

**Ruth Dyson**

**28 APRIL, 2008**

## **Address for the launch of the NZ Carers' Strategy**

*Social Development and Employment Minister Ruth Dyson address for the launch of the NZ Carers' Strategy, Grand Hall, Parliament Buildings*

tenei te mihi ki a koutou i runga i te kaupapa o te ra.

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

*[Distinguished guests and award recipients, greetings to you gathered here for this purpose today. Greetings once, twice, three times to you all.]*

Good afternoon everyone and welcome to the Grand Hall of Parliament House to celebrate the launch of the New Zealand Carers' Strategy together with a five-year action plan.. With this strategy and action plan, New Zealand is firmly acknowledging a group of very special, very deserving people...our carers.

The Carers' Strategy marks an important step for people who help others to manage their everyday living. These might be friends or family with an illness or who are disabled, or older people in need of assistance.

Some of you may have witnessed the first step towards realising this Strategy in July last year at this very same place, when we launched *Caring for New Zealand Carers*. At the time some of you may recall that I promised the Strategy would be ready by April this year. Some had their doubts we could move so quickly, but here we are! – thanks largely to your efforts.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your awesome input. You can be very proud of the difference you make in the lives of the people you support.

I would also like to acknowledge Carers New Zealand and the New Zealand Carers' Alliance. If not for them, we may not be here celebrating this success. It was in November 2004 that Carers New Zealand brought a group of national non-profit groups together for the first time to discuss how they could work together to ensure better support for family, whanau, and aiga carers.

I was honoured to host the Carers' Alliance meeting at Parliament, where over 30 non-profit organisations agreed unanimously that their first development priority would be to achieve a Carers' Strategy for New Zealand.

When I first heard that the Alliance wanted a strategic framework that would be developed in partnership between government and carers, it was music to my ears. I had no hesitation in agreeing. I think this has been a particularly strong and effective partnership, based on trust, openness and respect. It has resulted in a Strategy that truly encompasses the views and opinions of carers, the people they support and their families.

You'd think this is something we take for granted but in fact government working this closely with the sector is a relatively new thing and in this case the collaboration has been fantastic. That's why the process in producing this Strategy has been incredibly smooth and swift.

To John Foreman, Laurie Hilsgen and the rest of the Alliance's executive committee: thank you. Your leadership skills and commitment made it possible for us to accomplish so much in so short a time.

I would also like to thank everyone who made submissions or attended meetings during the consultation process. We received over 200 written submissions and over 1,000 people attended meetings. It's good to get such extensive feedback, it makes the resulting document and its content that much more meaningful and relevant.

Caring for friends and family who need support in their daily lives is no mean feat! It requires commitment and perseverance.

It can be a battle. All of us here know the toll that caring for others can take. We may feel isolation, even despair. We may encounter stress or sometimes deep seated depression. The people around us may feel the impact too, and our other relationships can be affected. Many of you have mentioned these problems. You've also told me how the great work you do in our communities can seem undervalued, while at the same time you're missing the opportunities other people take for granted, such as involving yourself in sport or other interests, socialising, developing a career, pursuing education.

The New Zealand Carers' Strategy is a wonderful way to recognise the accomplishments of our carers who face significant challenges every day. It will provide carers with the support they need in order to lead decent lives. But it's not just about helping carers. It's about helping create strong families, and strong communities. And there are sound economic reasons for doing this: By helping carers who, for example, may want to enter the workforce but can't do so due to their caring responsibilities, we are helping reduce current skill shortages.

The Carers' Strategy is an investment for the future. Growing numbers of New Zealanders will need care in the following decades as the population ages. The Strategy shows we have come a long way. At the same time, we recognise that there is still much to be done.

The Labour-led government is continuing to work with non-governmental organisations and community groups that have their ear to the ground, to build our awareness of carers' needs now and in the future.

The key to the Carers' Strategy is its vision for carers, where:

*New Zealand Aotearoa is a society that values individuals, families, whānau or aiga who support others who need help with their everyday living.*

Alongside the vision are four principles to drive change:

- recognising diversity: by acknowledging and responding to the diversity of needs and aspirations of carers.

- being proactive: enabling family focused support to be in place for carers when they need it.
- enabling carers: giving them the choices and the autonomy to develop, grow and sustain their personal, family and community support systems; ensuring that formal supports are reliable and are able to provide real support to carers. And, last but by no means least:
- being inclusive: acknowledging that the needs of carers, family, whānau, or aiga and the person being supported, are often intertwined.

The Carers' Strategy sits alongside a number of related government initiatives, including the New Zealand Disability Strategy, the New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy, Working New Zealand and the Choices for Living, Caring and Working 10-Year Plan.

The Government is committed to ensuring the Carers' Strategy makes a difference – that it is a “live” initiative and its implementation undergoes continuous development.

We must make sure carers and those close to them receive the services they deserve. As one carer put in their submission: “The only way the vision and principles will meet our needs is if they are supported by actions.” That’s why we’ve produced the five-year Action Plan. It is in effect the first step towards achieving the Strategy’s long-term vision for carers.

We’ve listened to the voices of carers, the people they support, health providers, health professionals, and employers, and taken full account of their views, perspectives and priorities.

The five objectives of the New Zealand Carers' Strategy that the Five-year Action Plan aims to address are:

- Provide information
- Protect the health and wellbeing of carers
- Enable carers to take a break
- Provide financial support for carers
- Provide training and pathways to employment for carers.

The Action Plan addresses the priorities identified by carers during the consultation process. Our carers have told us they want help in learning how to provide the highest level of care to those close to them. This includes not only practical tips around safe lifting, but ways to deal with stress and grief.

So this year ACC will develop a wellbeing and learning programme available to all informal carers.

Carers also told us that having a break was central to their wellbeing and to the wellbeing of the person being supported. Over the next three years the Government will take steps to increase the flexibility and reliability of respite care for informal carers. We'll increase the residential respite services for disabled people with high needs, and we'll provide additional assistance in recruiting relief carers.

I'm pleased to announce an immediate action as a result of the Strategy is to launch an online poll. I am advised this will be put up on the Families Commission website today, asking families to tell us about themselves, their lives and what caring means to them. The knowledge gained from the poll will be invaluable to the continuous development of the Strategy's implementation.

We'll be closely monitoring the Strategy's effectiveness. A steering group including two representatives from the Carers' Alliance will be overseeing its implementation. They'll be responsible for measuring the outcomes of the policies and services delivered under the Strategy. So we'll know what's effective and what needs further work.

The challenge remains for other organisations to consider how they can help deliver the vision for the future of carers in New Zealand.

Communities and the voluntary sector, health funders, providers and professionals, employers, unions and other workplace organisations, carers and those receiving care – everyone has a role to play. The success of the Carers' Strategy will be the sum of its parts. Working together, we can make sure carers and the people they care for get a fair deal.

We all have a stake in this. Most of us reach a point in our lives where we'll either need to be cared for, or need to care for someone else. In the 2006 Census, near 420,000, or nearly 13-and-a-half per cent of New Zealanders over 15, reported looking after a person with an illness or disability. The Carers' Strategy concerns us all.

To our caregivers here today; thank you for your commitment. We celebrate you for the support and encouragement you provide. You are champions of the people you care for. You make a valued contribution to their success and to the success of New Zealand society as a whole.

To the wider team of people who have provided help and advice along the way: you know who you are and no amount of words can thank you enough for your efforts.

I hope I'll continue to hear from our carers. The Labour-led government is committed to ensuring the Strategy remains relevant. We want it to be a living strategy...one that continues to make a real difference and produce overwhelmingly positive outcomes for everyone.

Thank you.