



Policy Forum: Carers and Paid Work

OUTCOMES REPORT

CARERS AUSTRALIA
MAY 2026

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Foreword

On 19 May 2026, Carers Australia held a National Policy Forum on Carers and Paid Work. The Forum brought together carers, policymakers, employers, researchers and community and peak body representatives to discuss the challenges carers face combining caring with paid work and to explore practical solutions to better support carers to remain in, and/or return to, paid work.

Balancing work and caring is challenging for many carers. And with an ageing population, a preference for many older Australians to age at home, and more women participating in the workforce, there will be more Australians combining work and care.

Carers understand the importance of employment, not just for financial security, but also for their health and wellbeing, and for social connections. But too often they are faced with difficult choices around being able to continue working because they do not receive the support to manage both their caring responsibilities and employment.

Carers told us about flexible working policies that do not respond to real life circumstances, and carer leave arrangements that are difficult to access and/or are not designed for the realities of the unpredictable and ongoing nature of care. We also heard about the difference that supportive workplaces and tailored supports can make to the working lives of employees with caring responsibilities, and the benefits for employers they work for, including improved employee loyalty, staff retention and productivity.

This report provides a summary of the key issues and practical solutions discussed at the Forum and makes recommendations for the Australian Government and employers, including strengthening current policy settings, investing more in carer inclusive workplace programs, and building a stronger evidence base for further reforms. The challenge now is getting action on what we know will make a difference.

I would like to thank everyone who participated in the Policy Forum for their valuable insights and contributions. Carers Australia will continue to work with the Australian government to drive changes to enable carers to be recognised, supported, and better able to combine paid work and caring.

Joanna Cave

Chief Executive Officer
Carers Australia

About the Policy Forum

Event details

Carers Australia's Policy Forum on Carers and Paid Work was held on 19 May 2026 at the Vibe Hotel at Canberra Airport.

About the sessions and the participants

The Policy Forum began with two carers – Josie Caruso and Nicholas Smith – relaying their lived experience juggling paid work and caring. Both had cared for a parent and had been unable to remain in paid employment because of their caring responsibilities.

The next presentation was by Mel Mylek from the University of Canberra. Mel presented insights on carers and paid work from the 2025 Carer Wellbeing Survey.

The Forum's first panel session was on Policy Settings and System Adequacy and included presentations from:

- Melissa Docker, Carers NSW
- Catherine de Fontenay, Productivity Commission
- Professor Marian Baird, Gender and Employment Relations, University of Sydney.

Lydia Ross, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing then spoke about progress on the National Carer Strategy and Action Plan.

Carer Inclusive Workplaces – Innovative Solutions was the topic of the Forum's second panel session. The presentations for this session were from Populous, Motorola and Mental Health Carers Australia.

The third panel session was on Data and evidence – What do we know and what's missing? The speakers were Dr Laura Sbaffi from the UK Centre for Care, Clare Sibly from the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and Azadeh Abbasi Shavazi, an Australian National University PhD candidate.

The Forum concluded with group discussions on key insights, solutions and areas of focus.

The agenda for the Forum can be found in appendix A, and appendix B has a list of participants.

Presentation slides from the Forum's speakers can be accessed through [this link](#).

Key insights and findings



Carers struggle to combine work and care

Caring affects employment. Carers are less likely to be employed than non-carers (65% of primary carers compared to 82% for non-carers)¹ and to work part-time (71% of primary carers work fewer than 20 hours per week compared to 31% of non-carers).^{2,3} Caring can also affect chosen career paths and the age of retirement. Just 22% of carers responding to the 2024 National Carers Survey reported that caring had *not* impacted their employment.⁴

With women more than twice as likely to be a primary carer than men, caring affects their workforce participation more than men.⁵

Some of the insights from the 2025 Carer Wellbeing Survey (CWS), presented by Mel Mylek from the University of Canberra, were that:

- 70% of carers have low satisfaction with their ability to participate in paid work
- 75% of carers are doing less work than they wanted to do because of their caring role
- 78% of carers were unable to take employment opportunities, such as promotions, due to being a carer.⁶

‘My caring role does not allow me to work in my profession, and at nearly 52 I am now struggling to find any paid employment that is flexible enough to accommodate my caring duties.’

