

Response to the Australian Government Select Senate Community Affairs Inquiry on Work and Care

September 2022

Introduction

Carers Australia welcomes the establishment of the Senate Select Committee on Work and Care and the opportunity to respond to the Terms of Reference. Carers Australia and the National Carer Network - our members, the peak carer organisations in each state and territory - have been advocating for over 30 years for carers seeking to juggle work and care.

Carers Australia represents more than 2.65 million Australians who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends with a disability, chronic health conditions, mental illness or disorder, drug or alcohol problem, terminal illness, or who are frail and aged. An evaluation on the “Value of informal care” undertaken by Deloitte Access Economics estimated that a total of nearly 2.2 billion hours of care were provided in 2020 and that the total cost to replace all informal care in that year would be \$77 billion.¹

Carers Australia proposes three pillars are needed to effectively support Australians with unpaid care responsibilities to also participate in the paid workforce:

- More flexible workplaces
- Adequate substitute care
- Improved interface with the income support system

Each of these pillars is necessary but not sufficient in the absence of the other 2 pillars.

What carers in diverse circumstances have in common is that they may need flexible working arrangements, income support and formal care services, concurrently or separately at different stages of their caring trajectory.

While laws mandating workplace flexibility and access to carer leave are vital, these must be matched by an understanding of the impact of the caring role, consistently followed workplace policies, and managers educated and empowered to exercise discretion and flexibility in the workplace.

While some people receiving care may be eligible for formal support services under the NDIS, My Aged Care or other systems, unless these are accessible and affordable, and of sufficient quality and quantity to enable carers to work, formal substitute care is not enough.

While carers may need or want to work fewer hours to enable them to provide care, they still need economic security. Yet eligibility requirements for the Carer Payment in our income support system can actively discourage combining work and care.

¹ Deloitte Access Economics, The Value of Informal Care in 2020, <https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/replacement-value-of-unpaid-care-in-australia-rises-to-77-9-billion-per-year>



Carers Australia invites the Select Committee to review our other recent submissions for more detail on each of these three pillars, in particular, our Response to the Senate Select Committee on Job Security² and our comprehensive submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Carer Leave³, noting we raise many of the same issues and provide similar evidence.

Questions posed in the Inquiry Terms of Reference

(a) The extent and nature of the combination of work and care across Australia and the impact of changes in demographic and labour force patterns on work-care arrangements in recent decades.

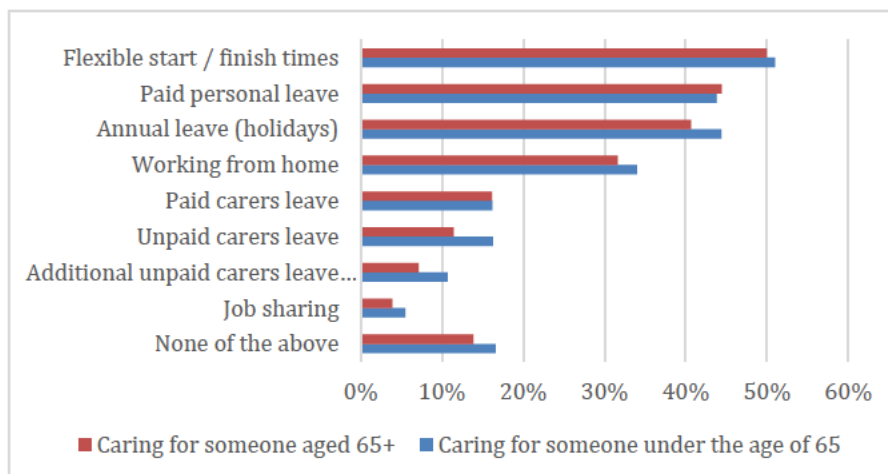
According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2018 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC), 2.65 million (or one in 9 Australians) provided ongoing assistance for someone with disability or older people.⁴

Of these, 861,600 (or 3.5% of all Australians aged 15 years and over) were primary carers – i.e., the carer who provided the most care assistance. While seven in ten of all carers were in the labour force, only 55.5% of primary carers of working age were employed.

(b) The impact of combining various types of work and care (including of children, the aged, those with disability) upon the well-being of workers, carers and those they care for.

A 2020 National Carer Survey found that the most common career impacts of caring on respondents' paid work were exiting employment and reduced working hours, with a typical carer working 27 hours per week (refer to chart 1). Half of all working carers had used flexible start/finish times in their current jobs and 44% had used carers leave.⁵

Chart 1: Use of flexible work arrangements



² Carers Australia's submission to the 2021 Senate Select Committee on Job Security, [Carers-Australia-Response-to-Select-Committee-Job-Security-March-2021.pdf](https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Carers-Australia-Response-to-Select-Committee-Job-Security-March-2021.pdf) ([carersaustralia.com.au](https://www.carersaustralia.com.au))

