

Mental Health Carers NSW

ANNUAL REPORT 2024 – 2025



**Mental Health
Carers NSW**



About MHCN, Our Vision & Mission

Mental Health Carers NSW (MHCN) is the peak body for mental health carers in NSW. Founded as ARAFMI in 1974 by social worker Margaret Lukes, she believed there needed to be more support for families, friends and carers of people living with a mental illness.

Mental health carers are people who support friends, partners, members of their family, kinship groups or communities, when they experience mental health conditions.

MHCN advocates for a vision of safe and competent mental health services and systems that recognise and respect carers as partners in care planning and delivery, to achieve recovery.

MHCN's Mission is to support, empower, capacity build, and advocate with mental health carers to ensure their voices and experiences are heard.





**Mental Health
Carers NSW**

Strategic Plan 2024 – 2026

1. Influence Policy Leadership & Reform

- 1.1 Develop and maintain new strategic relationships with policy makers, service providers and community partners.
- 1.2 Advocate for increased engagement of mental health carer experience and representation in reform and governance processes.
- 1.3 Support mental health carer advocacy, participation, and leadership in policy, co-design and service delivery processes.
- 1.4 Promote the importance of mental health carers voices and lived experience.
- 1.5 Advocate for a mental health system that is accessible and inclusive for mental health carers and those that they care for.

2. Community, Mental Health & Carer Services Development

- 2.1 Raise awareness of the value of increasing mental health carers capacity through education and information.
- 2.2 Recognise, respect, engage, and promote mental health carer lived experience in policy, and systemic and service reform.
- 2.3 Improve social inclusion of mental health carers and reduce stigma by informing and educating the community, health and human services sectors.
- 2.4 Advocate for and promote the importance of the role of mental health carer peer workers and lived experience peer workers.

3. Promote Mental Health Carers Capacity Development

3.1 Enhance the capacity and knowledge of mental health carers to navigate the mental health system through information, resources, training and peer support.

3.2 Foster innovation in research by collaborating with and facilitating relationships between mental health carers, researchers, and sectors.

3.3 Lead by example through engaging with mental health carers as partners in mutual support, advocacy and governance.

3.4 Develop new ways for mental health carers to engage and participate in MHCN and sector activities, to increase awareness and recognition of mental health carer experiences and expertise.

4. Continuous Organisational Development and Improvement

4.1 Provide opportunities for mental health carers to engage in policy and advocacy, capacity development, and share their stories and experiences through MHCN's ***Mental Health Carer Advocacy Network***.

4.2 Foster co-design within MHCN through consultation and co-design where able, to support MHCN's policy and advocacy, capacity development, and engagement programs.

4.3 Identify sustainable funding resources to remove cost as a barrier to mental health carer engagement and participation, and to achieve organisational sustainability.

4.4 Review MHCN's policy and advocacy, capacity development and engagement programs for continuous quality improvement and accreditation.



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Carers NSW**

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President's Report – Anne Stedman

As we move into a new era and model of mental health care focused on supporting people holistically within the community, the role of MHCN is to ensure that the carers and supporters of people experiencing mental health issues are recognised and in turn supported in their roles. Whilst this trend towards community support has been evolving since the 1970s, hence Margaret Luke's initiative to set up carer supports and advocacy for their needs, we are witnessing further depletion of government run, and poor oversight of private providers of, support to the vulnerable.

I resumed the role of President, sadly at the passing of former President, Jenny Learmont, to ensure that the years of support and opportunity that MHCN has offered me was returned to the organisation. I wish to contribute my skills and knowledge to forward the MHCN vision to support and empower mental health carers and their family, kin and friends.

My time spent as a member of the staff of MHCN was rewarding as the organisation began a process of change. That change involved increased funding, recruiting new staff and supporting long term staff through the change process. I must say that the Accreditation process, though lengthy and involved, was also a catalyst in strengthening the organisation.

Currently our staff span the generations, offering many benefits to MHCN. The diverse age groups enhance innovation



and problem solving through the mix of new insights and seasoned experience. Knowledge sharing between members is enhanced through a collaborative atmosphere where the younger generations offer support around technology and new trends whilst older members share knowledge and experience. This is crucial in the mental health advocacy space as so many initiatives come and go, often throwing the baby out with the bathwater!

Teams that reflect different generations can better understand and connect with a wider carer base, potentially improving not only our understanding of issues faced, but also innovative ways of reaching a wider cross-section of mental health carers in NSW.

The Strategic Plan drives the direction and development of MHCN as an organisation. Staff regularly plan, monitor and review their operational activities based on meeting these strategic objectives. It heartens me greatly to see the progress made on many of MHCN's strategic goals. We have greatly increased our membership and our engagement with stakeholders – mental health carers, Health and clinicians, as well as community service providers.



MHCN regularly contributes to service development in a current climate of political interest and responsiveness to system improvements within the mental health sector. This is achieved through representation by members of our Policy and Advocacy Team (PAT) presenting research and the collective wisdom of our carers, or through carer lived experience groups arranged and facilitated by MHCN. I'd like to thank our dedicated members who provide such pragmatic and valuable input and creative solutions to current and ongoing challenges within the sector.

I have met quite a few of our members over the years whilst delivering training and capacity development activities. Many return to further training and avail themselves of participation opportunities and contribute towards sector development. There are still a few hard-to-reach carer groups such as young carers and carers from diverse communities which we will focus our strategic efforts on addressing over the coming year.

Other remaining areas of focus will be on amplifying the voice of mental health carers and extending the reach of MHCN across NSW whilst working on sustainable funding strategies to strengthen the organisation and influence change.

I'll be sorry to see Elizabeth Priestley step down from the position of Board Secretary, to pursue travel adventures and enjoy retirement after many years dedicated to the mental health space. I've worked alongside Liz as CEO of Wayahead, in particular during the Collective Purpose days, and wish to thank her for her years of service both in the mental health promotion and prevention space as well as her support for MHCN. I will be renominating as President and look forward to the new year and Board as we continue to grow and expand MHCN's reach and influence in the mental health sector.