‘I had to give up full time employment to care – offered other jobs and promotions but unable to take them up due to caring responsibilities.’⁷

The two carers who presented at the Policy Forum both spoke about the rewards of caring, but also the challenges of juggling paid work and caring responsibilities and not being able to sustain full-time employment.

Josie Caruso shared a deeply personal account of caring for her mother with Motor Neurone Disease while working in an early childhood leadership role. She described the unpredictable nature of caring, and the emotional strain and eventual burnout she experienced trying to meet workplace expectations while managing the complex care needs of her mother.

‘Workplaces are built on predictability: calendars, meetings, targets, and timelines. Caring is nothing like that. It is constant, unpredictable, and emotionally relentless. ... That level of

¹ Dr Laura Shaffi also presented data for the United Kingdom – 82% of working-age carers in the UK are in paid employment compared to 75% for their non-carer counterparts.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) [Disability and carers: Census](#)

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024) [Labour Force, Australia](#)

⁴ Carers NSW 2024 National Carers Survey, Melissa Dockers presentation on Carer Leave Entitlements and the National Employment Standards.

⁵ [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#) Professor Marian Baird also presented data from the 2022 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Caring on Australians who provide informal elder and disability care, by aged group and sex. The data shows that in most age group categories females are more likely to provide informal care.

⁶ Carers Australia (2025) [Carer Wellbeing Survey Report 2025](#)

⁷ Carers comments from the 2025 Carers Wellbeing Survey.

unpredictability makes sustained employment almost impossible, and without reliable support, something eventually gives.'

Nicholas Smith described his transition into caring for his mother with Alzheimer's while working as an engineer and the difficulties he faced fulfilling his caring responsibilities while working. Nicholas reduced his working hours before leaving the workforce. He also noted that 'caring does not fit neatly around a work calendar' and spoke about the need for carers to be better supported to move in and out of the workforce.

'... expectations didn't really change. The work still needed doing. Deadlines still existed. Meetings still happened. And eventually I realised there were more important things to worry about than project deadlines.'

There are also implications for employers when carers struggle to combine paid work and care, including the loss of experienced staff, higher recruitment costs and lost productivity.



Impacts on the financial security and wellbeing of carers

The financial security of carers is affected by their reduced ability to participate in paid work. Carers spoke about the long and ongoing financial impact of caring. Josie said:

'The financial impact was long term and deeply destabilising. I had to place my home loan on hold, reduce repayments, and shift from building security to simply surviving while prioritising what Mum needed most. Caring does not just take your time and emotional energy; it can quietly reshape your financial future. I am still recovering from the financial impact of years spent navigating caring, loss, and survival.'

Almost 80% of carers responding to the 2025 CWS said being a carer had led to a reduction in their income and 79% reported accumulating less superannuation. Carers are estimated to lose around \$392,500 in lifetime earnings and \$175,000 in superannuation at age 67.⁸

Results from the 2025 CWS also show that carers in paid employment report higher financial wellbeing and carers with higher financial wellbeing are more likely to report healthier levels of wellbeing. Carers in paid employment were also significantly less likely than other carers to be lonely and carers with lower levels of loneliness are significantly more likely to report higher wellbeing.



Workplace/employer support for carers

Not all carers in paid work report wellbeing benefits, but employer support makes a big difference to the ability of working age carers to combine work and care and to carers wellbeing.

⁸ Carers Australia (2022) [Caring Costs Us: The economic impact on lifetime income and retirement savings of informal carers](#)

In 2025, carers who reported having an understanding employer were significantly more likely to report healthy levels of wellbeing (48%) than those who felt their employer was not understanding (26%).⁹

One-way carers seek to better combine work and care is to increase flexibility at work (flexible working arrangements, such as changes to hours of work, patterns of work – split shifts/ job sharing and working from home or working remotely are highly valued by carers).

Several organisations participating in the Policy Forum – Populous, Motorola and Mental Health Carers Australia – presented on their carer-inclusive workplaces and what they do to ensure their workplaces are flexible and work for carers. Common themes from the presentations were that supportive workplaces are characterised by:

- flexible work arrangements tailored to the individual needs of carers
- psychologically safe environments that enable disclosure/normalise conversations about caring roles
- leaders/managers who are proactive and empathetic and who understand the formal policies that are in place and how to apply them in the real-world (box 1).

