

# Older carers and paid work

## Recent evidence from Australia

### Background and purpose

The number of older Australians balancing work and unpaid caring is growing as the population ages, families are asked to take on more of the care of older people, and more people – women in particular – are remaining longer in the workforce.

Recent legislative changes in Australia provide older carers with the right to request flexible work arrangements, such as flexible work hours and days, job sharing and working from home. It is expected that flexible work options will help carers to address some of the challenges inherent in mixing work and caring, but there is a lack of Australian data to show what impact these changes may have on their participation in paid work.

This report presents the latest evidence in Australia on the issues facing older carers who are in the workforce or would like to be working.

### Research methods

The report uses data from the 2011–12 Barriers to Employment for Mature Age Australians Survey, to answer a number of questions:

- Who is providing unpaid care, who are they caring for, and how much care to they provide?
- How many of these carers are in paid employment, and how many want to be?
- What issues do carers face in the workplace, and what are the barriers that prevent them from working at all or working longer hours?
- What would enable carers to increase their participation in paid work?

### Key findings

#### Who is providing unpaid care, and who are they caring for?

The study showed that nearly three in every ten Australians aged 45–74 years (28%) were providing care for someone. Of these carers, one in six (17%) was caring for a child and just over one in ten (11%) for an adult. Over half (55%) were providing care for 20 or more hours per week.

Nearly one in three carers (31%) had an illness, injury or disability themselves, and nearly half (49%) were caring for someone with a long-term illness or disability. Women and carers with an illness, injury or disability themselves were most likely to be caring for someone with a long-term illness or disability.

#### How much does caring affect the ability to work?

Just over half the people who were caring for an adult (51%) and nearly two-thirds (63%) of those caring for children were also in paid employment, either full-time or part-time.

More than one in three carers (36%) who were not in work at all reported that caring prevented from them working. This included nearly half of those who were caring for an adult, and these carers were also more likely to have a lower level of education, and be caring for someone with a long-term illness or disability. Almost one in three carers (31%) who were working part-time reported that caring prevented them from working more hours. Women were much more likely than men to report that care-giving limited their ability to work.

## What workplace issues and barriers do carers face?

Carers faced a number of issues and barriers in the workplace or when looking for work:

- **Exclusion:** While similar proportions of carers and non-carers reported some form of exclusion in the workplace or while looking for work, this was most likely among carers who had an illness, injury or disability. Most commonly, carers reported insulting jokes or comments, being paid less than other workers in similar roles, and feeling they were being forced out.
- **Superannuation:** Three in every five (60%) of the carers whose care-giving limited their ability to work said that this had also limited their ability to accumulate superannuation.
- **Training and skill development:** More than two in every five carers (42%) said that they wanted to attend work-related training but could not.

## What would help carers to be able to work, or work more?

The study suggested that there are two options that might help carers to work at all, or work more hours:

- **Flexible work arrangements:** More than three in five (61%) of the people whose caring prevented them from working at all said that flexible work arrangements would enable them to work (equivalent to 169,295 people). Nearly half (49%) of those whose caring prevented them from working more hours stated that flexible work arrangements would help them work more hours (equivalent to 135,242 people),
- **External care:** Nearly half (46%) the people whose caring prevented them from working said they could work if suitable external care were available.

## Conclusion

Caring responsibilities limit the ability of many older people to work, and carers can face many challenges both in the workplace and in finding work. The effect of the recent legislative changes regarding flexible work arrangements will, therefore, be of much interest.

As the Australian population ages, the challenges of balancing paid work and unpaid caring will continue to increase, and in coming years care for the elderly could become a greater issue than childcare for both workers and employers.

### Further Information

This short report summarises a NSPAC research report: Adair T, Williams R, Taylor P. *A juggling act: Older carers and paid work in Australia*. Melbourne: National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre, 2013 (full report available at [www.productiveageing.com.au](http://www.productiveageing.com.au))

### About National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre

National Seniors Australia (NSA) is a non-profit organisation that gives voice to issues that affect Australians aged 50 years and over. It is the largest membership organisation for over-50s in Australia (200,000 members) and the fourth largest in the world.

National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre is an initiative of National Seniors Australia and the Australian Government. The Centre's aim is to improve quality of life for people aged 50 and over by advancing knowledge and understanding of all aspects of productive ageing.

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