I'd like to acknowledge the sterling effort our CEO, Jonathan Harms, makes in continually raising the voice and concerns of mental health carers across NSW to decision makers and the community. I also wish to recognise and thank the wonderful team at MHCN who display true interest and dedication to improving the mental health system and lives of mental health carers.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge and thank our major funding body, The NSW Ministry of Health, for its ongoing support and recognition of the important role MHCN plays as the Peak Body for mental health carers in NSW. I'd also like to thank our benefactors who's yearly donation is greatly appreciated by the organisation.

All the best to everyone for a happy and peaceful holiday season, and along with MHCN wish you a terrific year ahead.



Anne Stedman,
President



CEO's Report –Jonathan Harms



This last financial year, 2024–2025, has been a year of contrasts for MHCN. We implemented a very successful program with existing activities, and new projects starting or funded, and marked 50 years as an organisation at our 50th Anniversary Celebration in November 2024.

But it has also been tinged with the sadness at the passing of our President, Jenny Learmont and the anxieties caused to many mental health carers and their loved ones by developments in the mental health and disability sectors. The 'Psychiatrist crisis' in NSW made finding help more difficult for many and the changes to the NDIS reduced support for psychosocial disability within the scheme as well as reducing access to it. Meanwhile, 'Foundational Supports' for people with psychosocial disability outside the NDIS will take months if not years before they can be implemented to meet the needs for the hundreds of thousands of people with significant psychosocial disabilities who will never be eligible for the NDIS. MHCN continues to discharge its systemic role by meeting with and consulting mental health carers to understand their needs and experiences and then advocating to any necessary authority to make sure those needs are understood and (eventually) met.

MHCN's Policy and Advocacy Team (PAT) and Disability Advocacy Futures Program Team (DAFP) have been busy focusing on MHCN's key policy and advocacy work. MHCN has been advocating even more closely with its key organisational partners, BEING, the Mental Health Coordinating

Council (MHCC), the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) and Wayahead, (among others) through the NSW Mental Health Alliance and has been meeting regularly with the Minister's office in particular to monitor and manage the psychiatrist crisis impacts as they unfolded. I currently chair the Mental Health Alliance and MHCN plans to continue this fruitful advocacy collaboration into the future.

MHCN's core work in engaging with families and carers has continued to be supported through our regular monthly Mental Health Carer Connection Meeting (MHCCM), open to anyone who is a member of our free Mental Health Carer Advocacy Network (MHCAN), and our Carers of Forensic and Correctional Patient's Network (CFCPN) meeting (open to families and carers of forensic patients and of prisoners with mental health concerns). In addition, MHCN has undertaken many consultations on behalf of NSW Health and other institutions (like the NSW Mental Health Commission). MHCN has exhaustively reviewed its processes for setting up such consultations, resulting in smoother meetings with great discussions of the issues concerned with carers with relevant lived experience. The number of consultations which NSW Health and others are entrusting us with demonstrate that we are delivering a good service to all involved.

The Capacity Development Team (CDT) and Stakeholder Engagement Team (SET) have taken on new staff after implementing the pilot Carer, Consumer and Community Advocacy Community of Practice in collaboration with Lived Experience Australia (LEA). As a result, MHCN was again funded by the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) for this financial year for a new Mental Health Carer Advocacy Community of Practice, this time in collaboration with Mental Health Carers Australia (MHCA). The CDT Team also welcomes Melissa Goldman and Madeleine Fabian as new peer facilitators and has made great progress in reviewing MHCN's training and moving it to a new on-demand platform, Articulate. SET has also reviewed the weekly e-news and has some exciting new ideas to enhance MHCN's reach to hidden carers and the general community, as well as raising MHCN's profile among mental health carers generally.

Finally, I would like to recognise the work of the Business and Organisational Support Services Team (BOSS), with their critical work in supporting MHCN as an organisation and employer. In particular, MHCN has made significant improvements in many areas as a result of the implementation of the many quality processes initiated under Accreditation, including welcoming the development of the PULSE survey on staff wellbeing and experience and the implementation of MHCN's staff Reward and Recognition Program, among many others.

MHCN thanks all of its members, staff, volunteers and stakeholders for their ongoing support. MHCN will endeavour to work with even more success in 2025-2026 with all its partners to help governments, state and federal, provide the mental health, disability and carer support services that Australian families deserve.



Jonathan Harms,
CEO



Remembering Jenny Learmont

On behalf of MHCN, I would like to pay tribute to our previous President, Jenny Learmont, a tireless advocate for mental health carers and consumers, who passed away on 3 May 2025.

Jenny had been a member of Mental Health Carers NSW (MHCN)'s Board since 2012 and President since 2019 but had a long career in mental health and other community advocacy before that. Notably, in 2005, Jenny was a founding member and later chair of the NSW Consumers Advisory Committee, which evolved into BEING, the peak body for mental health consumers and our key partner organisation.

However, Jenny's advocacy journey began during the AIDS crisis, where she led a research team into the long-term non-progression of HIV in a cohort of blood transfusion recipients at the NSW Red Cross Blood Transfusion Service, becoming an Honorary Associate of the Centre for Virus Research at the Westmead Millennium Institute.

Jenny next turned her focus to mental health after one of her family faced mental health challenges, leading her to establish the Anxiety Disorders Alliance (ADA) in 1990, a committee of volunteers from the NSW Mental Health Association (now Wayahead).

In 1996, Jenny was honoured as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) and she was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Medicine degree by the University of NSW. In 2006,



Jenny expanded ADA, founding the Anxiety Disorders Association NSW Inc. (ADAN), where she served as president from 2006 to 2015. There are now 30 Wayahead support groups for anxiety disorders across NSW.

More recently, Jenny received the 'Julie Leitch Leadership Through Lived Experience Award' at the 2024 Mental Health Matters Awards, and received a Lifetime Membership at the 50th Anniversary Celebration for Mental Health Carers NSW, hosted at Parliament House in November 2024. Jenny also served as a long-term member of the Mental Health Review Tribunal and had only recently stepped down in early 2025.

