

**Carers and informal supports are often an integral part of the care network for people living with neurological conditions. They often take on complex and sustained responsibilities, balancing multiple roles, and many with limited formal support. Health professionals are well positioned to identify early signs of strain, promote preventive strategies, and facilitate access to appropriate services.**

## Identifying carers in clinical settings

People living with neurological conditions often rely on family or friends for practical and emotional support, though neither may see this as a caring role. Because the term carer is interpreted differently, these support needs are sometimes missed. Identifying who assists the person helps build a clearer picture of their overall wellbeing and care context.

- Ask about the person's broader support network to understand who assists with daily life, for example: "Who helps you with day-to-day activities, appointments or managing your condition?"
- With the person's consent, invite those involved to participate in relevant discussions to support continuity, safety and shared planning.
- Introduce carer supports as a standard part of holistic care, emphasising that maintaining the wellbeing of support people contributes to sustainable outcomes for both the individual and their care network.

## Promoting carer wellbeing

Acknowledging the carer's role and validating their experience encourages openness about challenges. Routine conversations about self-care and available supports help normalise help-seeking and reduce stigma.

### Practical strategies for clinicians

- Check in regularly on how the caring role is affecting health and relationships
- Encourage GP reviews and mental health care plans where appropriate
- Offer information on respite, counselling and peer support options
- Reinforce that maintaining carer wellbeing sustains quality of care for the person they support

### Times of carer strain

Periods of transition or disruption can increase stress for carers and reduce their capacity to provide consistent support. Health professionals should be alert to situations such as:

- Changes in employment – adjustments to work hours, job loss or increased workload can impact carer availability and financial stability
- Loss of driving ability – reduced independence can affect both the carer's and the person's ability to access appointments, services or social activities
- Financial pressure – increased costs or reduced income can heighten stress and limit access to supports
- Life milestones or family changes – events such as pregnancy, relationship changes, or shifts in household structure can alter caring responsibilities

### Overcoming barriers to accessing support

- Recognise that many carers do not self-identify as “carers,” which can prevent them from seeking or accepting support.
- Be aware of time constraints, financial pressures, and competing responsibilities that limit carers' ability to attend appointments or services.
- Acknowledge emotional barriers such as guilt, fear of judgement, or reluctance to prioritise their own needs.
- Communicate clearly and consistently, as complex systems and fragmented information can be overwhelming.
- Proactively ask about caring roles and screen for carer stress and burnout.
- Provide flexible options (e.g. telehealth, after-hours appointments) to improve access.
- Actively connect carers with practical, culturally appropriate supports rather than relying on self-referral.

### Getting support

#### **Carer Gateway**

A national service providing free practical and emotional supports for carers across Australia.

Supports include:

- Short-term counselling (phone, online or in-person)
- Peer connection and social programs

- Coaching to develop coping and planning skills
- Planned and emergency respite
- Tailored support packages for individual and family needs

Contact Carer Gateway:  
Phone 1800 422 737 or visit  
[carergateway.gov.au](http://carergateway.gov.au)