



Carers & Employment Roundtable Outcomes

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For information contact: Policy@carersaustralia.com.au

Summary

In May 2023 key stakeholders explored the barriers to paid employment faced by Australia’s 2.65 million unpaid carers. Representatives were invited from a variety of sectors and organisations, including employment and industry, community advocacy, health and service provision, academia, and government.

It was acknowledged that carers’ participation in the paid workforce is a multifaceted issue, underpinned by recognition and sustainability. While efforts targeted at improving access to flexible working arrangements and upskilling carers interested in returning to paid work are important, broader efforts are needed to systematically recognise the contribution made by carers to Australian economy and society. Changes and improvement in assistance provided to carers will strengthen the sustainability of Australia’s care economy and broader labour market. It will also improve the wellbeing of Australian carers.

As a result of this discussion, a range of recommendations were developed to inform Carers Australia’s advocacy, government policy and ultimately improve employment outcomes for carers. These recommendations are summarised below.

Table 1: Summary of Recommendations

Reducing Barriers to Employment	Improving Employment Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accessible and affordable substitute care, including regular access to respite• Increased flexibility within the income support system, such as ensuring eligibility to welfare payments, concession carers and pharmaceutical benefits is less rigid.• Recognising carers as a ‘priority cohort’ for the Australian Government jobs and skills framework.• A national framework or strategy for carers, which includes measures targeted at return-to-work coaching specifically for carers.• Expanded options available to accrue and take leave.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased and regular access to respite care.• Incentives for employers to invest in their workforce and ensure support to upskill is accessible for all employees.• Incentivise greater understanding and inclusivity of carers within workforce and leadership positions.• Programs and resources to support carers to self-identify within the workplace for additional support.• Expand positive obligations on employers to avoid discrimination to a Commonwealth level.• Explore greater portability of entitlements, so people who become carers feel more comfortable taking on new jobs.

Carer Support and Services

Access to and availability of support and services tailored to carers needs and experiences was recurrently identified as an underdeveloped area which, if improved, would benefit carers pursuing or maintaining paid employment.

Responsibility for these services should sit across different government portfolios, however provision of services must be undertaken by a single department. The reason for this opinion was to increase employer’s accountability in the provision of carers support whilst maintaining a single touch point for carers for ease of navigation.

Recommendations for preferred support and services are listed below.

Carer Support	Access to Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tailored training services for carers that address common barriers to employment including return-to-work, skills transfer, and career coaching.• Increased access to mental health support and counselling to help balance care and work roles.• Targeted support for carers from diverse backgrounds including First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTQI+	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reliable, affordable, and accessible respite.• Greater capacity and availability of accessible childcare services and education.• Pathways for employers to develop a greater understanding of caring role and responsibility.• Greater efforts to streamline existing services to make it easier to navigate government supplied services.• Increased recognition of carers within existing employment services providers.

Efforts targeted at improving employer and organisation inclusivity and recognition were considered critical to equal opportunity for young carers, by many. **Young carers need consistent access to tailored supports and resourcing to enable and encourage them to perform their best within the education system.** To ensure this cohort is supported to live a healthy life, achieve financial wellbeing, and have equal access to opportunity, measures must be provided sooner rather than later.

Work flexibility and caring responsibilities

Whilst standard entitlements for flexible working are becoming increasingly popular, they are not always appropriate or accessible to carers due to the diversity of circumstances and responsibility. As such, increased accessible and flexible working options must be available for carers. Measures suggested to achieve this included:

- Addition of carer-inclusivity to access, inclusion and diversity strategies for employers and organisations.
- Increased efforts to promote the recognition of carers throughout Australian communities.

- Right to request time off work for caring responsibilities to limit circumstances where carers are using annual or personal leave balances for caring, or where they do not have access to carers leave, specifically individuals within the casual workforce.
- Adding the ability to purchase leave not in the National Employment Standards (NES), allowing carers to increase their leave balance by salary sacrificing.

The impact of the income support system on workforce participation

Reducing or removing any negative impact the income support system has on workforce participation for carers was recommended.

In support of the findings of the 2020 Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health and reiterated in the 2023 Productivity Commission Inquiry into Carer Leave, **the government should remove or revise the 25-hour rule imposed on those receiving the Carer Payment.**

Additionally, steps should be taken to reduce the administrative and regulatory burdens experienced by payment recipients when accessing the income support system. Examples of administrative burden included extensive wait times for applications, complex evidence requirements in payment eligibility, and flexibility limitations with the existing system.

Caring and skills transfer

Support opportunities for greater skills transfer resourcing for carers. Including increasing awareness and opportunities for carers to better showcase and develop the unique skills they learn from their caring role. Suggestions to support successful skills transfer included:

- Ensuring employment programs recognise and respect the carers right to choose an employment industry.
- Recognition of a carers right to equal opportunity.
- Incentivising employers and organisations to increase their own understanding of how and why carers develop these skillsets, and how they can be beneficial to the organisation from which they are seeking employment.
- Expanding availability and promotion of accessible employment coaching services for through existing service channels such as Carer Gateway services.