On a more personal note, working with Jenny on MHCN's Board, I found her to be determined but gracious, a champion of the disadvantaged and marginalised, but at the same time every inch the Grande Dame, full of regal empathy.

Jenny was deeply committed to advancing the work of mental health reform and to amplifying the voice of lived experience, of both consumers and carers, and to these voices being raised together to call for a better, safer, more humane, accepting, empowering and above all accessible mental health system for families and carers to be able to entrust their loved ones to.



She leaves us before that great task is accomplished, but not before advancing it in great strides. For example, she was able just last year to speak in Canberra at the launch of the first national peak body for families and carers of people with mental health issues in the world, when Mental Health Carers Australia was formally announced by minister Emma McBride (photo below).

Jenny's style and grace have served us well and helped navigate many treacherous waters. In a sector as unsettled and unsettling as mental health and carers rights, she had no enemies, despite her many years of activism, and that in itself is a remarkable achievement.

We bid Jenny a bittersweet farewell. We will miss her staunch but fond determination. Now she belongs to the ages.



Jonathan Harms, CEO







MHCN's 50th Anniversary



On the 28 November 2024, Mental Health Carers NSW celebrated the organisations 50th Anniversary with a special lunchtime and award ceremony event at Parliament House, Sydney. Guests enjoyed a 3-course meal, drinks and lucky door prizes. The day was filled with celebration, hope and recognition.

The event was MC'ed by Julie McCrossin, former ABC and Channel 10 radio broadcaster and journalist. Special guest speakers included Jenny Learmont, MHCN's President at the time, who spoke of MHCN's focus for the future, and Kerry Hawkins, the Chair of Mental Health Carers Australia, formerly the National Mental Health Commissioner, who spoke of the significance of the establishment of the national peak bodies for mental health carers and people with lived experience of mental health conditions, the first of its kind in the world. We also spoke with Rhonda Wilson from Central Coast ARAFMI and Coralie Reeve from Hunter ARAFMI about the fantastic work they have been doing in their regions with carers and people with a lived experience.

Lifetime Memberships were presented to individuals who have shown their commitment and dedication supporting MHCN's work over the many years. Jonathan Harms, MHCN's CEO, handed out Lifetime Memberships to Jenny Learmont AM, Anne Stedman, Rob Wellman, Douglas Holmes OAM, Rhonda Wilson, Kelly Parrish and Philip de Haan.

Carer Recognition in Advocacy Awards were awarded to carers who have been advocating tirelessly for many years for mental health reform both nationally and in NSW. The Hon. Rose Jackson MLC Minister for Mental Health handed out Carer Recognition in Advocacy Awards to Eileen McDonald, Satu Beverley, Peter Heggie, Lyn Anderson, Kerin O'Halloran, and Helen Pokorny.

MHCN would like to sincerely thank everyone who attended the event to celebrate the incredible contributions of all those involved with ARAFMI and MHCN over the past 50 years. MHCN's founder, Margaret Lukes, would be very proud of her legacy indeed!











1. Influence Policy, Leadership & Reform

The Policy and Advocacy Team (PAT) and the Disability Advocacy Futures Program Team (DAFP) is focused on the first of the four pillars of our Strategic Plan – influencing policy, leadership and reform. PAT consists of Prasheela Karan, Senior Policy Officer & Team Coordinator, Richard Baldwin, Senior Policy Officer, and Armie Farooqui, Policy Engagement Officer. The DAFP Team consists of Alyce Cannon, Psychosocial Disability Research & Policy Coordinator, and Ellie Christen, Policy Engagement Officer.

PAT advocates for governments and service provider organisations to recognise and meet the needs of mental health carers, including family and kinship members, as well as people experiencing mental health concerns or psychosocial disability. We undertake regular meetings, consultations and co-design with mental health carers to ensure our advocacy is informed by lived experiences of caring. PAT has assisted NSW Health and other institutions with increasing numbers of consultations with carers, and the DAFP Team has undertaken surveys and consultations on behalf of MHCN to deliver a high tempo of lived experience informed research and policy submissions.

Through our convenorship of the Mental Health Carer Connection and Carers of Forensic and Corrections Patients Network (CFCPN) monthly meetings, we collect evidence on the experiences of mental health caring and jointly advocate for systemic reform. Our goal is to ensure carers and people experiencing mental ill health and distress get timely access to holistic, safe, fair and adequately funded services.

MHCN has worked closely with the NSW Mental Health Alliance, a group which includes BEING, the Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC), Wayahead, AMA, Nurses NSW and the RANZCP, collaborating on supporting the Gaps Analysis and other mental health policy issues, and continues to develop shared priorities for the forthcoming NSW budget and elections. BEING, MHCC and MHCN also now meet regularly with Minister Rose Jackson's office after the psychiatry crisis, a development which has enhanced MHCN's understanding of the government's policy dilemmas and opportunities.

PAT actively participates in a range of standing committees with the Ministry of Health and other organisations. Through this participation we ensure that the voices of mental health carers are heard and included in policy development. During the year in review, we have been particularly active in assisting the Ministry of Health in activities related to Older Persons' Mental Health by engaging carers in focus groups and through reviews of draft policies. We have also commented on draft changes to legislation and regulations; mandatory forms used within the mental health system; advising on the best methods for health services to communicate with mental health carers; and contributed to the continuing project facilitated by the Ministry of Health on the relationship between mental and physical health.



PAT has increased engagement with diverse and hidden carers through establishing a new project consulting with culturally and linguistically diverse young people affected by mental challenges and their families and carers. The project aims to develop resources that will guide clinicians to provide culturally sensitive family and carer engagement. Arising from our ongoing advocacy for more practical and accessible supports for carers, we have also collaborated with members of the CFCPN to co-design a webpage resource for carers navigating the forensic and justice mental health systems. The webpage offers information to help carers locate the person they care for, understand visitation processes, know their rights and access available supports. [You can view the page on our website here.](#)

We have also advocated for flexible and longer-term respite services for carers with diverse needs to a Parliamentary Committee Hearing on the prevalence, causes and impacts of loneliness in NSW. PAT looks forward to continuing engagement and advocacy with mental health carers on respite care and other priorities identified by carers.