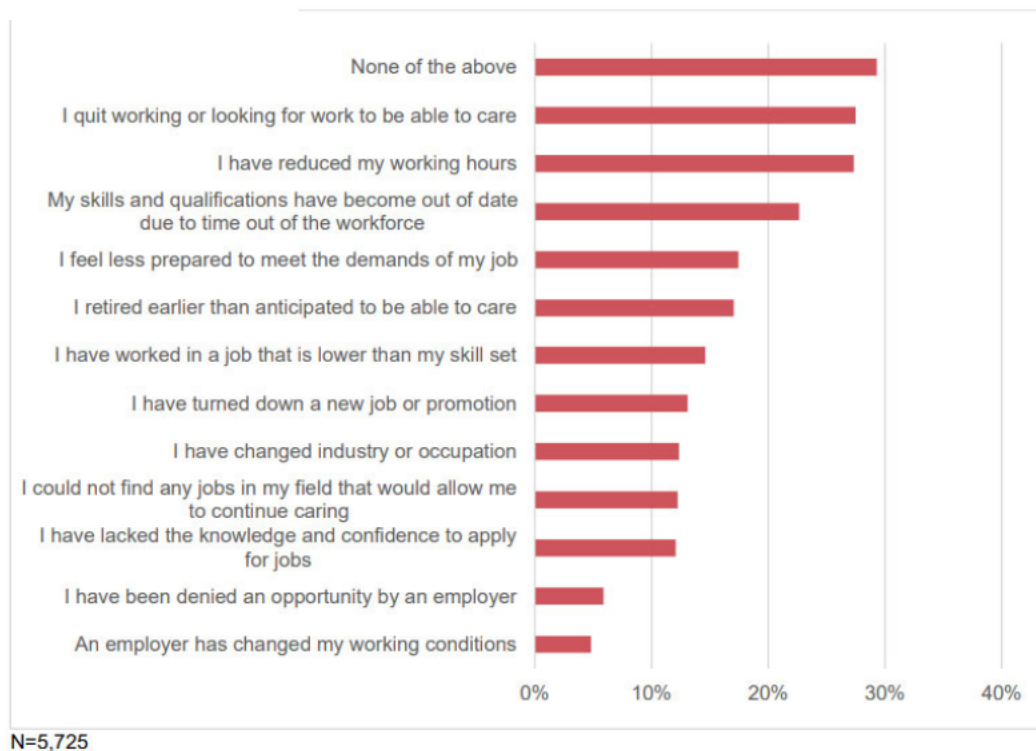
³ Carers Australia Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Carer Leave, 2022, <https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Carers-Australia-Submission-to-the-Productivity-Commission-Carer-Leave-Inquiry.pdf>

⁴ The Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers defines disability as a limitation, restriction or impairment, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months and restricts everyday activity. This includes sensory, intellectual, physical, psychosocial, head injury/stroke/acquired brain injury, long-term conditions which impact on everyday activities)

⁵ Carers NSW (2020). 2020 National Carer Survey: Summary report. Available online at: <http://www.carersnsw.org.au/research/survey>

Less than a third (29%) reported that caring had not impacted their career. The most common impact reported (27.5% of respondents) was having to quit paid work to care. Combined with having to retire early to continue caring, nearly half (44.5%) of carers reported having left the workforce due to their caring responsibilities. The second most common impact (27.4% of respondents) was reducing working hours, followed by not being able to keep skills/qualifications up to date, which was reported by 17.4% of working carers. Career impacts are shown below in Chart 2.

Chart 2: Career Impacts of Caring



The 2021 Carer Wellbeing Survey⁶, commissioned by Carers Australia in partnership with the Department of Social Services and undertaken by the University of Canberra, found that:

- Carers were more likely to have paid employment if they were younger and had fewer caring obligations.
- They were less likely to be in employment if they were older or had high caring obligations.
- The longer a person is a carer, the less likely it is that they will be participating in the labour force (47% of those who had been a carer for five years or more were employed compared to 61% of those who had been a carer for less than a year).

⁶ [211011 Carer-Wellbeing-Survey Final.pdf \(carersaustralia.com.au\)](https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/211011-Carer-Wellbeing-Survey-Final.pdf)

- When asked if their employer was understanding of their caring obligations 17.2% reported they were not very understanding, 41.6% that they were somewhat understanding, and 41.3% that they were very understanding.
- Younger carers were more likely than other employed carers to report their employers were not very understanding.

The effort involved in combining work and care can be considerable, especially against the background where many primary carers provide care in excess of more than 40 hours per week and carers generally report high levels of psychological and emotional strain. Nevertheless, 37% of primary carers providing 40+ hours of care per week do manage to combine some level of work and care.⁷

The benefits of being able to do so can be significant.

- Work can reduce the social isolation so many carers experience⁸ and it can also provide respite from caring.⁹
- A current work history and continuing attachment to the workforce is very important to carers if they wish to be employed and improve their standard of living once their caring role diminishes or ceases.

Most importantly, the ability to combine work and care helps alleviate the financial distress experienced by so many carers and their families. In 2018, 60% of carers relied on a government pension or allowance for their personal income.¹⁰ And currently just under 300,000 Australians rely on the Carer Payment which is \$493.80 per week (plus \$64.80 for those also in receipt of Carer Allowance to cover the additional costs of care). This compares to minimum wage of \$813.50 per week.¹¹

More than half the carers who responded to the 2021 Carer Wellbeing Survey reported that their household was either very poor, poor or just getting along financially, compared to 33.8% of Australians. Fifty-seven per cent of carers had experienced at least one major financial stress event in the last 12 months, such as being unable to pay bills on time, going without heating or cooling, having to delay important purchases, or having to ask for financial help from friends and family. This compared to 35% of Australians more generally in 2020. Three quarters of carers aged under 45 had experienced at least one financial stress event.¹²

(c) The adequacy of workplace laws in relation to work and care and proposals for reform

Carers of working age consistently report that workplace flexibility is one of their greatest challenges.

