

Response to the Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations - Jobs and Skills Australia Discussion Paper

10 February 2023

Introduction

Carers Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations *Jobs and Skills Australia Discussion Paper*¹ (Discussion Paper), as an opportunity to provide views to inform the establishment of Jobs and Skills Australia. Carers Australia and our members have been advocating for more than 30 years to improve living standards and create greater opportunities for carers.

We have no particular issues with the proposed structure of Jobs and Skills Australia as an independent statutory body of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (the Department), or with the Commissioner model. However, **the tripartite advisory body should include independent expertise with respect to the skills and special employment needs of Australia's 2.65 million carers**² - those who provide *unpaid* care and support to a family member or friend who has a disability, chronic medical condition, terminal illness, mental illness or disorder, alcohol or other drug issues, or who are frail aged.

For many carers these hours of care and associated impacts are a large factor in not participating in the labour force as much as they would like, in professions they would prefer or are qualified for, or at all. The employment struggles of primary carers, those who provide the most care and support, is a particular concern.

We have tirelessly advocated for the recognition of carers, the challenges they face participating in employment and the intrinsic role they have in the sustainability of the care economy and broader labour market. Carers Australia has engaged heavily with the various recent consultations focused on supporting full and meaningful employment and equality of carers, and recommends the Department also refer to our responses to the:

- [Treasury Employment White Paper Terms of Reference](#)
- [Senate Select Committee on Work and Care](#)
- [Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Carer's Leave](#), and the
- [Senate Select Committee on Job Security](#).

Our response is focused on **ensuring that carers are identified and included as a 'priority cohort' in work of Jobs and Skills Australia, noting the Discussion Paper does not mention carers at all, despite being a population that experiences high levels of vulnerability, poverty and disadvantage**. Their circumstances are briefly identified below and are also made within the context that the right to participate in economic,

¹ Australian Government, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 'Jobs and Skills Australia Discussion Paper' (January 2023) [[accessed online](#)]

² Carers Australia uses the term 'carer' as defined by the [Commonwealth Carer Recognition Act 2010](#) (the Act). The terms 'informal carer', 'unpaid carer' or 'family and friend carer' are also often used by organisations, government and the community to describe a carer. Carers Australia may use these terms to assist in providing context and to differentiate between other types of care.

social and community life is recognised under the *Carers Recognition Act 2010* which states carers “should be supported to achieve greater economic wellbeing and sustainability and, where appropriate, should have opportunities to participate in employment and education.”

Carers as a vulnerable cohort

Top level insights about carers can be gleaned from the 2018 Survey of Disability Ageing and Carers³ which found that:

- 75% of all carers were of working age, as were 76% of primary carers.
- 55% of primary carers were employed compared to 66.6% of all carers and 77.4% of non-carers, which represents a largely underused portion of the population who are adversely affected when attempting to gain or sustain employment due to ongoing challenges with access, inclusivity and equality in employment because of their concurrent caring role.
- Half (50.2%) of all carers lived in a household in the lowest two equivalised gross income quintiles, twice that of non-carers (25.6%).
- The largest group of primary carers were women between ages 45 and 64 (675,200) and at an age where it can be particularly hard to find employment.
- 39% of primary carers were reliant on a Government pension or allowance, compared to a quarter of all carers and 9.2% of non-carers.

There are further data sources available regarding the impact of caring on employment and financial outcomes, that should provide the justification needed for carers to be included as a ‘priority cohort’ within the Jobs and Skills Australia remit.

Carers Australia commissioned economic modelling exploring the financial impact of informal caring⁴ indicated that 73.9% of Carer Allowance recipients are female and that income support through the Carer Payment is less than 30% of average weekly earnings. Furthermore, a quarter of people who become primary carers will face a real reduction in lifetime earnings of more than \$497,500 and a real reduction in their superannuation balance at age 67 of more than \$216,000.

The 2022 Carer Wellbeing Survey⁵ revealed:

- Of those carers who were working or who wanted to be in paid work, 44.8% were doing less paid work than desired, compared to only 23.1% of Australians more generally.
- 70.8% of these carers who reported less paid work than desired also reported poor wellbeing.
- 22.8% of carers did not have flexibility of work hours, while 46.4% had somewhat flexible hours, and 30.9% very flexible hours.
- 42.5% reported their supervisor was very understanding of their caring obligations, however, only 48.1% reported they had spoken to their supervisor and could discuss their carer role at any time with them if they needed to.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2018, [\[accessed online\]](#)

⁴ Evaluate (2022) ‘Caring Costs Us: The economic impact on lifetime income and retirement savings of informal carers. A Report for Carers Australia’ [\[accessed online\]](#)

⁵ University of Canberra, ‘Caring for Yourself and Others, 2022 Carer Wellbeing Survey Full Report’ (commissioned by Carers Australia), [\[accessed online\]](#)

Importantly, the likelihood of feeling confident to have regular discussions with supervisors about being a carer increased with age, with 67.3% of carers aged 65-74 who worked reporting they could discuss their carer role with their supervisor any time they needed to, compared with 16.7% of young carers aged 15-24. Young carers are one of the most at-risk cohorts of carers who currently or will face challenges in employment. There are approximately 235,000 'young carers' aged 11-25 years in Australia who are at risk of disengagement or who have disengaged from school or education opportunities due to caring responsibilities.