MHCN will continue to enhance the impact of its advocacy by developing Stakeholder Engagement and Advocacy Plans, especially with the new national peak, Mental Health Carers Australia, on national issues.



As the systemic advocacy provider for psychosocial disabilities, the Disability Advocacy Futures Program Team (DAFP), has engaged government and non-government organisations, policy makers, and representatives through policy papers and projects that platform service and policy barriers for people with psychosocial disabilities, carers, families, and kin.

We have increased our involvement with the NSW Disability Advocacy Network (NDAN), comprised of all DAFP-funded disability organisations, ensuring that the issues affecting psychosocial disability are communicated to policy leaders. We have attended sector roundtables with NSW Minister for Disability, Kate Washington MP, and collaborated on several NDAN position papers, including one on the NSW Government's response to the Disability Royal Commission's final report.

Our submission to the NSW Standing Committee on Social Issues' Inquiry into the prevalence, causes, and impacts of loneliness in NSW addressed social determinants (e.g. employment and housing) and structural inequalities (e.g. service accessibility) as key factors driving loneliness for people with psychosocial disabilities and families, carers, and kin. To improve social inclusion, we recommended investment into mental health literacy, systemic and individual advocacy services, dedicated peer support, and community and service connectivity.



In response to the NDIS cuts for Music and Art therapy announced in late 2024, we wrote to the NDIS Minister to advocate for the value of art-based therapies. The proposed cuts impacted the accessibility of care, particularly to children with psychosocial disabilities on the NDIS who achieved significant results through art therapies. Following public outrage and an independent review, the cuts have been minimised to near reversal.

Towards the end of 2024, we published our position paper on the systemic drivers of housing inequality for people with psychosocial disability.



This paper included evidence from consultations and highlighted key issues concerning access and housing retention. We continue to reference and circulate the paper as supporting documentation in our policy and advocacy work. We also continue to work with the Housing and Mental Health Agreement Lived Experience Committee, who always provide crucial information and expertise to our work.

We initiated a series of Yarn meetings with First Nations stakeholders in 2024, and they identified the age of criminal responsibility as a critical barrier to improved mental health outcomes in First Nations communities. In January 2025, the DAFP team released a joint statement with BEING that endorsed the #RaiseTheAge nationwide campaign to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to at least 14 years of age. The statement addressed the interconnection between mental health and youth incarceration, Australia's place globally, systemic racism, and closing the gap in First Nations health outcomes.

We provided feedback to Homes NSW on the Homelessness Strategy 2025-2034 and advocated for the inclusion of people with psychosocial disabilities in the outcomes of the strategy. Drawing on ongoing consultation around housing access, we recommended changes to the eligibility criteria for a formal mental health diagnosis to improve service access.

We recommended increased regulation and a total ban on prone restraint as a step towards complete elimination in our submission to the NSW Legislative Framework for Regulating Restrictive Practices on people with disability, produced by the Department of Communities and Justice. MHCN policy staff have since attended a series of consultations and continue to advocate for elimination of these practices.

We have attended several consultations around the NDIS, including updating the NDIS Supports List. Disability sector organisations informed and raised questions about the NDIS and its Supports rules. We called for clarity around the responsibilities of mainstream services, what is classified as a NDIS support and why, and what supports participants can buy using their NDIS funding.

We are a small but effective team driven by a goal of representing psychosocial disability and ensuring that the voices of families, carers, and kin are always involved. We have made ten submissions this year, attended many consultations, roundtables, and ministerial meetings, and have been fortunate to engage with MHCN's stakeholders, all of whom have shaped the content of our advocacy.



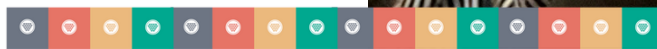
2. Community, Mental Health & Carer Services Development

The Stakeholder Engagement Team's (SET)'s work is focused on the second of the four pillars of our Strategic Plan – on the development of community, mental health and carer services. SET consists of Jade Curran, Stakeholder Engagement Manager, supplemented by Anne Stedman, formerly Carer Peer Trainer, currently MHCN President, and Ellie Christen, Policy Engagement Officer, assisting with the Mental Health Carer Advocacy Network (MHCAN), as well as with administrative assistance from Laura Knight, Organisational Development Coordinator, and Alex Brown, Administration Coordinator.

In August 2024, SET launched an online order form for the Carers and the Mental Health System brochures to support their distribution and display across NSW. Since then, 25+ orders have been dispatched to Family and Carer Mental Health Programs (FCMHP), health services, and community organisations. Many of these orders requested at least 75 copies of each of the 10 brochure topics, enabling SET to distribute a large quantity of resources and strengthen engagement with carers, families and kin.

In January 2025, SET released six new brochures designed for carers, families, friends, and kinship groups supporting someone with mental health challenges.

These resources cover key topics such as Supporting Someone Through a Mental Health Crisis, Information for LGBTIQ+ Carers of People Accessing Mental Health Services, Understanding Mental Health Diagnosis, and more. Additionally, a number of these brochure resources were also translated into Hindi, Arabic, Chinese (simplified) and Vietnamese.



SET promoted these resources on MHCN's social media channels, MHCN's website, MHCN's e-newsletter and circulated promotional information to relevant stakeholders, community organisations, Local Health Districts within NSW etc.

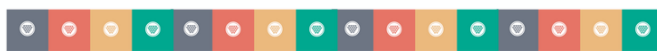
In October 2024, we hosted our annual Mental Health Month event, Artistic Dialogue: Creative Workshop for Carers, which was led by art therapist Lisa McArthur-Edwards. This event facilitated open discussions about mental health through a series of interactive art therapy stations, helping participants develop the skills and language to communicate their experiences, needs, and challenges effectively, and foster a supportive environment within communities, families, and friends. A morning tea was also included to give participants a chance to unwind and connect with other carers.

