



WORK & CARE
THE NECESSARY INVESTMENT




**Carers
Australia**

**GUIDE FOR
EMPLOYEES**

Combining Work and Care

Acknowledgements

Carers Australia would like to thank the state and territory Carers Associations for their assistance in developing this resource. This work has been inspired by the tools for employers and employees, as developed by Carers UK.

Disclaimer

At the time of print all contents in this booklet were accurate. However, legislative change may impact upon employment arrangements in the workplace. For further information visit the Fair Work Ombudsman www.fairwork.gov.au or the Fair Work Commission www.fwc.gov.au.

For further information about the *Work & Care* Initiative please visit www.carersaustralia.com.au or email work&care@carersaustralia.com.au or phone us on (02) 6122 9900.

Statistics

All carer statistics in this Guide are sourced from the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics, Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2012.

FOREWORD

Ara Cresswell
CEO Carers Australia

“IN AUSTRALIA, THERE ARE MANY EMPLOYEES WHO COMBINE PAID WORK WITH CARING FOR SOMEONE WITH A DISABILITY, MENTAL ILLNESS, CHRONIC CONDITION OR TERMINAL ILLNESS OR SOMEONE WHO IS FRAIL AGED.”



“However, there are also many carers who are currently not engaged in the workforce due to the demands of their caring role, a lack of available support options and workplaces which don’t support their need for flexibility.

“With changing demographic trends, an increasing number of Australians will need to take on caring responsibilities in the near future. The sustainability of meeting this growing demand for carers – including those in their prime productive years – will be contingent upon their ability to combine work and care, and to enter or re-engage with the workforce when their caring role ceases or is reduced.

“Providing specific workplace arrangements for these carers is crucial to the ability of employers to remain competitive and to attract and maintain skilled and committed staff.

“Even though many employees with caring responsibilities may not identify with the term carer, I encourage all carers to read this booklet to find out about their rights at work, options for flexible working and the range of supports that can assist with combining work and care.”

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INTRODUCTION

The following guide is designed to assist unpaid family and friend carers who are juggling paid work with their caring responsibilities. It provides information on what the caring role involves, carers' workplace entitlements, advice on balancing work and caring responsibilities and information on available supports and services for carers. There is also a lift-out for carers to provide to their employer on the benefits of becoming a carer-friendly workplace, and tips on implementing flexible workplace provisions for working carers.

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

- > Carers who are currently combining work and care.
- > Carers who are looking to enter or re-enter the workforce.
- > Employees who may become a carer in the future.
- > Employees who want to learn more about their colleagues who are carers.

With advances in healthcare; the elderly, chronically ill and those with disabilities are now living longer at the same time as the working age population is decreasing in relative terms. As the proportion of Australia's population aged over 65 years continues to increase, Australia will soon reach the 'tipping point' for care, when there are likely to be fewer informal carers available relative to the ageing population.

These demographic trends, along with an increasing retirement age and a greater number of older Australians choosing to age at home, will see relatively more employees needing to take on a caring role than ever before.

Trying to maintain both paid work and an unpaid caring role can be incredibly stressful. Many carers describe it as like trying to hold down two full time jobs. There are many reasons why you might be combining work and care: financial necessity, to have a break from your caring role, or maybe it's an opportunity to get out of the house and interact with others. Whatever the reason, chances are there will be times when balancing these two roles is very challenging. Whether you've been a carer for some time, are relatively new to the role or you're simply planning ahead, this resource can provide you with useful information on combining work and care.

ANYONE AT ANY TIME CAN BECOME A CARER – CARING IS AN ISSUE WHICH EVERYONE WILL FACE.

- > There are 2.7 million carers in Australia.

WHAT IS A CARER?

What do we mean by 'carer'?

A carer is someone who provides unpaid care and support to family members and friends who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition or terminal illness, and those who are frail aged.

What do they do?

