

MEDIA RELEASE



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Productivity Commission Inquiry into Carers Leave welcome but it must be for all carers

Carers Australia welcomes the Treasurer's announcement that the Productivity Commission has been asked to undertake an Inquiry into the merits of extending leave entitlements under the *Fair Work Act* to family and friend carers of older Australians, which was one of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (ACRC).

"We are pleased there is action on this recommendation and the comments by the Treasurer in that carers are a critical element of the care system for older people. However, the same holds true of the contribution of carers of people under 65 years of age, and the impact carers have on the disability, mental health and broader health systems," said Melanie Cantwell, Acting CEO of Carers Australia.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2018 Survey of Disability Aging and Carers (SDAC), 65% of carers care for people under the age of 65, while 35% care for people over 65. In addition, carers of people under 65 are more likely to be of working age than carers of older people. A Deloitte Access Economics report commissioned by Carers Australia in 2020 valued the replacement cost of unpaid carers' contribution to the economy at \$77.9 billion per annum.

"There are over 2.65 million carers in Australia of people with disability, chronic illness, mental illness or disorder, at the end of life or who are frail aged. Already carers find it difficult, if not impossible, to maintain secure employment, and if they do, and they have leave entitlements, their own sick leave is used to provide time away from paid work to care."

"Australia does not have leave arrangements that allow people who have suddenly become carers as a result of injury or disabling illness to take time off to adjust their new circumstances in the same way government-funded parental leave is available to new parents. In this respect Australia lags behind a number of comparable OECD countries who have legislated for both short- and longer-term leave arrangements for carers", said Ms Cantwell.

The scope of the announced Inquiry is to examine the economic and social impacts of providing a statutory leave entitlement to extended unpaid carers who provide informal care to older people who are frail and living at home, while offering employment protection on return to work.

"This Inquiry is a real opportunity to examine one of the barriers for carers to continue to participate in paid work. However, the Commission should do more than simply 'consider' carers in other care relationships and include them in the main scope of the Inquiry, not just carers for older people. Focusing on only one carer group would be in direct contrast with the Commonwealth *Carer Recognition Act 2010* which formally acknowledges the valuable social and economic contribution of all carers in Australia."



“We look forward to participating in this Inquiry and call for the scope to explicitly include carers of people under 65 years, once again asking ‘who cares for carers?’ or, in this case, ‘who cares for all carers?” said Ms Cantwell.

About Carers Australia and the National Carer Network

Carers Australia is the national peak body representing Australia’s carers, advocating to influence policies and services at a national level. The National Carer Network, which consists of Carers NSW, Carers ACT, Carers Victoria, Carers Tasmania, Carers SA, Carers WA, Carers NT, and Carers Queensland, deliver a range of essential carer services across states and territories.

About carers

An informal, unpaid carer is a family member or friend that cares for someone who has a disability, chronic or life-limiting illness, is frail aged, has a mental health illness, alcohol or other drug related issue. Informal carers are distinct from paid support workers who are colloquially also called carers but are fully employed and remunerated with all the benefits of employment. Conversely, family or friend carers perform their caring duties without remuneration

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