Throughout 2025, MHCN attended various stakeholder events including the Lived Experience Engagement Symposium in Melbourne, a national gathering of Australia's three lived experience peak bodies under the theme 'Beyond Representation - From Experience to Expertise.' The two-day event included keynote sessions from national leaders and workshops for family, carer, and kin attendees, focusing on policy advocacy and community engagement. Participants worked on translating lived experience into effective advocacy and co-designing inclusive, locally grounded initiatives.

This financial year, MHCN's MHCAN has continued to grow, welcoming individual and organisational members from across NSW. Anne and Ellie have collaboratively organised MHCAN's monthly Mental Health Carer Connection Meetings (MHCCM); online

sessions where carers share support, build advocacy skills, and connect with others. These meetings provide valuable insight into carers' priorities, informing MHCN's policy, strategy, and link carers and lived experience representatives with organisations and researchers, ensuring fair compensation for their contributions.

A Terms of Reference, developed with input from MHCCM members, clarified the meetings' purpose and strengthened participant advocacy. Meetings have increasingly focused on solution-oriented advocacy and boosting carer engagement. Members expressed interest in collaborating on specific advocacy projects, and a poll and Expression of Interest has been circulated to recruit working group members for projects in the next financial year.



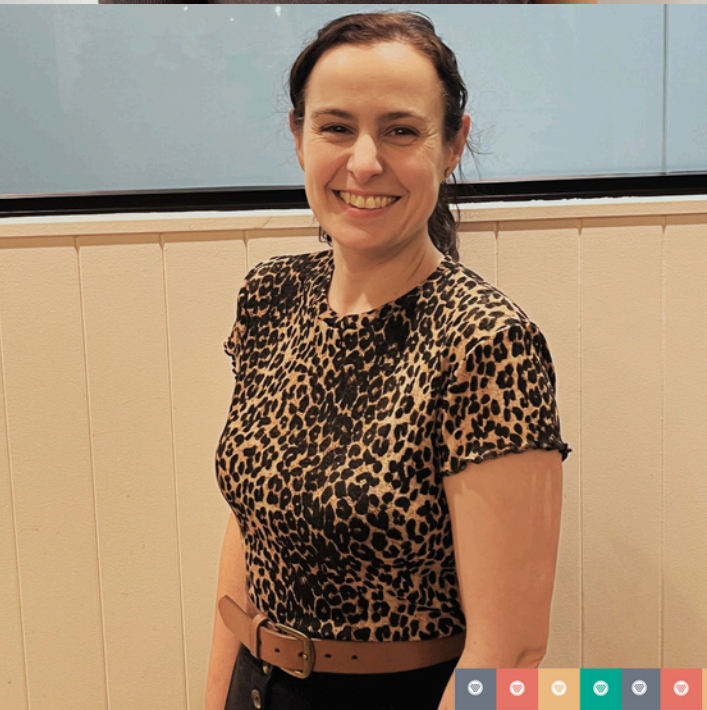
3. Promote Mental Health Carers Capacity Development

The Capacity Development Team is focused on the third of the four pillars of MHCN's Strategic Plan - to promote mental health carer capacity development. The Capacity Development Team (CDT) consists of Jade Curran, Stakeholder Engagement Manager, and Anne Stedman, formerly Carer Peer Trainer, currently MHCN President, with administrative assistance from Alex Brown, Administration Coordinator, and Laura Knight, Organisational Development Coordinator.

In August 2024, CDT delivered a Recovery Oriented Practice training session to Local Health District staff to enhance carer awareness among mental health clinicians. The session provided space for participants to discuss existing gaps and share suggestions for improvement. CDT also collaborated with Lived Experience Australia (LEA) to develop an Intermediate Advocacy Community of Practice for mental health carers and consumers. This 12-month program consisted of six 2-hour online sessions and explored crucial advocacy topics such as identifying core values, self-care strategies, effective communication, writing, and presentation skills.

At the end of 2024, CDT established an ongoing partnership with The Benevolent Society to facilitate both online and in-person training sessions for their local carer groups. Throughout 2024-2025, CDT delivered several 'Healthy Boundaries' and 'The Caring Journey' sessions via Zoom as well as at various locations across Sydney.



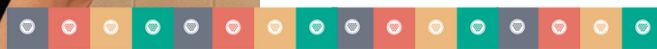


In January 2025, CDT introduced a Training Module Review to ensure MHCN's training program remains current and responsive to the needs of mental health carers. This includes a structured scheduling process to guide regular updates of all MHCN training modules. Each module is reviewed in detail, covering PowerPoint presentations, Learner Toolkits (which summarise training content and resources), and overall training structure.

Feedback from pre and post training evaluations is also integrated into the review process, helping CDT identify strengths, areas for improvement, and opportunities for redesign. A key theme from participant feedback related to MHCN's on demand platform, Demio. Users noted that the inability to pause videos affected engagement, and some found accessibility and navigation challenging which emphasised the need for a more user-friendly e-learning environment.

To enhance accessibility and interactivity, CDT subscribed to Articulate 360, a comprehensive e-learning platform designed to support the development of engaging and accessible on demand training modules. Articulate 360 allows participants to pause, revisit, and navigate training sections at their own pace. It also provides developers with tools such as customisable templates, built-in design resources, and an integrated Learning Management System (LMS), streamlining the process of updating and publishing MHCN's training modules. CDT aims to launch the updated MHCN modules on Articulate 360 in early 2026.

In May 2025, MHCN welcomed two new Carer Peer Trainers, Melissa Goldman and Madeleine Fabian, who joined the Capacity Development and Stakeholder Engagement Team to support training facilitation, administrative tasks, and the ongoing module review project.



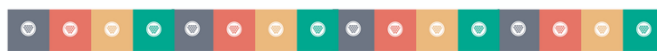
4. Continuous Organisational Development & Improvement

Focusing on the last of the four key pillars of the Strategic Plan – continuous organisational development and improvement, and underpinning MHCN’s operational activities, is the Business and Organisation Support Services Team (BOSS). The team consists of Jonathan Harms, CEO, Laura Knight, Organisational Development Coordinator, and Alex Brown, Administration Coordinator.