Box 1. Carer inclusive workplaces: Innovative solutions	
POPULOUS	Louise Week from Populous, a global architectural design firm, said the firm seeks to create an environment where employees feel safe to disclose their circumstances and seek support. Populous emphasises to employees that supporting carers is not a special accommodation, but a reflection of the broader reality that ‘all of us need care at some point in our lives’. The firm encourages their managers to check in regularly with their employees, understand their individual circumstances, and tailor supports accordingly (aligning employee needs and organisational outcomes).
Motorola	Suzie Haworth spoke about how Motorola had engaged with the Carer Inclusive Workplace Initiative and undertaken a structured process to assess and strengthen its support for employees with caring responsibilities. Motorola’s leaders are supported to understand formal policies and how to apply them in real-world contexts. The company recognises that caring is dynamic and can arise at any stage in life and because of this focuses on normalising conversations about caring, providing flexibility (tailored to roles and circumstances) and supporting employees through different life stages.
Mental Health Carers Australia	Katrina Armstrong, Mental Health Carers Australia (MHCA) spoke about their flexible approach to work arrangements where adjustments are made on a day-to-day or week-to-week basis (recognising that caring, particularly in the context of mental health, is often episodic, unpredictable and highly intensive). This approach enables their employees to respond to changing caring demand while remaining engaged in the workforce. An important component of MHCA’s model is proactive and empathetic leadership – this is understanding that caring can affect cognitive capacity, energy levels and overall wellbeing, and that work expectations may need to be adjusted during periods of intensified caring or grief. MHCA also demonstrates a strong commitment to employee retention and wellbeing. When staff experience challenges related to caring responsibilities, the organisational response is focused on identifying how support can be provided, rather than accepting workforce exit as inevitable.

⁹ 2025 Carer Wellbeing Survey results presented by Mel Mylek.

The benefits for carers, organisations (better retention of experienced employees, lower recruitment costs, improved productivity and engagement) and the economy (improved gender equity, reduced reliance on income support) from supportive workplaces were also noted.

‘A carer-inclusive workplace is not about charity; it is about future-proofing the economy.’¹⁰

However, while flexible and carer-inclusive workplaces were showcased, carers suggested that such workplaces are the exception rather than standard practice and that access to flexibility is often dependent on managerial/supervisors’ discretion rather than consistent organisational practice.

‘One of the biggest lessons for me was realising that flexibility often exists more in theory than in practice. Carers need workplace cultures where support is embedded across the organisation, not dependent on individual goodwill. I have seen this from both sides: as a leader supporting staff, and later as the person who needed support.’¹¹

A few presenters spoke about informal elder care being largely invisible and the conversation about elder care not being as mature as that for other types of care, and because of this, employees remain silent about the care they provide.

‘We’ve come a long way in conversations about parental leave, flexible work, and supporting parents in the workforce. But caring for ageing parents, dementia care, and adult caring responsibilities? That conversation is nowhere near as mature. Because these conversations are harder. They involve grief, decline, uncertainty, dependency, and conversations most people would rather avoid. Unless you’ve lived it, it’s incredibly difficult to understand what someone is actually carrying.’¹²

‘Childcare and parenting has become visible and recognised explicitly in policy; Informal elder care is largely invisible, especially the emotional + managerial care.’¹³

Responses from the 2025 CWS presented by Mel Mylek showed that less than half (45%) of the carers felt their workplace was highly supportive to their caregiving role (figure 1). Interestingly, the rate was higher for male carers (49%). Support also varied by age group and industry.

Carers in supportive workplaces were more likely to access flexible work and more able to work from home.

