eligibility criteria to be set at national rather than local level. The Scottish Health Council agrees with the view that this would help to ensure a consistent and equitable approach across Scotland.
- Carers’ organisations have previously called for a duty on health boards to involve carers in hospital admission and discharge planning. The Scottish Health Council believes that this involvement would be beneficial to everyone concerned and would help to ensure that due account is taken of the level of care that carers are able to provide.
- Each local authority must establish and maintain an information and advice service for carers in its area. We understand that some carers’ organisations believe that it would be preferable in some areas where carers’ information and advice organisations are already well established for those organisations to be supported and maintained. The Scottish Health Council agrees it is important that account is taken of existing services prior to the setting up of any new service, including the Patient Advice and Support Service operated by Citizens Advice Scotland, as well as carers’ organisations. During our ‘stronger voice’ engagement activities (referenced above), we heard from carers who felt that whilst it could be helpful that a range of groups and organisations existed to support and speak on behalf of carers, it could also cause a degree of confusion for carers. It should therefore be necessary to review existing arrangements in each local area before determining the best way of strengthening information and advice provision for carers. Involving local carers and existing organisations in considering this would be essential and the Scottish Health Council would be happy to provide advice on how best to do this.

4. Further information

Further information about the Scottish Health Council can be found on our website www.scottishhealthcouncil.org . Any queries regarding this response should be directed in the first instance to Sandra McDougall, Head of Policy, tel: 0141 225 5560 or email: sandra.mcdougall@scottishhealthcouncil.org

14 April 2015