The 2024 – 2025 Financial Year has been both a bittersweet and celebratory one. On the 28 November 2024, MHCN celebrated its 50th Anniversary with a lunch and award ceremony at Parliament House in Sydney. However, in May 2025, MHCN were devastated to hear that longstanding President and Board Member, Jenny Learmont passed away. You can read more about the 50th celebration, and the tribute that CEO Jonathan Harms wrote about Jenny, earlier in this Annual Report.

MHCN said farewell to Anne Stedman as Deputy CEO and Carer Peer Trainer but welcomed her back as the President of the MHCN Board. MHCN also welcomed two new staff members to the team, to help replace Anne in facilitating MHCN’s training and education program – Carer Peer Trainer, Melissa Goldman and Peer Trainer, Madeleine Fabian.

Melissa brings her own mental health carer lived experience to the role, as well as a PhD in Psychology. Melissa is also a Board Member of the Choice Foundation, an organisation dedicated to supporting initiatives and programs that improve the lives of people with disabilities, including those living with psychosocial disability.



Madeleine is the founder of Well Informed; a business that specialises in bringing best practice mental health skills and research into schools, workplaces and communities. Maddy is also a former MHCN Board Member and holds several qualifications, including a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Social Policy.

Last year's 2024 AGM saw the re-election of Raja Gopalan as Ordinary Board Member, and the election of Douglas Holmes OAM, and Matt Floro as Ordinary Board Members.

Douglas has been involved with MHCN over many years, as well as the Association of Relatives and Friends of the Mentally Ill (ARAFMI) on the Central Coast and the Hunter region, including as current Chairperson of the Central Coast ARAFMI board and long-time member of the Yakkalla Community Support Group.

Matt is a passionate advocate for mental health care, particularly for older Australians and individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds, and is an experienced lawyer with a focus on environmental, planning and climate change law.

MHCN would like to thank Robert Wellman, who, whilst unfortunately was not re-elected at the 2024 AGM, has spent many years working tirelessly as an advocate in the community and as part of MHCN's advocacy work.

There has been significant traction in the development of MHCN's organisational infrastructure in accordance with QIP and Accreditation. We continued to streamline our HR processes through ongoing work with the consultants at Employee Matters, and by utilising Employment Hero, a Human Resources Information System (HRIS). We have reviewed and developed a number of policies and procedures, and developed and implemented several systems, including an Employee Reward and Recognition Program, and Feedback and Complaints, Quality Improvement and Management and Hazard, Risk, Incidents and Accidents Systems.

MHCN are thrilled to report that there has been a substantial increase in the number of Eunice Lonergan Carer Respite Grants being awarded, with six travel vouchers awarded to carers from July 2024 to date, however, the decision was made at the end of the 2024-2025 Financial Year to increase the number of names selected in the draw to twenty annually. The Eunice Lonergan Carer Respite Grant program is run by MHCN to provide mental health carers in NSW an opportunity to take a holiday break from their caring journey. The BOSS team looks forward to being able to help provide more carers with some respite from their caring duties over the next financial year. You can read more about MHCN's bequest program, [the Eunice Lonergan Carer Respite Grants and eligibility criteria on our website here](#).

MHCN would like to extend a heartfelt thankyou to our volunteer Board Members, mental health carers, Mental Health Carer Advocacy Network Members, stakeholders, our funders, and our staff for a successful 2024 - 2025 financial year.



Issues Raised from MHCN's Carer Networks

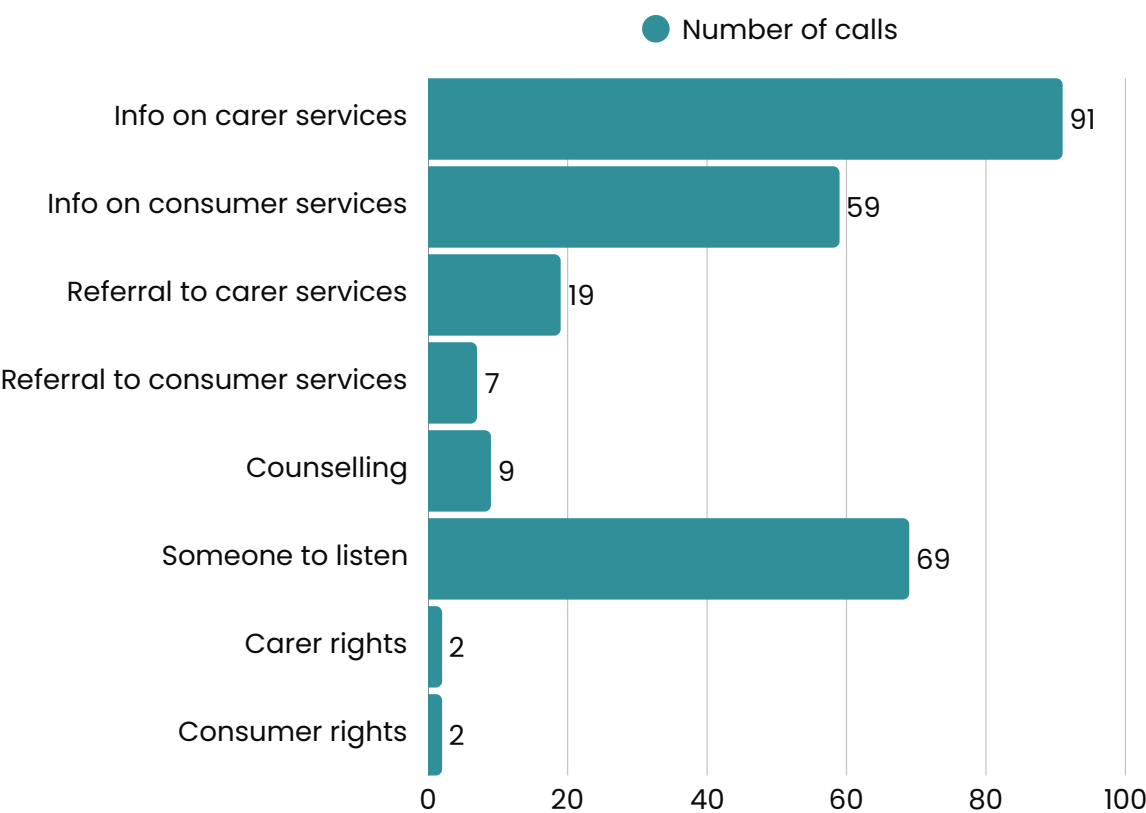
The following lists the key concerns of carers from MHCN's Carer Connections Meetings and Carers of Forensic and Corrections Patients Network Meetings:

- Fund respite directly for carers, including residential respite and a 'carer respite card' to access entertainment venues.
- Psychosocial support, including for carers of forensic and corrections patients.
- Better communication and information from services about the person they care for.
- Support with navigating the mental health system.
- Early intervention supports and services.
- Mental health crisis responses in the community should include clinicians, and not only police.
- Sensationalist media reporting of forensic (mental health criminal) cases.