The nature and intensity of the caring role can vary significantly. Carers of someone with a physical disability or impairment might need to provide assistance with bathing, dressing, providing food and physical mobility, while those who care for someone with a mental illness might need to help manage symptoms, provide emotional support and assist with domestic tasks. Carers of people with chronic conditions often play a key role in medical treatment including taking the person to and from appointments, administering medications, monitoring vital signs and managing wounds and dressings. The caring role can also often involve coordination of services including arranging support staff, liaising with government departments to arrange income support and filling in application and assessment forms for assistance.

Not all carers live with the person they care for, particularly those who care for an elderly parent. This can often increase the time commitment of the caring role with additional travel to and from the person's home. For those who care for someone who is frail aged, the intensity of care required will also often increase over time.



**56% of carers
are female**



**44% of carers
are male**

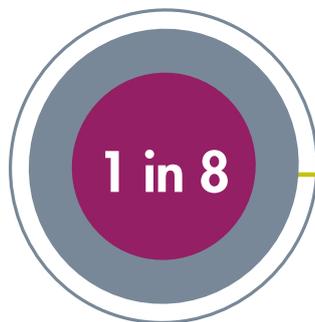


How many of my colleagues are likely to be carers?

Almost 2.7 million Australians were identified as carers in 2012, which means that around 1 in 8 Australians or 11.9 per cent of the population have an unpaid caring role. Around 770,000 (29 per cent) of these were primary carers, those who provide the majority of care for another individual.¹

The proportion of Australians who are carers generally increases with age, with 21.2 per cent of 25–44 year olds identifying as carers, and 40 per cent of Australians aged 45–64 years identifying as carers.¹

While the intensity of the caring role prevents some carers from engaging in the workforce, there are many carers who combine paid work with their unpaid caring role, with 68 per cent of carers aged 15–64 years participating in the labour force.¹



1 in 8 Australian employees are carers

TELLING OTHERS ABOUT YOUR CARING ROLE

*"I always felt really awkward talking about my other responsibilities at work, so I kept it hidden and the stress used to make me feel really miserable. My employer started up a group for carers, and I was amazed to find out how many other people look after someone else too. Even one of the senior managers is a carer! It really helps to talk with people who understand how things really are."*²

Should I tell my employer?

It is up to you whether you feel comfortable telling your employer about your caring role. It is natural to feel nervous or hesitant – many of us prefer to keep our personal lives separate from work.

However, in order to access certain flexible provisions or leave arrangements (such as carer's leave) it may be in your interests to let your employer know about your circumstances. Remember that you don't need to go into detail about your relationship to the person you care for or their medical conditions or impairment if you don't want to.

To help you decide whether to tell your manager about your caring role, you may want to find out about what policies your workplace has for employees with caring responsibilities. You may be surprised to find that there are workplace provisions you weren't previously aware of. Being aware of your rights and entitlements before speaking with management will also help you prepare for discussions.

*"I would encourage people to tell others because I think it's not just about how it impacts on your efficiency, but it is also helping others understand that there is a whole other world happening for somebody they're sitting next to or across the road from."*³

Should I tell other staff?

Every workplace is different, and only you can decide whether you feel comfortable sharing your personal circumstances with other staff members. You may decide that you're happy for everyone to know, or you may prefer to tell one or two close colleagues.

It's important to remember that coming to an agreement with your employer on alternative work and leave arrangements will inevitably have an impact on other staff in your team. While you should not be expected to negotiate any changes to your colleagues' working hours, you may find it useful to chat with other team members about your situation before talking to management. Other staff might have ideas about how the team can accommodate your need for flexibility, or you might find that some of your colleagues are also carers.

*"Where I worked before they knew about my Mother and they supported me. On a down day it was nice to let it all out and they would empathise with me."*³

FLEXIBLE WORKING AND LEAVE ARRANGEMENTS

You might find that a standard working week does not allow you adequate flexibility to combine your caring responsibilities with employment. Below is a list of flexible working and leave arrangements that you and your employer may want to consider putting in place to help you balance work and care.