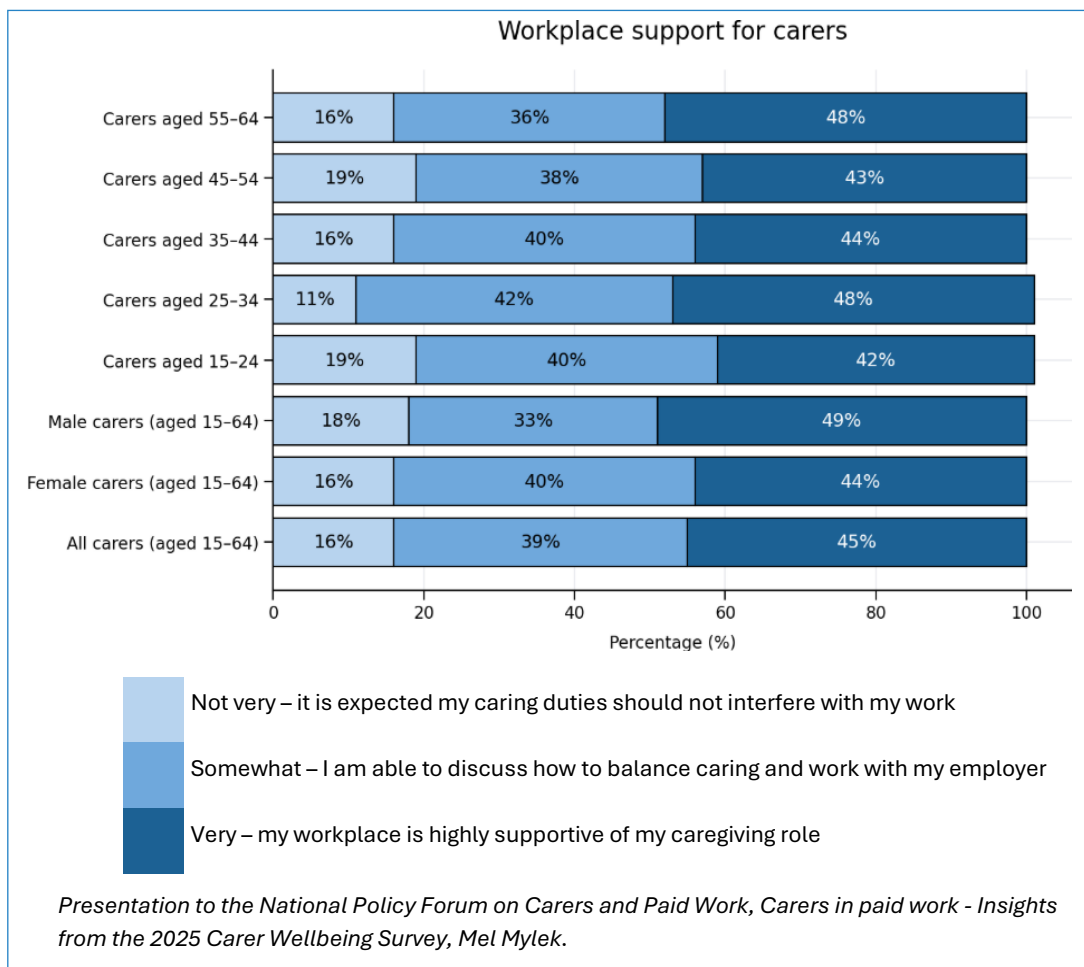
¹⁰ Dr Laura Shaffi, University of Sheffield, UK, ‘The UK unpaid caregiving economic pillar, Statutory rights and employer practices in the United Kingdom’.

¹¹ Josie Caruso, a carer who participated in the Policy Forum on Carers and Paid Work.

¹² Nicholas Smith, a carer who participated in the Policy Forum on Carers and Paid Work.

¹³ Professor Marian Baird, one of the speakers at the Policy Forum on Carers and Paid Work.

Figure 1. Support from employers for carers



Catherine de Fontenay from the Productivity Commission highlighted that workplace flexibility has improved in recent years with:

- the working-from-home revolution (more than one-third of employed Australians are working from home, figure 2)
- the strengthened right to appeal rejected flexible work applications.

Working from home has increased workforce participation overall, but especially for carers. A comparison of carers participation in working from home with the pre-COVID trend shows there has been about a 5% increase in participation. This compares to an increase of about 3% for all workers.¹⁴

While acknowledging that access to workplace flexibility remains inconsistent across sectors (working from home does not suit all jobs or businesses), she also noted that employers are facing increased labour market pressures to offer flexible working arrangements (and employers who do not offer hybrid work will have fewer workers interested and will have to offer higher wages).