“Being a carer is tough emotionally and physically. I enjoy my role and understand my role as I have been doing it a long time. I find using all my paid leave for caring limits me taking leave for myself and needing finances for bills and to live. A lot of times you are made to feel guilty for caring for someone and some senior people do not understand the complexities of being a carer even though you provide

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⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABC), Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC), 2018

⁹ The 2021 national Carers Wellbeing Survey found that carers were three times as likely as other Australians to regularly experience loneliness, with 35% often or always feeling lonely compared to 11% of Australians. [211011 Carer-Wellbeing-Survey Final.pdf \(carersaustralia.com.au\)](#)

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABC), Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC), 2018

¹¹ [Minimum wages - Fair Work Ombudsman](#)

¹² [211011 Carer-Wellbeing-Survey Final.pdf \(carersaustralia.com.au\)](#) p.vii

medical certificates and statutory declarations to advise where you were when away from work. They don't know the number of hours you spend caring after hours.”¹³

In summary, Carers Australia's position regarding workplace law reform is that legislation should be amended as follows:

- An entitlement to extended unpaid carer leave must be available to all employees who are carers within the meaning of the Carer Recognition Act 2010.
- Like the parental leave standard, this new standard should be job protected and available to employees who have 12 months' continuous service
- Carers who have left employment and receive Carer Payment should receive Superannuation Carer Credits payable until they re-enter employment or reach Age Pension age.
- An enhanced entitlement to paid personal leave as recommended by the Australian Human Rights Commission in 2007
- The right to request workplace flexibility must impose a positive duty on employers to grant such requests and prohibit unreasonable refusal to accommodate an employee's carer responsibilities as per the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)*

Amendments to the National Employment Standards (NES) must be accompanied by comprehensive guidance on flexible work arrangements for workers with carer responsibilities, setting out rights and responsibilities for both employers and employees.

“It's time that both employees and employers began to reframe workers as caring beings who work, rather than workers with caring responsibilities, says associate professor and deputy director of the Gender Equality in Working Life Research Initiative at the University of Sydney, Elizabeth Hill.”¹⁴

(d) The adequacy of current work and care supports, systems, legislation and other relevant policies across Australian workplaces and society

Workplace discrimination

The Australian Human Rights Commission National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability in 2016, found that employment discrimination and barriers were experienced by carers.¹⁵

The Inquiry heard of many experiences where people felt they had been discriminated against or had received unfair treatment from an employer due to their responsibility as a carer. A common theme was the denial of flexible working arrangements to accommodate caring responsibilities.

¹³ Carers NSW [Submission in response to the Productivity Commission issues paper on Carer Leave](#).

¹⁴ Sydney Morning Herald, August 23, 2022 [Why 'quiet quitting' is bad \(mostly because of the 'quiet' bit...\)](#)

¹⁵ Australian Human Rights Commission 2016 [National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability](#)

In their submission to the Inquiry, the NSW Public Service Association reported:

- Around 11% of respondents had experienced discrimination in employment because they were a carer.
- Over 88% stated that they believed older Australians, Australians with disability and their carers experience barriers in employment.
- Many lamented the lack of authorisation to work from home in order to make juggling work and carer commitments easier.
- Some pointed out that taking breaks from the workforce to meet carer commitments may negatively affect people in the 'prime' of their career.
- A number use personal leave and long service leave, to meet carer obligations and remain in the workforce because they had been led to believe that workplace adjustment (including flexible working agreements) was not available.
- Others believed their application for workplace adjustment would not be approved, or they feared making such a request.
- Some indicated that accessing leave to care for family members was also often difficult. They reported being 'cross-examined' by their managers about why they needed the leave.
- Some expressed concerns over requests by managers and employers which they considered to be a breach of privacy.

Victoria is the only Australian jurisdiction where carer status is a protected attribute in terms of workplace discrimination. At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission surveyed and interviewed Victorian workers aged 18+ years, who are parents, carers and/or have a disability, to better understand how COVID-19 transformed approaches to flexible work. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the struggle many carers and parents face in juggling their work and caring responsibilities, and the benefits of working flexibly to balance these responsibilities. Workplaces now have an opportunity to embed flexibility and enable caring and parenting to be shared equally within households, advancing gender equality and enabling all working parents and carers to make valuable contributions in the workforce and to public life more broadly.

The Commission's research demonstrated a need to:

- embed flexible work as part of a business-as-usual approach, enabling parents and carers to better balance and share caring responsibilities
- invest in strategies to transform societal attitudes towards unpaid caring and parenting, to adequately ascribe value to the 'second shift' many workers perform outside of their formal working hours
- strengthen enforcement of the Equal Opportunity Act to better protect parents and carers from discrimination

Carer directed supports

The Australian Government funds carer support services through the Carer Gateway. These include counselling, coaching, peer support, education, tailored carer-directed support packages and emergency respite care. However, with a limited number of carer-directed support packages available nationally at an

average of \$3,000 per annum, these are insufficient to enable an employed carer to purchase substitute care while they participate in the workforce. Carers Australia recommends that existing Carer Gateway supports for employed carers are significantly enhanced by Department of Social Services and that the Department of Health and Aged Care boosts funding for day care centres in the new Support at Home Program.