For some, caring roles may be short-term, episodic or can end. And while the external pressures placed on them may change, extended periods out of the workforce and the barriers faced can be a major barrier to re-entry and they no longer qualify for the Carer Payment. This drastically influences the outcomes of re-entry into the workforce or, in some circumstances, may disincentivise people entirely.

Carers Australia believes that it is important to highlight certain issues relating to social services payments to the Department in the context that activities aimed at skill and employment must also consider the most disenfranchised 'priority cohorts' from a broader social determinants lens.

People on the Carer Payment, which provides basic income support to eligible carers, do not have mutual obligation requirements. This is because carers need to be providing care for the equivalent of a working week to qualify for the Payment, although they are permitted to engage in education, volunteering, and employment for 25 hours per week (including travel time) – if they can find activities which accommodates these limitations.

However, we know from social security data provided to Carers Australia by the Department of Social Services that many people currently receiving the Carer Allowance (which is designed to help with the often substantial additional costs of providing care) are also on other payments which do have mutual obligation requirements. These include:

- 12,715 on JobSeeker
- 11,655 on the Parenting Payment (Single)
- 2,365 on the Parenting Payment (Partnered)

In addition, a proportion of the 23,470 people receiving both the Disability Support Pension (DSP) and the Carer Allowance will also have mutual obligation requirements.

Whether they have been or remain on a social services payment or not, carers face many obstacles to retaining and finding employment, both when they are caring and once their caring role diminishes or ceases. Their capacity to sustain some connection to the workforce can bring a number of benefits:

- It can increase their income
- It can increase their sense of self-worth
- It can provide respite from their caring role
- It can increase their capacity to improve their social connections, noting that the 2022 Carer Wellbeing Survey found that just under 40% of carers reported that they were often or always lonely compared to 10.3% of the general population.

Many carers will need a tailored pre-employment programs and face-to-face support to re-enter and find sustainable employment. For those still providing care, flexible working arrangements, including flexible

start/finish times, receiving shift notifications with more than a weeks notice and the possibility of working from home, may be key for those combining work and care.

For more information on these issues, please refer to the submissions mentioned in the introduction, however, briefly, when working age carers seek to re-enter the workforce after a significant amount of time providing care, many are likely to confront the following circumstances:

- They often have a severely attenuated and interrupted work history and no current referees.
- It may be a long time since they went to a job interview (if ever, especially if they began caring at a young age).
- In many cases their previous qualifications, including certificates and licences, no longer meet current standards and may, indeed, be defunct. Even soft skills, such as basic workplace IT literacy, may have changed dramatically.

In addition, many carers do not understand how the skills and personal attributes acquired in their caring role can be transferred to the workplace. These skills have been identified as including administrative task management, advocacy, time management, multi-tasking and adaptive problem solving skills. Carers also tend to acquire personal attributes which are valued by employers, including determination, resilience, persistence and emotional intelligence.

Conclusion

Australian carers face discrimination in employment and in many ways are disincentivised for joining, staying in, or re-entering the workforce entirely. **In conclusion, Carers Australia welcome establishment of Jobs and Skills Australia, and again emphasise the clear need for carers to be included as a 'priority cohort'.**

We are perplexed as to why this was not the case within the Discussion Paper, given a carer was included on the lived-experience panel at the Governments Jobs and Skills Summit in September 2022, and one of the listed outcomes/priorities for further work and 'immediate' action was to put in place a Carer Friendly Workplace Framework⁶, which was subsequently funded in the October 2022 Federal Budget.

We also request this in the context of the development of a new National Carers Strategy, which was a preelection commitment by the Albanese government within their first term⁷. This strategy must span multiple portfolio areas and have a clear implementation plan that addresses carers' rights and needs, together with and separately from the people they care for - including secure education, training, employment, and income.

Recommendations

- That an independent expert or experts well versed in the specific employment challenges and needs of carers be included in the tripartite advisory body along with others advising on 'priority cohorts'.
- That carers are identified as a 'priority cohort' under expanding Jobs and Skills Australia's functions, including for the purposes of 'enhanced cohort level analysis' and developing a deeper evidence base.

⁶ Australian Government, Jobs+Skills Summit: Outcomes, September 2022, [[accessed online](#)]

⁷ Carers Australia, 'Who Cares for Carers in this 2022 Federal Election? Carers Australia 2022 Federal Election Survey Results' May 2022 [[accessed online](#)]

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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.