¹⁴ Analysis by CEDA. Source: Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey. Presentation by Catherine de Fontenay, *Policy settings and system adequacy – how well are they working for carers?*

Figure 2: Working from home: CEDA research

More than one-third of employed Australians still regularly work from home

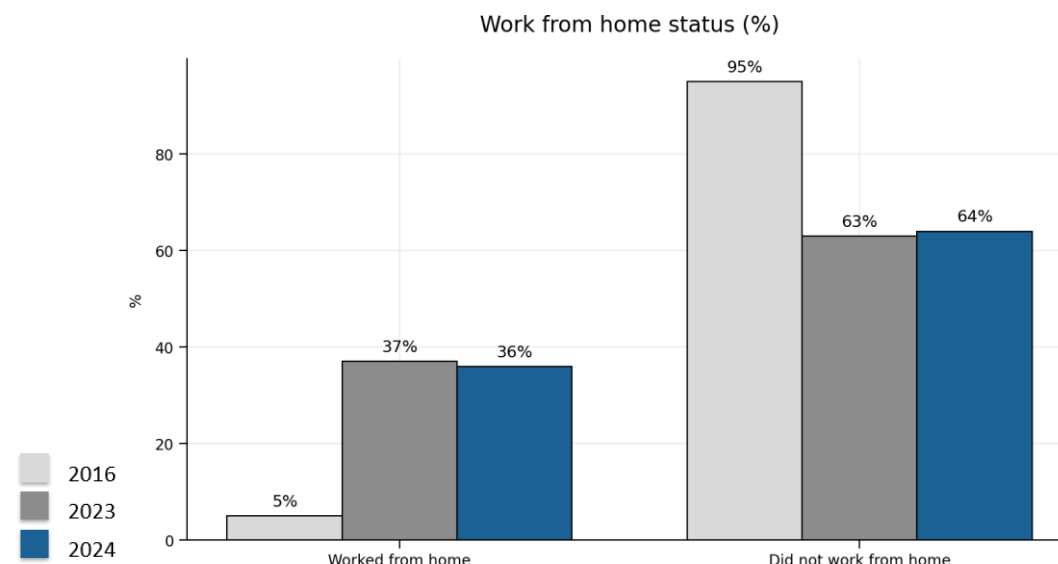


Chart: CEDA Analysis. Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (August 2024, 2016)
Presentation to the National Policy Forum on Carers and Paid Work, Catherine de Fontenay.



Existing leave entitlements are not working well for carers

The National Employment Standards (NES), by providing a legislative safety net for employees, help carers better balance paid work and care. However, the inadequacy of leave entitlements for carers under the NES featured in the panel session on Policy Settings and System Adequacy.

- 1) Carers can only access leave entitlements for certain caring tasks (sickness, injury or emergency) and caring relationships (the narrow definition of 'carer' excludes extended family (aunts, cousins), friends or community members and First Nation kin relationships).
- 2) Paid carer leave only applies to permanent and part-time workers (and many carers choose casual work for flexibility, and they are the most financially vulnerable when they must take time off).
- 3) Sick and carer leave are pooled into one 10-day entitlement and carers are known to exhaust their leave on caring, leaving no leave for themselves when they become unwell.
- 4) Carers can only access 10 days paid leave and 2 days unpaid carer leave after they have exhausted their paid leave. 50% of carers responding to the 2022 National Carer Survey reported not having enough paid leave and 54% said they had considered quitting work.

Many argued for amendments to the NES¹⁵ and the need for entitlements that better reflect contemporary caring.

Dr Laura Sbaffi, speaking about statutory rights and employer practices in the United Kingdom, outlined that carers there are entitled to up to one week of unpaid carer's leave each year from their first day of employment. Employers must also actively find ways to make flexibility work (the burden of proof has recently shifted) and there are enhanced redundancy protections for carers (they cannot be 'selected out' during restructuring because of caring responsibilities). There is also the Carer Confident Employers scheme which recognises organisations that actively support working carers through policies and workplace practices, encouraging employers to build inclusive environments that help carers balance paid work with caring responsibilities.

Marian Baird discussed findings from workplace eldercare research¹⁶, which show that although public policy provides a baseline for carers' rights, its effectiveness is limited by gaps in design and implementation. These insights underpin Marian's Policy Ladder concept, which illustrates that outcomes for carers depend on multiple layers of influence, including:

- legislative frameworks (the NES, the Fair Work Act)
- enterprise agreements and organisational policies
- work practices shaped by supervisors and managers.

Several presenters also noted that knowledge of workplace rights, including flexible employment entitlements, are not well understood and there was a case for increasing awareness of workplace entitlements for carers. One suggestion was that carers receive tailored information about how to request flexible working arrangements at key points in time.



The importance of timely and quality supports

The importance of timely and quality supports to help carers remain in employment was a theme of the Forum (carers need accessible, alternative care to be able to work). Catherine de Fontenay spoke about the key role formal care and respite care play supporting carers. She highlighted current aged care reforms as an opportunity to increase access to respite care.