Financial impacts on carers

Carers Australia notes concerns expressed by Anglicare Australia in its submission to the Productivity Commission's Care Leave Inquiry regarding extended unpaid carer leave:

"Encouraging more women to take unpaid leave to care for loved ones may have an unintended impact of widening the gender pay gap, as they miss opportunities for career advancement and salary increases available to male counterparts. Extended unpaid leave can also reduce women's superannuation balances, leaving them at risk of poverty as they age."¹⁶

Carers Australia is fully cognisant of these risks but considers the financial risk to carers of having to leave their jobs to care and being locked out of the paid workforce for longer periods of time is greater.

Carers Australia commissioned modelling of the economic impacts on lifetime income and retirement savings of carers.¹⁷ On average, Australian carers will lose \$392,500 in lifetime earnings to age 67; and \$175,000 in superannuation at age 67. People who are carers for extensive periods of time will lose substantially more than 12 months on unpaid leave, with the most affected 10% losing at least \$940,000 in lifetime income, and \$444,500 in retirement savings.

Carers Australia supports calls from multiple sources for superannuation carer credits¹⁸ to boost the retirement savings of carers during extended unpaid leave.

Restriction on the capacity to engage in employment on the Carer Payment

Carers Australia has long advocated for a loosening of restrictions on engagement in education and employment for people receiving the Carer Payment. The impact of what is known as the "25-hour rule" can not only make it hard for carers to supplement the Carer Payment, but also to retain engagement in the workforce over time. The qualification rules for accessing and continuing to access the Carer Payment are:

"Participation in education or training does NOT impact on the carer's qualification for CP, UNLESS the cessation of care in order to undertake the education or training (including the carer's travel time and meal breaks) exceeds 25 hours per week."

"Paid employment or unpaid voluntary work does not impact on the carer's qualification for CP, UNLESS the cessation of care in order to undertake the paid employment or voluntary work (including the carer's travel time and meal breaks) exceeds 25 hours per week. However, any income they are paid may affect the rate of payment."

¹⁶ Anglicare Australia [Submission in response to the Productivity Commission issues paper on Carer Leave](#).

¹⁷ Caring Costs Us: [The economic impact on lifetime income and retirement savings of informal carers](#). A report for Carers Australia. March 2022

¹⁸ Australian Human Rights Commission (2013) Investing in care: [Recognising and valuing those who care, Volume 1 Research Report](#), Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney.

“The absence from care is calculated from the start of the care cessation until the carer returns to the caring role. The calculation considers the time the carer is absent from providing care, therefore travel time and meal breaks are included.”¹⁹

Long periods out of the workforce are a major barrier to re-entry when the caring role diminishes or ends, noting a person will also no longer qualify for the Carer Payment. While Carers Australia accept that there must be a process to determine whether carers are fulfilling the requirement for continuous care for Carer Payment eligibility, the rigidity of the 25-hour per week rule must be reviewed to maximise work opportunities, for example, increasing flexibility by changing the rule to 100-hours per month, as recommended by the Productivity Commission:

*ACTION 18.3 ... for Carer Payment, replacing the 25 hour per week restriction on work, study and volunteering with a 100 hour per month restriction on work only*²⁰

(e) Consideration of the impact on work and care of different hours and conditions of work, job security, work flexibility and related workplace arrangements

As outlined in Carers Australia’s submission to the 2021 Senate Select Committee on Job Security²¹, the extent to which carers in Australia have poor employment outcomes is clear, especially with respect to primary carers where among carers of working age (15-64 years), primary carers are significantly less likely to be in the labour force than other carers or non-carers.²²

Modelling in the 2017 Valuation Report for the Australian Priority Investment Approach to Welfare, found around two thirds of people on Carer Payment who were projected to exit over the next 10 years were expected to move on to another income support payment, a substantial proportion moving to a working age payment, e.g. Job Seeker.²³

What this data doesn’t reflect is the particular risk to carers of income insecurity resulting from uneven coverage of paid and unpaid carer leave in different industries and different roles, particularly insecure and precarious employment, and the sometimes unexpected or unpredictable nature of caring. The pattern of care may not be constant or predictable (for example, carers of people with mental illness, or other episodic illnesses or disability), or carers may face a sudden and unpredicted transition into a caring role. For some, such as parents of young children with severe or profound disability, this caring role may be lifelong.

Carers are at greater risk of job insecurity due to the amount of time they can spend out of the paid workforce in long term caring roles. Approximately a quarter of primary carers in 2018 had been caring for between 5 and 9 years, nearly a third for between 10 and 24 years and 8% caring for 25 years or more.²⁴

¹⁹ Social Security Guide Version 1.297 - Released 15 August 2022, [3.6.4.70 Changes to carer situation - effect on CP qualification](#)

²⁰ Productivity Commission 2020, [Mental Health, Report no. 95](#), Canberra

²¹ Carers Australia submission to Senate Inquiry on Job Security, 2021, [Carers-Australia-Response-to-Select-Committee-Job-Security-March-2021.pdf \(carersaustralia.com.au\)](#)

²² [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2018 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#)

²³ DSS, [Australian Priority Investment Approach to Welfare - 2017 Valuation Report](#), pages 102-3]

²⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABC), Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC), 2018

Carers who have contributed the most hours and years of care are least likely to be able to transition with any ease to the job market when their full-time caring role changes, as they often have a severely attenuated and interrupted work history and no current referees. In many cases their previous qualifications or experience no longer meets current standards or expectations. The projected prospects for young carers aged up to 25, even though most will have spent a shorter time providing care, are also poor as more than 60% of young carers have not studied beyond high school, and on average current young carers were expected to be on income support in 43 years over their lifetime.²⁵

(f) The impact and lessons arising from the COVID-19 crisis for Australia’s system of work and care

The risks for insecure or precarious workers, even in ‘essential’ occupations were exposed and exacerbated by COVID-19. Carers, whose unpaid work underpins the sustainability of our health, aged care and disability systems played an even more vital role during the worst parts of the pandemic in Australia.

