



MEDIA RELEASE

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IF YOU DON'T CARE, HOW CAN WE?

The We Care! national awareness campaign, launched today by more than 40 national not for profits, is asking the Prime Minister, John Key, to lead a new era of positive change for New Zealand's 420,000+ carers of ill, elderly, and disabled friends and family members.

Carers NZ, the national peak body for carers, and the NZ Carers Alliance, a coalition of 44 not for profits, have organised the campaign to unify the large but often invisible community of carers, and give them a direct voice to the Prime Minister, government, and wider society.

The organisations are concerned that the Carers' Strategy, launched in 2008 with a five year Action Plan, has lost momentum with government agencies in the wake of budget constraints, restructurings, and health spending that is focused on facilities rather than community supports. They say community based care is unsustainable without first 'caring for the carers', a responsibility presidents and prime ministers have taken seriously in other countries.

"We have an ageing population that is living at home for longer with higher support needs than past generations," says John Forman, Chair of the NZ Carers Alliance. "This is happening at a time of other big social shifts, particularly the need for carers to work in paid employment to keep their families afloat."

Carers are New Zealand's biggest health workforce, and their unpaid work has an annual economic value of more than \$7 billion. Mr Forman says the caring role has priceless social and family value, and significant economic value that can no longer be taken for granted.

"We have to do better for carers. They give a lot and they deserve more. It's as simple as that."

Caring affects all New Zealanders, because we can all expect to give or receive care during our lives, says Carers NZ chief executive Laurie Hilszen. Although 90% of carers are of workforce age, and a majority work full or part-time in addition to their caring duties, inadequate support for carers is forcing many out of their paid jobs. A study by Auckland University last year found that of 300 carers interviewed, only eight have been able to continue in paid employment, a trend that is not sustainable for families or the national economy, she says.

"These days New Zealand needs every taxpayer to participate in paid employment if they can. We hope the Prime Minister, who describes carers as unsung heroes, will follow leaders of other countries by working strategically with the not for profit sector to help carers. This includes thoughtful debate about payment for the small number of carers in intensive 24/7 roles who are saving the Crown a fortune, and should have the option to be paid for their caring work."

The Government has made progress for carers in areas such as respite, development of a government help guide, and the legislative right to request flexible work. A strategic approach by not for profits, government, community organisations, families, and employers will ensure sustained progress for carers.

To learn about and participate in the We Care! campaign visit www.wecare.org.nz Facebook: We Care NZ Twitter: #wecarenz

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NZ Carers Alliance Participants: @ Heart, Access to Medicines Coalition, Age Concern NZ, Allergy NZ, Alzheimers NZ, ANZMES (Associated NZ ME Society), Aotearoa Maori Whanau Carers Network, Asthma Foundation, Autism NZ, BALANCE NZ, Cancer Society of NZ, Carers NZ, CCS Disability Action, Cerebral Palsy Society of NZ, Complex Carers Group, Cystic Fibrosis Association of NZ, Epilepsy NZ, Federation of Disability Information Centres, Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, Head Injury Society of NZ, Hospice NZ, IHC, Kidney Kids, Lysosomal Diseases NZ, MS Society, Muscular Dystrophy Association of NZ, Neurological Alliance, NZ Continence Association, NZ Down Syndrome Association, NZ Lesbian and Gay Carer Network, NZ Organisation for Rare Disorders, NZ Spinal Trust, Parent to Parent, Parents of Vision Impaired NZ Inc, Parkinsons NZ, Phobic Trust of NZ Inc, Rescare NZ, Retina NZ Inc, SAMS, Stroke Foundation, The Brain Injury Association of NZ Inc, TOA Pacific, Young Carers NZ