Formal supports can help with day-to-day pressures that constrain carers' time and capacity. Participants noted that practical supports are not supplementary but rather essential infrastructure for workforce participation.

Lydia Ross, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, when providing an update on the National Carer Strategy and Action Plan said that the priorities for 2026 included pre-vocational supports (to help carers return to work, training, resumes, job readiness) improving access to mental health supports, expanding flexible and personalised respite, and better supporting priority carer groups. She also mentioned extended funding for the Carer Inclusive Workplace

¹⁵ Including Catherine de Fontenay, Melissa Docker and Professor Marian Baird.

¹⁶ Dr Alexandra Heron (2023) 'Love's labour lost from view: Eldercare and the conundrum for policy makers, employees and their workplaces' PhD Thesis.

Initiative. A new Reference Group and annual reporting are key mechanisms for strengthening accountability and tracking progress.

In the context of accessing formal supports, it was noted that carers access services across a range of systems, departments and agencies and this results in a system navigation burden for carers. This not only adds to caring time it also means additional stress which further limits carers capacity to engage in paid work.



Gaps in supports when transitioning into and out of caring roles

Carers spoke about gaps in supports when transitioning into and out of caring roles, highlighting that carers:

- can experience abrupt shifts in income when entering or exiting caring
- have limited time to adjust before job search requirements begin
- can find it difficult to demonstrate readiness to return to work.

‘There is a real gap between intensive caring and genuine workforce readiness. Current policy doesn’t adequately recognise that transition because the emotional load doesn’t disappear the moment someone’s caring journey ends. The responsibility doesn’t disappear. The caring role hasn’t ended. It has evolved.’¹⁷

Current income support settings for carers were identified as insufficient. Nicholas Smith, while speaking about the financial impact of caring, commented on the particularly harsh transition period when his mother went into residential care. Because his caring role had changed (noting that he was still deeply involved in his mother’s care, including advocating, coordinating decisions, and managing administration) he was required to transition from the Carer Payment to the Job Seeker Payment with a significant loss in income.

‘While dealing with grief, emotional exhaustion, and a major life transition, there was also immediate financial pressure. ... When my caring role changed, that transition felt incredibly harsh. Not just emotionally, but financially. Moving from Carer Payment to JobSeeker meant a reduction of nearly \$400 a fortnight, despite the reality that my caring responsibilities hadn’t simply disappeared. The challenge wasn’t employability. It was readiness. I wasn’t ready, and I think that distinction matters.’



Carers – an under-valued workforce asset

Another theme of the Forum was the significant transferable skills carers can bring to workplaces, including resilience, problem-solving, coordination and advocacy, and emotional intelligence. There was a view, however, that these capabilities are often undervalued or overlooked in recruitment and career progression.

¹⁷ Nicholas Smith, a carer who participated in the Policy Forum on Carers and Paid Work.

‘The question is not whether carers are capable. The real question is whether workplaces recognise and value what carers bring.’¹⁸

‘... caring builds extraordinary capabilities: crisis management, advocacy, negotiation, complex coordination, decision-making under pressure, systems navigation, emotional intelligence, and resilience. If I described those competencies without mentioning caring, they would sound highly employable. Despite everything caring had required me to develop, I didn’t emerge from that experience feeling strengthened. I felt depleted. And when it came to returning to work, I found myself downplaying the caring experience, trying to make it look as small as possible on my resume, almost as though it hadn’t happened.’¹⁹

Recognising carers as a workforce asset presents both economic and social opportunities.



Data gaps limit effective policy and program design

The Forum’s panel session on Data and Evidence: What do we know and what’s missing? – revealed that while there is a lot of high-level data on carers and caregiving, the evidence on what works to support carers’ wellbeing, paid work, education and caregiving is thin. There is also variation in the way unpaid caring is defined and measured and the definitions adopted in many key surveys are inconsistent with the *Carer Recognition Act 2010*.

Some carers are not well represented in the data. This is in part because some datasets rely on people self-identifying as carers (and many people undertaking a caring role do not identify as a carer) but also because carers are undercounted because of methodological and practical reasons. And while longitudinal studies present a significant opportunity to better understand and respond to carers’ needs, there is limited longitudinal analysis. Good evaluations of what works to support carers are also thin on the ground. Clare Sibby, from the Australian Institute of Family Studies, argued that richer longitudinal research and evaluation could provide insights into:

- the longer-term physical and mental health impacts of caring
- how the caring role affects careers, education, relationships, income, housing stress and retirement savings
- how transitions in the caring role impact carers
- how carers access (and potentially benefit from) services aimed at supporting carers’ wellbeing, paid employment and education
- how governments can best support carers.