As has been widely acknowledged, COVID-19 put additional pressure on formal care services for older people and people with disability as well as general and specialist health services, some of which were already strained. Some of these care and support services were not available, or their delivery was severely impacted. This added to the number of unpaid care hours worked and contributed to costs. Those carers that were employed at the start of the pandemic were similarly affected as other workers – whether in industries that were shut down or were sent to work from home. Many carers experienced reduced employment and income, especially young carers and women in lower paid, casualised sectors. In addition, some carers needed to or chose to voluntarily reduce their economic and social participation and maintain more restrictive isolation practices due to the vulnerable health status of the person they care for.

For carers, a key issue brought into sharp relief during the pandemic is the need for adequate paid and unpaid carer leave. This is particularly an issue for carers working in insecure or precarious roles due to their care responsibilities. As the Work + Family Policy Roundtable has observed:

*“Inadequate investment in care services and supports, uneven coverage of paid leave for workers in casual and precarious employment, and low wages for the essential workers who keep our communities functioning, weaken our economy”.*²⁶

National Carer Network member Carers Victoria surveyed 1,113 carers in December 2021 to understand the impact of the pandemic on their caring role. Some people reported they commenced their caring role due to the pandemic. There were differential impacts on employment for people who were new to caring and people who had been caring for longer.

People caring for the shortest amount of time (less than 1 year), were more likely to take paid leave (21%) or resign from their jobs (13%). Those whose caring role began due to the pandemic were more likely to have had changes in employment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They were more likely to have resigned (17% versus 5%) or take unpaid leave (10% vs 4%).

²⁵ DSS, [Try, Test and Learn Fund: Data Driven Job Opportunities for Young Carers](#)

²⁶ Work + Family Policy Roundtable, [“Work+Care in a Gender Inclusive Recovery: A Bold Policy Agenda for a New Social Contract”](#)

Older carers were more likely to retire early or resign to cope with their care role during the pandemic. Younger carers (aged 30-39) were more likely to accept a role that would allow more flexibility with their care role (13%) or resign (12%). Almost a third of people caring for between 1-2 years (29%) reported needing flexible work arrangements, while people caring the longest were more likely to report the need for respite care.²⁷

Working from home

The 2020 National Carers Survey²⁸ found that half of all working carers had used flexible start/finish times in their current jobs and 44% had used carers leave. A third of employed carers were working from home, which may have been impacted by COVID-19 restrictions in place at the time of data collection. The majority (84.4%) had used one or more flexible work arrangements.

While the ability to work from home is not available to all workers, and can add additional challenges, one of the probable benefits is that it can make it easier for carers to juggle work and care.

(g) Consideration of gendered, regional and socio-economic differences in experience and in potential responses including for First Nations working carers, and potential workers

Gender differences

Women and men can experience very different pressures to provide care, but also some similarities dependent on their individual circumstances. For example, men without sisters are more likely to be called upon to care for ageing parents. However, women are more likely to provide care to their parents-in-law than men. Women are also more likely to experience both consecutive and concurrent caring pressures. For example, women may have to interrupt their employment consecutively to care for their children, parents, partners and grandchildren. Others will be caring for multiple people at the same time. This is so common that the term 'sandwich' carer has been coined. These are middle-aged people (mostly women) caring for their older parents while also providing care to children or grandchildren.

According to the 2018 SDAC, women represented 71.8% of primary carers (refer to chart 3). While there are not significant differences between the proportion of male and female carers in terms of workforce participation²⁹ or how they evaluate the security of their employment³⁰, it is simply the case that more women experience the challenges of combining work and care. Female carers are also likely to earn less than their male equivalents due to the gender pay gap in Australia.

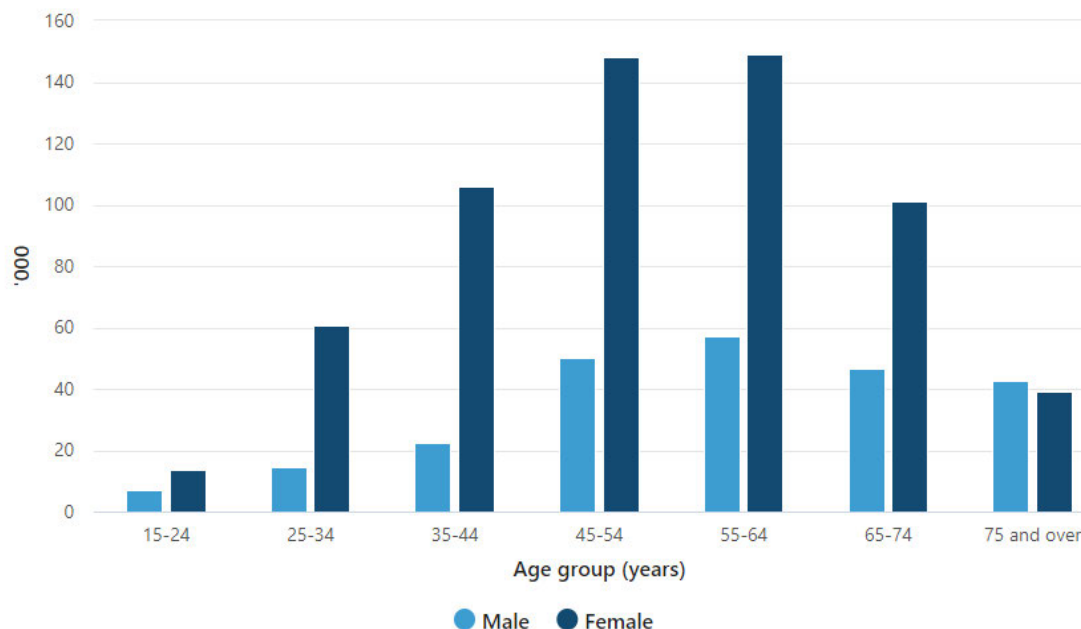
²⁷ Carers Victoria, March 2022 [Overview of findings from the Victorian COVID-19 carer survey](#)

