

# MEDIA RELEASE



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## No long-term unpaid leave for carers of older people

Carers Australia is frustrated by the Productivity Commission's reluctance to prioritise the needs of carers in recommendations arising from its Carer Leave Inquiry.

As the Peak Body for Australia's 2.65 million unpaid carers, we argued throughout the Commission's Inquiry for carers of older people to be entitled to long-term carer leave. This would allow carers to take an extended time off work to adjust to a new intensive caring situation, all while keeping their position in the workplace.

The Commission is not supporting this recommendation.

"This is not the outcome we wanted for Australia's unpaid carers, thousands of whom would have benefited from this entitlement," said Carers Australia CEO Jane Bacot-Kilpatrick.

"Anyone can become a carer, at any point in their life. When this happens, it can be hugely overwhelming as they try to juggle the needs of the person they are caring for, their employment and all the other life tasks. Many carers are forced to quit their jobs while they focus on finding the right supports.

"Once out of work, many carers struggle to re-enter the workforce. An entitlement to long-term carer leave would have helped so many people."

The Inquiry was spurred by a recommendation of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety which placed emphasis on the valuable role of family and friend carers in the aged care system, the challenges they face and their need for support.

While the Productivity Commission acknowledges the access to extended leave would benefit some carers and the people they care for, their modelling indicated most employed carers would not access such leave for financial and career progression reasons. However, they acknowledge their data is thin. They also highlighted the problems it could create for some employers.

While not endorsing the extension of unpaid leave to carers of a period between one and twelve months, the Commission has made some recommendations in relation to Carer Leave which, if introduced, would benefit carers.



They recommended a review of current provisions in the Fair Work Act for access to short-term carer leave. Currently the definition of 'carer' in the Act only refers to immediate family or household members and does not include extended family relationships, kinship care or family of choice.

In addition, the eligibility to take carer leave is limited to an illness, injury or unexpected emergency and does not cover assistance with everyday activities or to organise replacement paid care. They also question the requirement to exhaust paid leave before short-term unpaid leave to cope with emergencies can be accessed.

Importantly, they recommend a review of combining both Carer Leave and Sick Leave under the two-week entitlement to paid Personal Leave. Carers Australia has long advocated this provision of the National Employment Standards should be revisited. Many carers sacrifice their own sick leave to care for somebody else with predictable consequences for their health, noting that carers have much worse health outcomes than the non-carer population.

And finally, they recommended the new National Carer Strategy currently being developed by Government should include a whole-of-Government approach to carers' workforce participation, incorporating carers' lived experience in policies to support carers to combine work and care, and that carers should be advised of their employment entitlements when accessing Centrelink and the Carer Gateway.

Governments do not have to act on Productivity Commission recommendations, but we strongly hope this Government will act on these recommendations which would improve outcomes for carers with respect to combining work and care.

#### **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 that 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 carers perform their caring duties without remuneration.

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