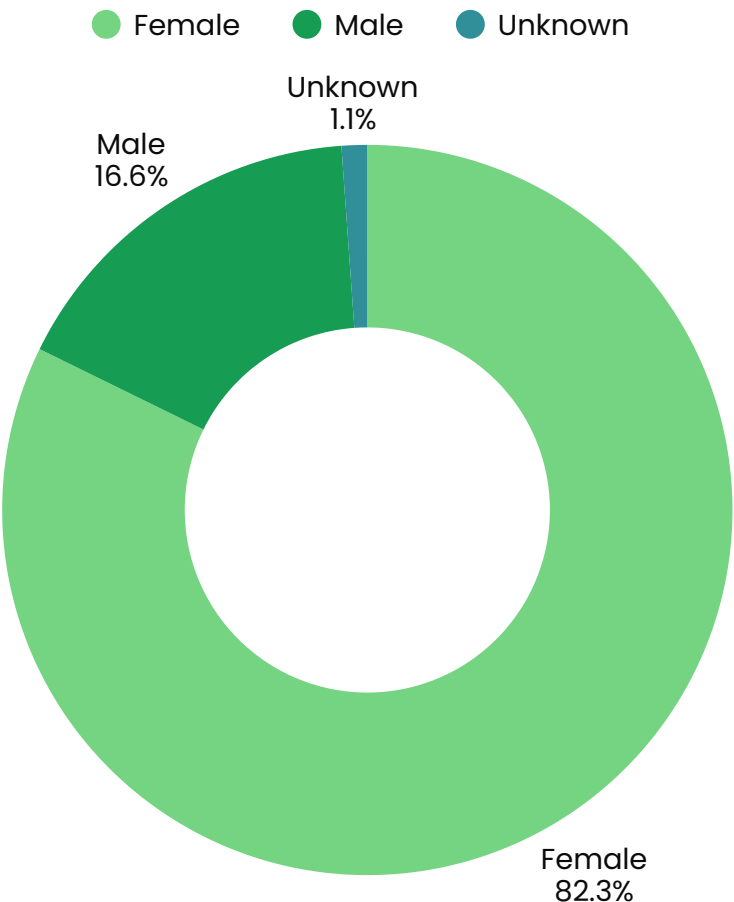


Carer Connections Helpline Data

Main reason for the call

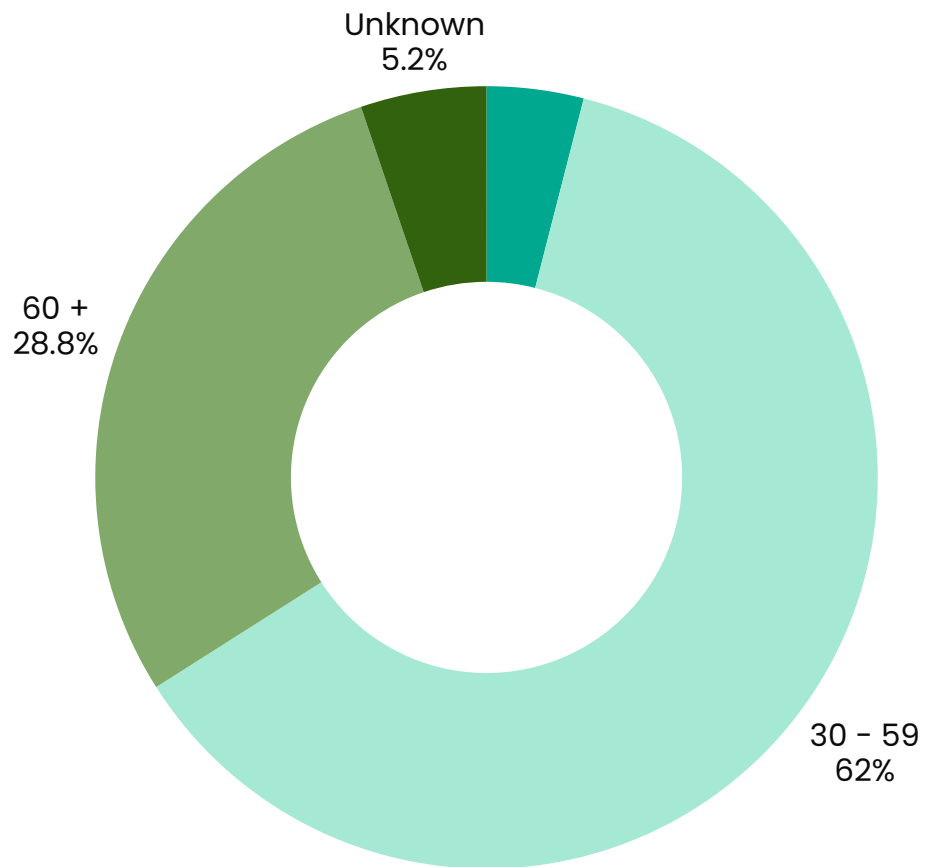


Gender of the caller

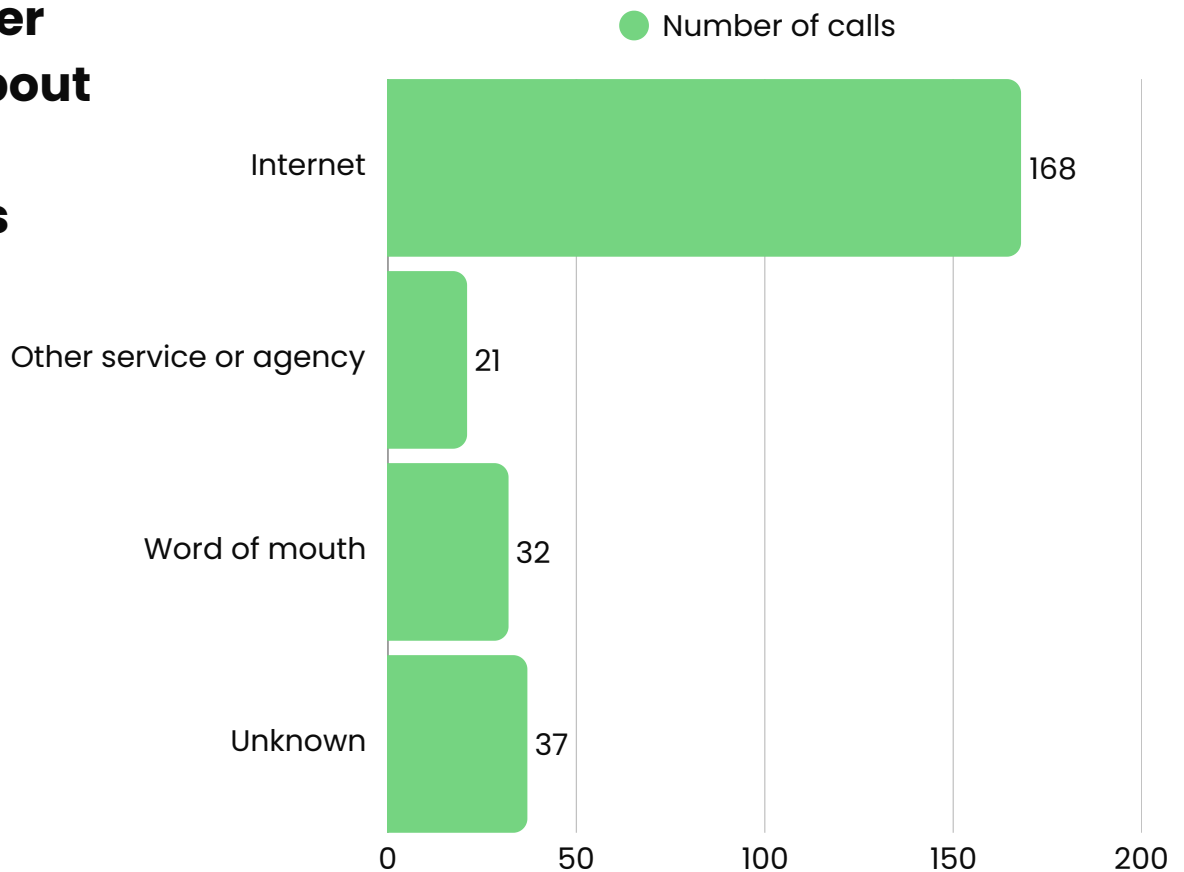


Under 30 30 - 59 60 +
Unknown

Age of the caller



How the caller found out about the Carer Connections Line



Eunice Lonergan Carer Respite Grant Program

The Eunice Lonergan Carer Respite Grant Program is funded by a bequest that was left to MHCN by Eunice Lonergan, and is a unique program run by MHCN to provide mental health carers and families in NSW an opportunity to take a holiday break from their caring duties.

To be eligible for the grant, you must be a member of MHCN, care for someone with a diagnosed mental illness, live with the person you care for, be 18 years old or above and be a resident of NSW.

Since its inception in 2022, 10 Eunice Lonergan Carer Respite Grants have been awarded to carers. Winners are chosen via random draw and are awarded a \$1,000.00 travel voucher if their application is approved by the Board of MHCN. In 2025 the decision was made to increase the number of carers drawn to be eligible for the grant to 20 per year.

What the carers said about their experience



We wish to thank MHCN for your kind donation. This has been one of the hardest years in the past 10 years. Once the year is over we plan to take a trip overseas in 2026.