²⁸ Carers NSW (2020). 2020 National Carer Survey: Summary report. Available online at: <http://www.carersnsw.org.au/research/survey>

²⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABC), Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC), 2018

³⁰ [211011 Carer-Wellbeing-Survey_Final.pdf \(carersaustralia.com.au\)](#)

Chart 3: Number of primary carers, by age and sex, 2018 (source: SDAC)



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

The 2021 Census identified that 14% provided unpaid assistance to a person with a disability, health condition or due to old age compared to 11.9% of the general population.³¹

Interestingly, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who responded to the 2021 Carer Wellbeing Survey were more likely to be employed than carers in general (71.9% versus 52.6%), had similar flexibility of working hours and similar levels of employer understanding of their caring role.³² However, they were significantly more likely to have experienced financial distress in the previous year (80.7% compared to 57.3% of current carers).³³

Socio-economic considerations

Decision-making about who should be the primary carer within families shares some similarities with how such decisions are made by parents of young children. Family members seen to have the most availability. For example, if they are geographically or emotionally closer and or have the least income earning capacity they are more likely to become the primary carer. This disproportionately affects women.

The 2020 National Carers Survey³⁴ found that carers with higher education qualifications were more likely to be in paid employment (51.5%) than carers with vocational (35.3%) or no post-school qualifications (20.4%).

³¹ [Disability and carers: Census, 2021 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au)

³² [211011 Carer-Wellbeing-Survey Final.pdf \(carersaustralia.com.au\)](https://www.carersaustralia.com.au)

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Carers NSW (2020). 2020 National Carer Survey: Summary report. Available online at: <http://www.carersnsw.org.au/research/survey>

Carers in general are more economically disadvantaged than non-carers. In 2018 38.2 % of primary carers and 27.4% of all carers relied on a Government pension of allowance as their main source of personal income compared with 17.4% of non-carers. Thirty-five per cent of primary carers and 29% of all carers resided in a household with equivalised gross household income in the lowest two quintiles compared with 17.9% of non-carers.³⁵

(h) Consideration of differences in experience of disabled people, workers who support them, and those who undertake informal caring roles

For families of regularly developing children, their need for substitute care to enable parental workforce participation generally wanes when children reach adolescence. By contrast, parents of children with disability continue to need access to flexible work arrangements, income support and substitute care for adolescents and young adults in order to combine work and care.³⁶

Lisa's story

Lisa is the mother, primary carer, and NDIS Plan Nominee of her 20-year-old son Liam who lives with Intellectual Disability, Autism and ADHD. She works 3 days per week to allow her to attend to caring responsibilities and manage her family's needs.

Liam's complex disability results in challenging physical and verbal behaviour which has impacted his well-being and that of his family. Due to Liam's violent behaviour towards family members when living in the same home, Lisa found him a unit to live on his own with NDIS supports. She rented another unit close by as he also relies heavily on her support.

In May 2021 Lisa was given notice Liam must vacate his unit. As Liam is challenged by change this had a very destabilising impact on him. Lisa struggled for 2 months trying to find alternative NDIS Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) while still trying to attend to her paid work responsibilities.

Lisa felt overwhelmingly stressed and guilty over not doing her paid work well. With an unclear timeframe, she felt she could no longer manage this crisis and as the date of eviction drew near, she decided to resign from her job.

Lisa's manager encouraged her not to resign. Their workplace has a policy of additional carers leave and family violence leave. Her manager advised she was eligible for family violence leave due to Liam's violent behaviour toward her. As his behaviour results from his complex disabilities, Lisa had not thought to apply for this form of leave.

Lisa took 7 weeks of paid leave using a combination of carer leave, family violence leave, and personal leave. Having the support of her manager to fully attend to Liam's needs while remaining in employment had a big impact on Lisa's mental health. She did not have the worry of being unemployed, of not paying immediate bills and of not continuing to work that was important to her.

³⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABC), Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC), 2018

³⁶ Carers Victoria, Ways to Work – Employment support for carers of adolescents and young adults with intellectual disability

Lisa met with her manager at week 7 and negotiated a further week of unpaid leave then returned to work. She has been back for over 14 months now. The flexibility, leave policies and culture of support for carers in the workplace that saw her supported in this way has not only benefited her, but has benefited her employer in retaining a valued employee.

(i) Consideration of the policies, practices and support services that have been most effective in supporting the combination of work and care in Australia, and overseas

Carers Australia's research into leave entitlements (both long and short-term leave) among 14 OECD countries with similar economies, similar carer population profiles and similar incentives for providing carers leave found that the majority of these countries had more generous leave entitlements than is the case in Australia.³⁷ and that an increase in leave entitlements in recent years was partly inspired by concerns about people dropping out of the workforce to provide care.

