

# Carers Australia response to the National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality

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*Note: This response was submitted by Carers Australia to the online survey conducted by the Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet with regard to development of the [National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality](#). We highlight that the format of survey-based consultation is not ideal for facilitating accessibility or broad engagement and encourage the use of more diverse and accessible methods of engagement in future consultations.*

Carers Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to consultations regarding the National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality (the Strategy). Our organisation represents the [2.65 million people](#) who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who have a disability, mental ill health, chronic condition, terminal illness, an alcohol or other drug issue or who are frail aged.

We are pleased to note the Strategy's attention to unpaid care as a gendered issue. Considering this, we stress **the importance of specifically identifying carers as a key demographic that provides unpaid labour**. Women represented [seven in every ten primary carers](#) in 2018. According to the 2022 [Caring Costs Us Report](#), at the mean, and at current subsidy settings, Australian carers will lose \$392,500 in lifetime earnings to age 67; and \$175,000 in superannuation at age 67. Caring responsibilities and the disadvantages associated with them do have a gendered aspect. However, the lack of available data must be remedied if these disparities are to be properly understood.

The unpaid work that carers do is vital for the people they support, and Australia as a whole. In the Value of Informal Care Report, produced by Deloitte in 2020, it was estimated that the total cost to replace all informal care in 2020 was [\\$77.9 billion](#). Caring responsibilities increase the economic disadvantage experienced by an individual. The [2022 Carer Wellbeing Survey findings show](#), 76.3% of carers aged 15-64 were participating in the labour force in 2022, compared to 81.9% of non-carers in that age group. Carers are commonly underemployed, with 73.6% of carers [reporting](#) that their caring duties meant they could not do as much paid work as they would have liked in the past month. Alongside financial disparities between carers and non-carers, more than half of carers – 54.4% - reported that they had experienced [at least one significant financial stress event](#) in the previous 12 months, such as being unable to pay bills on time, going without meals, or having to ask for financial assistance.

These impacts are felt by carers of all genders. However, available data does show that obligations to fulfill care responsibilities fall disproportionately on women. SDAC 2018 found that there were more female carers than male carers in all age groups, with the exception of those aged 75 years and over. Some age groups have twice as many female carers as males. Female carers were more likely to report a lack of choice about becoming a carer. 60.9% of current female carers reported that [they had no choice](#) about whether to be a carer or not, compared to 46.2% of current male carers.

According to the [She's Price\(d\)less Report](#) by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency,

*"Unpaid care and work are inherently gendered issues. They contribute to labour market inequalities, are associated with employment quality and increase the likelihood of part-time or insecure casual and contract work. Analysis by Chief Executive Women suggests that in*

*Australia, on average, a woman spends 43% less time in paid work than a man, yet 81% more time in unpaid work. While it is at times suggested in public discourse that women have 'chosen' to reduce their time in work, social norms regarding the distribution of unpaid care and work and factors such as job segmentation and pay mean that these 'choices' are inherently constrained."*

The disadvantage and overrepresentation of women in the carer population suggests that the gendered framing of caring work could be detrimental to carers. This theme was raised in [roundtable discussions](#) around the Strategy, mainly regarding parenting with some mentions of the care of older people care. As the caring role is different to child-rearing and broader than caring for older people, research that specifically focuses on carers and gender is needed to identify and address gender inequality in this crucial demographic.

**Carers Australia strongly suggests that resources should be dedicated to researching the gender dynamics that impact carers as part of the National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality.** This research should examine how caring roles and relationships interact with gender, with a sound evidence base facilitating policymakers to respond to gendered issues affecting carers and advocates to identify specific issues, experiences and needs affecting their stakeholders.

In the interim, we urge that **carers be included as an interest group in the Strategy's co-design process.** While Carers Australia is greatly appreciative of the opportunity to comment on the Strategy, its **development must include the perspectives of carers themselves.** Furthermore, **the Strategy must be effectively integrated with other relevant strategies, existing or being developed.**

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