



Supporting Ageing Carers

The numbers of older people caring for an adult with a brain injury are increasing as the population ages.

For many, caring for a family member has become a life-long responsibility. As carers age, physical, social and emotional factors, declining health and strength can take an increasing toll. Carers are less able to carry out domestic or work responsibilities while also assisting with rehabilitation activities and managing their own wellbeing (Kreutzer, Serio & Bergquist, 1994)..

Challenges

- Available income to support the individual with a disability – the older the carer, the lower the family income available.
- Decreased abilities to manage challenging behaviours associated with brain injury.
- Ongoing difficulties in accessing appropriate services to support both the individual and the carer
- Individuals and families who do not reside in metropolitan areas have reduced contact with or access to suitable care systems and rehabilitation facilities.
- Adapting to life changes like relationship changes, retirement, and advanced care planning.

Family carers have varied experiences during life transitions. They require support to understand what has happened and the implications for the future.

Parent Carers

As parent carers get older, anxiety increases about who will care for their adult child with a disability when they are no longer able to do so or should they pre-decease their adult child. Many people living with a disability are equally concerned about what will happen to them and who will support them when their parents die (Qu et al., 2012).

Some parent carers may also need help themselves, with ageing parents being more likely to have such needs. Many ageing parent carers are not living

with a partner (i.e. sole parents) and hold the bulk of caring responsibilities of their adult child. Contrary to expectation, older parents (over 65) did not perceive caregiving as more stressful than younger parents (between the ages of 50 and 65). This may be due to the parents' ability to adapt to carers' burden.

Partner Carers

Partners of people with a brain injury will often take extra responsibilities – running a household, being the sole wage earner, making most of the decisions, and providing support to the person with a brain injury. Financial situations may change due to ongoing medical bills, loss of income, and planning for the future. For couples, changes in emotional and sexual intimacy in a relationship can occur. Managing the relationship through these changes across a number of levels can be challenging for both parties.

Where to get support

- Services Australia provides financial help and other services if you care for someone with a disability, an illness or who is frail aged.
- Access counselling or join carer groups to meet peers with similar experiences. You can also contact Carer Gateway to register and access carer supports such as financial help and respite.
- Seek independent advice for a financial adviser and/or a legal professional to plan for the future. It is important to consider Power(s) of Attorney and Advanced Care Directives.

References

Minnes P, Woodford L, Carlson P, Johnston J & McColl MA 2010, 'The Needs of Ageing Parents Caring for an Adult with Acquired Brain Injury', Canadian Journal on Ageing, vol. 29, pp. 185 – 192.

Qu L, Edwards B, Matthew G 2012, 'Ageing parent carers of people with a disability', Australian Institute of Family Studies, Canberra.

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