To take Japan as an example, in 2016 the Japanese Government extended the criteria for publicly funded employee leave to care for an infirmed loved one in an effort to stop family related job losses against a background where some 100,000 people a year quit their jobs to provide such care.³⁸

None of these countries combined sick leave and carers leave into a single entitlement (Personal Leave) as is the case in Australia.

With respect to employment policies, there are many ways businesses and employers can better support carers in their workforce in addition to an entitlement to extended unpaid leave. These do not have to be costly or require a major change in operations. Simple adjustments can make significant differences to recruitment, retention, and re-entry to employment for carers.

For example, the Carers NSW Carers + Employers program promotes carer-friendly workplaces, including a workplace accreditation scheme. They have developed 10 tips for workplaces:³⁹

- Raise awareness of what it means to be a 'carer' and enable staff with caring responsibilities to self-identify.
- Recognise carers as a distinct group within HR policies and procedures.
- Develop a supportive culture in which carers feel comfortable disclosing their caring role and discussing their needs for flexibility. Managers play a key role.
- Consult with staff to understand the 'carer population' in your workplace.
- Provide practical support based on what carers have said would be helpful. Expand carer leave provisions where possible above the minimum legislated requirements and explore options such as purchased leave.

³⁷ These countries were: the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Japan.

³⁸ [Japan to loosen rules on nursing care leave - Nikkei Asia](#)

³⁹ Carers NSW Carers + Employers [10 tips for a carer friendly workplace](#)

- Promote flexible working arrangements by making flexibility the norm, rather than the exception, for all job roles. Train line managers to understand the challenges faced by carers and workplace policies to ensure that support is offered consistently.
- Unlike most diversity groups, staff can become or cease being a carer throughout their career. Monitor changes in the carer population and their uptake of workplace supports.
- Explore supports such as paying superannuation during unpaid carer leave, offering career breaks, or promoting carer-specific return to work programs.

In addition to practices and entitlements which allow carers to stay in work, assistance is needed to allow those who have given up work to care to move back into employment.

What distinguishes carers from many other disadvantaged groups is the amount of time they spend out of the workforce. In this context it is noteworthy that, as of June 2022, 301,217 carers relied on the Carer Payment for personal income with the average duration on the payment being six and a half years.

Carers who have contributed the most hours and years of care are least likely to be in a position to transition with any ease to the job market. In 2018, 24% of primary carers surveyed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics had been caring for between 5 and 9 years and 29.9% had been caring for between 10 and 24 years.⁴⁰

It is not surprising then, that carers who leave work to care often remain dependent on income support for a very long time after their caring role has diminished or ceased. According to the 2017 Valuation Report for the Australian Priority Investment Approach to Welfare, around two thirds of those on Carer Payment who are projected to exit over the next 10 years will move on to another income support payment, a substantial proportion of which will move onto a working age payment.⁴¹

Even if carers seeking work had work experience prior to taking on an intensive caring role:

- They often have a severely attenuated and interrupted work history and no current referees.
- In many cases their previous qualifications, including certificates and licences, no longer meet current standards and are, indeed, defunct.
- Required skills, such as basic IT literacy, have changed dramatically and they are unlikely to have kept up to date.
- The jobs they previously had may not exist anymore or have radically declined in number.
- They do not understand how they can translate the skills and personal attributes acquired in their caring role can be transferred to the workplace. These skills have been identified as including administrative, advocacy, time management, multi-tasking and adaptive problem-solving skills.⁴²
- Carers also tend to acquire personal attributes which are valued by employers, including determination and persistence and emotional intelligence. But they need to be made aware of how to use these attributes when seeking work.

⁴⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABC), Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC), 2018

⁴¹ Department of Social Services, *Australian Priority Investment Approach to Welfare - 2017 Valuation Report*, pages 102-3, <https://www.dss.gov.au/review-of-australias-welfare-system/2017-valuation-report>

⁴² Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, *Improving Recognition of Carers' Skills Literature Review*, 2014, pp.20-21

- They are going to need help putting together a job resume.
- They may need financial assistance to acquire the basics required for applying for a job, including an appropriate wardrobe and transport costs.
- It is likely to be a very long time since they last attended a job interview (if ever) and they will need guidance about how to proceed and present themselves.
- Even if they do understand that transitioning to employment will mean finding a job very different to others they have held, they struggle to imagine what shape their future employment might take.

Programs which can assist them to meet these challenges exist, but are in short supply. For example, one program which is designed to assist carers with training, tools and work opportunities to meet their own employment goals is Your Caring Way, a partnership between Carers Queensland, Carers South Australia, Carers Tasmania and a number of other organisations.

In addition to amended workplace laws, investment in the expansion of carer-specific return to work programs such as Carers WA's [Be Job Ready Program](#), is required. This program assists carers through the return to the employment process, providing realistic information and practical skills to secure and maintain employment. Importantly, these programs also provide carers with an improved sense of self-work and self-confidence, provide the opportunity to interact with other carers in a supportive group setting and re-establish a routine similar to that of the workforce.