Areas where there is insufficient data to support monitoring of aspects of the National Carer Strategy were also highlighted, including, for example:

- carer’s awareness of the information, services and supports that are available to help them in their caring role
- the nature and location of unmet demand for carer services and supports

¹⁸ Josie Caruso, a carer who participated in the Policy Forum on Carers and Paid Work.

¹⁹ Nicholas Smith, a carer who participated in the Policy Forum on Carers and Paid Work.

- the reasons why some carers are not accessing available supports.

Commenting on data gaps in the United Kingdom, Dr Laura Shiffi noted intersectional blind spots (the data are too white), little evidence on the male perspective (and males are making up an increasing proportion of the caring workforce), and a rate of investment void (there is problem data but a lack of solution data).

Azadeh Abbasi Shavazi, presenting research on higher education completion rates, which showed that unpaid carers in higher education have slightly lower completion rates than non-carers (particularly among disadvantaged groups) argued for better data on carers' education-to-employment pathways and consideration of earlier life stages of carers in employment policy.

Addressing these gaps in the evidence base is critical for designing more effective policies to better support carers to better combine paid work, caring and life.

What needs to change?

Based on the presentations and discussions, the following is a list of priority actions that would help carers better combine paid work and care and improve the carer evidence base for more effective policies, services and supports for carers.



Priority actions for the Australian Government

1. Amend the National Employment Standards relating to carer leave entitlements

- Broaden eligibility for carer leave to better reflect the realities of contemporary caring and employment
 - Align the definition of 'carer' with the *Carer Recognition Act 2010*; include extended family & kin relationships.
 - Expand eligible occasions of care beyond sickness/emergency to cover ongoing caring responsibilities.
 - Simplify evidence requirements with one-time evidence, not repeated documentation.
 - Extend paid carer leave entitlements to casual employees so they are not excluded from essential workplace protections.
- Redesign leave arrangements so carers are not required to use their own sick or personal leave to provide care
 - Separate paid carer leave from personal (sick) leave.
 - Provide additional paid carer leave days.
 - Extend unpaid carer leave from 2 to 5 days (in line with the United Kingdom and other OECD countries).
 - Remove the requirement to exhaust paid leave before accessing unpaid leave; allow non-consecutive, part-day use.
- Increase awareness of workplace entitlements and supports
 - Run a national awareness campaign on caring and paid work to increase carers' knowledge of workplace entitlements and available supports and to start normalising the conversation in the workplace about caring responsibilities.
 - Address stigma and discrimination that may reduce use of carer entitlements.
 - Provide accessible and centralised information for carers so they can easily find and understand information about available supports, eligibility requirements and entitlements. This is important for carers understanding their rights and being able to confidently engage with their employers.

2. Review income support payments for carers

- Review eligibility, rates and complexity of income support payments. Consider reducing income shocks for carers when they enter and exit caring roles and address any barriers to combining paid work with income support.

3. Invest more in supports and infrastructure to help carers combine work and care

- Expand access to flexible and personalised respite (services that can be tailored to carers' work schedules)
- Invest more in formal care and workplace supports (carer-inclusive workplace programs).
- Improve system coordination across care systems. Strengthen links between health, aged care, and disability systems to reduce fragmentation and to make the systems easier (and less time consuming) for carers to navigate.

4. Implement and monitor the National Carer Strategy

- Use the National Carer Strategy to develop a whole-of-government approach to supporting carers to engage in paid work and as a means for ensuring carers are considered in key areas of reform, including aged care reform and changes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme.
- Collect new data (to address data gaps) to facilitate effective monitoring of progress against the Strategy.
- Have a process for developing the evidence on what works to support carers and incorporate lived experience of carers. Conduct research and evaluations to better understand how governments can best support carers and caregiving. Involve carers in policy design, implementation, and evaluation.

5. Improve datasets, data linkages and undertake more longitudinal research

- Standardise definitions of unpaid carers across datasets and ensure all unpaid carers are counted and adequately represented in key data collections.
- Strengthen the integration of administrative datasets and survey data to deepen the evidence base on carers.
- Make better use of longitudinal data sets to better understand the long-term impacts of caring and paid work on incomes, careers, superannuation, health and wellbeing.

