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**Aim** To provide a free and accessible online support program to promote physical and psychological wellbeing in caregivers.

## Background

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures indicate that there are approximately 2.6 million carers in Australia<sup>1</sup>. Based on the data that 45 per cent (7.3 million people) of Australians aged 16 - 85 are estimated to experience a mental health or substance use disorder at some point in their lives, and with 20 per cent (3.2 million individuals) having experienced a mental health disorder during the 12 months prior to taking the survey<sup>2</sup>, the number of mental health carers in Australia is likely to be significant.
- The demands of caregiving can lead to subjective and objective burden, which in turn can contribute to mental and physical distress<sup>3</sup>. Mental health carers are often isolated by continued stigma and discrimination towards mental illness, as well as by the lack of information or processes for its delivery<sup>4</sup>.
- Information alone may not be sufficient to address substantive areas such as burden, coping or mental health<sup>5</sup>.
- Specialist services and support mechanisms are required, incorporating cognitive and behavioural elements<sup>6</sup>.
- Existing carer programs can help to lower subjective burden<sup>7</sup> but universal engagement may be problematic due to time constraints and a lack of flexibility in program structure. Financial concerns, stigma, shame and a tendency to focus upon the needs of the individual with the mental illness, could all pose barriers to carers seeking out their own support.
- Web-based programs can address carer needs whilst simultaneously offering flexibility, cost effectiveness, anonymity and accessibility.

## Target Users

Friends or family members supporting individuals with mental illness.



### Consultation & Planning

- Consultation meetings with consumer representatives and stakeholders
- Literature review

### Program Development

- Program framework
- Signposts (modules)
  - Tools
  - Resources

### Web Development

- Design, implementation, test, deployment, go live!

### Dissemination

- Marketing campaigns
- Network communications
- "Go live" coinciding with MH week

## Challenges

- Increasing engagement with web-based technologies
- Establishing a network or community to promote peer support
- Increasing internet access in community centres or primary care settings
- Enriching the program with carer stories whilst protecting caregivers
- Supporting the challenges and wide spectrum of difficulties faced.

## Key Features

### Tools:

- Pleasurable activities
- Gratitude and values
- Identifying risks
- Strengthening relationships
- Hopes and dreams

### Resources:

- Mindfulness audios
- Fact sheets

Stand alone tools, initial problem solving focus to provide maximal impact.

## Future Questions

Is OnTrack Families and Friends an effective program for promoting psychological wellbeing in caregivers and addressing perceived burden? Which tools and resources map onto carer needs most closely? How could this program be further enhanced? How can dissemination, registrations, public awareness and utility be increased?

## References

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