I was so appreciative of receiving a Eunice Lonergan respite grant from Mental Health Carers NSW. As carers, we often miss milestone events for friends and family and usually one of us has to remain at home, so honestly – this opportunity couldn't have come at a better time. My husband and I were, together, able to attend my oldest friend's 60th birthday and stay two nights at the QT Hotel on the Gold Coast – something that simply wouldn't have been possible without the respite grant. The voucher covered a fabulous hotel so we could then cover the cost of additional care for our daughter, ensuring she was safe and well while we were away.



Board Meeting Attendance FY 2024 – 2025

Board Meetings			Executive & Finance Meetings	
Name	Attended Meetings	Total Number Meetings	Attended Meeting	Total Number Meetings
Jenny Learmont – President (22 November 2024 – 3 May 2025)	3	5	2	3
Anne Stedman – President (Elected 22 May 2025/elected President 26 June 2025)	1	1	0	0
Lynda Walton – Vice President	3	7	1	3
Andrew Pryor – Treasurer	7	7	3	3
Elizabeth Priestley – Secretary	7	7	3	3
Chris Avent – OBM	7	7	N/A	N/A
Raj Gopalan – OBM (Re-elected 22 November 2024)	3	7	N/A	N/A
Douglas Holmes – OBM (Elected 22 November 2024)	2	5	N/A	N/A
Matt Floro –OBM (Elected 22 November 2024)	4	5	N/A	N/A



Board Meeting Attendance

FY 2024 –2025

Board Meetings			Executive & Finance Meetings	
Name	Attended Meetings	Total Number Meetings	Attended Meeting	Total Number Meetings
Rob Wellman (Retired 22 November 2024)	2	2	N/A	N/A
Yolande Williams – OBM (Retired 23 April 2025)	0	4	N/A	N/A
Jess Treacy – OBM (Elected 9 September 2024, retired 22 November 2024)	1	1	N/A	N/A