6. Invest in evaluation of interventions supporting carers' workforce participation

- Fund evaluation of programs and policies: Assess which initiatives are most effective in supporting carers to remain in or return to work.
- Embed evaluation into program design: Ensure new initiatives include clear evaluation frameworks from the outset.



Priority actions for employers

Employers play a critical role enabling carers to remain in and re-enter the workforce. The following recommended changes are for employers.

1. Embed carer-inclusive workplace practices

- Normalise flexible work as standard practice: Embed flexibility (where possible) in how, when, and where work is performed to accommodate ongoing caring responsibilities.

- Ensure consistent application of policies across organisations: Apply flexibility and carer-related entitlements fairly across teams and roles to avoid inequities. Employers are encouraged to engage with the Carer-Inclusive Workplace Initiative and pursue accreditation as a carer-inclusive organisation, demonstrating their commitment to supporting working carers.
- Expand access to remote and hybrid work where appropriate: Enable carers to better balance work and care through increased access to location-based flexibility.

2. Strengthen organisational capability

- Provide training for managers on supporting carers: Equip managers with practical tools and knowledge to respond effectively to carers' needs.
- Improve communication of workplace entitlements: Ensure employees are aware of available supports and how to access them.
- Foster psychologically safe environments: Promote workplace cultures where carers feel comfortable disclosing responsibilities without fear of stigma.

3. Recognise carers as a workforce asset

- Acknowledge the skills, resilience, and experience carers bring to the workplace.
- Support recruitment, retention and progression pathways for carers: Implement targeted strategies to attract, retain, and advance employees with caring responsibilities.

Next steps

There is a strong case for better supporting carers to combine paid work and care. There are benefits for carers (financial security, improved health and wellbeing), employers (better retention of staff, lower recruitment costs) and the economy (higher productivity, reduced reliance on income support and health costs). And, as outlined in this Policy Forum Outcomes Report, there are also several practical changes that can be made to current policy settings that will make a real difference to the lives of working carers. Making progress on these changes, however, will require coordinated action across policies, workplaces and care and support systems.

Carers Australia will use the outcomes of this Policy Forum to inform ongoing advocacy and policy development. We will work with government, employers and the care sector to progress the recommended changes outlined in this report. Carers Australia will also continue to develop an evidence base through research with carers and employers to better understand how carers can be better supported in the workplace.

Appendices

A. Forum agenda

Time	Activity
9:30 am	Arrival and morning tea
10:00 am	Welcome and about the Policy Forum Joanna Cave, CEO Carers Australia
10:10 am	Setting the scene: Juggling paid work and caring 1. Josie Caruso, Carer 2. Nicholas Smith, Carer
10:40 am	Setting the scene: Carer Wellbeing Survey 2025 Report Mel Mylek, University of Canberra
10:55 am	Panel session 1: Policy settings and system adequacy – How well are they working for carers? 1. Melissa Docker, Carers NSW 2. Catherine de Fontenay, Productivity Commission 3. Professor Marian Baird, Gender and Employment Relations, University of Sydney
11:55 am	National Carer Strategy and Action Plan: Progress Lydia Ross, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
12:00 pm	Lunch break
12:45 pm	Panel session 2: Carer inclusive workplaces – Innovative solutions 1. Suzie Haworth, Motorola 2. Louise Weeks, Populous 3. Katrina Armstrong, Mental Health Carer Australia
1:30 pm	Panel session 3: Data and evidence – What do we know and what’s missing? 1. Dr Laura Sbaffi, The Centre for Care, UK 2. Clare Sibly, Australian Institute of Family studies 3. Azadeh Abbasi Shavazi, ANU PhD candidate
2:15 pm	Afternoon tea
2:30 pm	What’s next? Solutions and areas of focus Table-group discussions: From barriers to solutions
3:00 pm	Plenary feedback: Key insights and priority actions Group reporting and synthesis of key themes
3:20 pm	Next steps and close Joanna Cave, CEO Carers Australia

B. Participant list

Name	Organisation
Afrooz Zanjani-Torrado	Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
Alyce Morris	Carers Australia
Azadeh Abbasi Shavazi	Australian National University
Catherine de Fontenay	Productivity Commission
Clare Sibly	Australian Institute of Family studies
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