*Be Job Ready Program Case Studies (*names changed for confidentiality).*

Paula

Paula became a carer for her husband Adam* after he experienced a stroke, which resulted in paralysis on the left side of his body and an acquired brain injury with cognitive impairment affecting his behaviour and personality. As a result, Paula left work to care for her husband. Two years after becoming a carer and prior to commencing and completing the Carers WA Be Job Ready Program, Paula was unemployed and experiencing low confidence about applying for work. She was receiving psychological support with depression and anxiety related to her difficult circumstances following her husband's stroke and resultant disability.*

One month after completing the Carers WA Be Job Ready Program, Paula had secured casual/part-time work close to her home, which provided her with the flexibility to undertake work hours around her caring role commitments. Paula was very positive about her experience in the Program, recommending that other carers also do it. She said the program gave her the confidence, skills, knowledge and guidance to re-enter the workforce, and thanked Carers WA for the great opportunity to complete the program.

Since completing the program, Paula has also become an active member of several stroke-related groups and attended carer workshops delivered by Carers WA. She is also keen to assist Carers WA in other areas to provide a carer perspective in presentations.

Sam

Sam (aged 25) is a young carer who became primary carer at 15 years old for his mother Amy* who was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and experienced multiple breakdowns. Over the next ten years Amy also developed and overcame cancer, with Sam providing support in the home and coordinating*

treatment along with mental health support services. When Sam engaged with Carers WA's Be Job Ready Program he was receiving Carer Payment and Carer Allowance and his last paid work role had been 3 years prior, with previous work history erratic due to his caring role commitments.

Following completion of the Be Job Ready Program, Sam successfully obtained a fulltime role within a government department, but the role involved seven weeks of intensive training at a venue a long drive from where he and his mother lived. This made completing the training while balancing his caring role commitment challenging. The Program was able to assist by offering Sam carer respite through hotel accommodation three times a week over the seven-week period to be closer to attend his training, while also assisting to ensure in-home support services were in place to meet Amy's care needs.

As a result, Sam successfully completed his training, has had consistent employment for six months and no longer receives Carer Payment. He also has had a flexible work option approved by his workplace and manager, which in collaboration with a service coordinator and in-home support for Amy, has assisted with balancing work and care commitments. In his feedback on the Be Job Ready Program, Sam said he was so grateful for the accommodation, which he found to be the most useful and profound support to his ability to do the training. He also said the massive reduction in travel time, the fuel savings and the impact to his sanity were very meaningful.

Tracy

Tracy (aged 57) became the primary carer for her mother Edith* in 2016 and ceased fulltime employment to take on caring for her mother fulltime. Edith had several health conditions including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) requiring oxygen fulltime, heart failure and used a wheelchair. Prior to this caring role, Tracy had extensive experience working in the project environment, including site-based roles covering project administration, human resources, contracts, procurement and logistics, customer service and office management.*

When Tracy engaged with the Be Job Ready Program she had been out of the workforce for 2.5 years and was receiving both Carer Payment and Carer Allowance. Her mother's health had been deteriorating and Tracy was looking to re-enter the workforce as it was likely her caring role would soon come to an end. She wanted to look for work on a part-time or casual basis with the hope of gaining fulltime employment when she no longer had caring role commitments. Edith passed away in week 4 of the Be Job Ready Program, following which Tracy was offered grief counselling from Carers WA. Tracy continued to attend each session of the course as she particularly valued the peer support from the other carers in the group.

Toward the end of the Program Tracy realised that she wanted to work in the community service/care industry supporting people, rather than the industry she formerly worked in. Following course completion, an organisation in Tracy's desired industry (which had a partnership with Carers WA) indicated they were recruiting. Based on Tracy's resume, lived experience in her caring role and past extensive work experience in administration, she was offered an interview and then a part-time role as an administration assistant with the organisation. Tracy's feedback on the Be Job Ready Program was that she highly recommended the course, and found the program staff to be amazing. She further encouraged other carers to try the program, saying that they would not regret taking up the generous opportunity provided by the Program to learn, gain more confidence and help them gain employment.



Carers Australia argued strongly for carers who had spent a long time out of the workforce to be specifically identified and provided with suitable support in the design of the employment support program to replace Jobactive, the new Workforce Australia initiative.⁴³ At this point, it is not clear to us whether their special needs are being met by this program.

For information contact:

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About Carers Australia

Carers Australia is the national peak body representing the diversity of the 2.65 million Australians who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends with a disability, chronic condition, mental illness or disorder, drug or alcohol problem, terminal illness, or who are frail aged.

In collaboration with our members, the peak carer organisations in each state and territory, we collectively form the National Carer Network and are an established infrastructure that represent the views of carers at the national level.

Our vision is an Australia that values and supports all carers, where all carers should have the same rights, choices, and opportunities as other Australians to enjoy optimum health, social and economic wellbeing and participate in family, social and community life, employment, and education.

This includes carers:

- Who have their own care needs
- Who are in multiple care relationships
- Who have employment and/or education commitments
- Aged under 25 years (young carers)
- Aged over 65 years, including 'grandparent carers'
- From culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- Who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex (LGBTI+)
- Who are living in rural and remote Australia, and
- Who are no longer in a caring role (former carers).

Carers Australia acknowledges Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities as the traditional custodians of the land we work on and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. As an inclusive organisation we celebrate people of all backgrounds, genders, sexualities, cultures, bodies, and abilities.

⁴³ Carer Australia's submission to the Department of Jobs and Small Business on the Next Generation of Employment Services, 2018, [carers-australia-submission-on-the-next-generation-of-employment-services.pdf](https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/carers-australia-submission-on-the-next-generation-of-employment-services.pdf) ([carersaustralia.com.au](https://www.carersaustralia.com.au))