Examples of flexible working arrangements

Policy/arrangement	Description
Flexi-time	Flexible starting and finishing times – adjusting the working day to begin and end earlier or later.
Home-working or Tele-working	Working in a home, or other environment, as opposed to the normal workplace, often through the use of technology.
Annualised working hours	Completed contracted hours, but making adjustments to allow for shorter or longer days or weeks across the period of a year.
Job rotation	Moving from one job to another for a specific period to reduce work commitments during a period of care.
Term-time working	Working contracted hours but within school term times.
Self rostering	Team voluntarily agree shift patterns for managers to approve.
Job sharing	Two or more people fulfilling the requirements of a single post. Option of having a job share register within a company.
Split shifts	For example, arranged with a period of time in the middle of the day or afternoon.
Compressed working hours	Completing contracted hours in a shorter period than normal. For example, a 9 day fortnight.
Flexible Combination	Ability to pick and choose, e.g. increasing/decreasing annual or unpaid leave for a particular working pattern.
'Day extender'	Working predominantly in the office but also carrying out additional work at home in the evening.
Phased retirement	Reducing hours progressively over a certain period rather than ceasing work completely. Often involves a cross-over period where the retiring employee helps to train their replacement.

EXAMPLE

Susannah and her husband Tom care for their 11 year old son James who has epilepsy. Both Susannah and Tom work full-time, and while James attends school most days, he generally has a couple of seizures a month. This usually requires time in hospital due to the injuries he sustains while having a seizure and several days at home to recuperate. Susannah has discussed her son's condition with her manager who allows her to work from home when James is unwell. Her co-workers are understanding of her caring situation, and Susannah is able to dial in to staff meetings when required.

Examples of leave arrangements

Policy/arrangement	Example of Care Situations
<p>Carers' emergency leave</p> <p>For unforeseeable emergency incidents when leave is needed for a short period of time to care for a family member. If more time is needed, then absence usually becomes planned leave.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > To make longer term arrangements for a dependant's care. > To cover when existing arrangements break down. > To deal with an unexpected incident involving a dependent child at school.
<p>Carers' planned leave</p> <p>Leave needed for a foreseeable event lasting for a defined period. If more time is needed, absence usually becomes a career break, or a review of working pattern/hours can be undertaken.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Providing nursing care following hospital discharge. > Assisting a dependant to move accommodation. > Attending benefit/legal hearings with a dependant. > Attending hospital appointments with a dependant.
<p>Career break or sabbatical</p>	<p>Used when a carer has to take a longer period out of the workplace, but wishes to return to their former job. Not necessarily exclusive for carers. Minimum period usually 3 months – 2 years.</p>
<p>Unpaid leave</p>	<p>Usually used when all other paid leave options are exhausted. Not necessarily exclusively for carers.</p>
<p>Purchased leave</p>	<p>To build up a bank of leave to be used for caring.</p>
<p>Matched leave</p>	<p>An additional period of leave offered by an employer to 'match' annual leave an employee has to take to provide care – often used to cover a period following hospital discharge.</p>
<p>Compassionate leave</p>	<p>Used mostly following bereavement.</p>
<p>Cost of replacement care covered by employer</p>	<p>To enable a carer to attend training, or perform work duties requested by the organisation – at a time when they would normally have caring responsibilities.</p>

EXAMPLE

Richard is a builder whose wife was recently injured in a serious car accident. Her recovery will take several months and during this time she will require assistance with bathing, dressing and preparing food. Richard used all his personal and sick leave looking after his wife immediately after the accident, and was worried he would have to quit his job until his wife recovers. Richard discussed his caring situation with his employer who offered to match his carers leave with additional sick leave and offered to let him purchase additional annual leave (which will gradually be deducted from his pay when he returns to work full-time).

WORKPLACE SUPPORTS

The type and range of carer supports offered by employers usually varies depending on the size of the organisation and the nature of the business. Your employer may already offer some of the options listed below, or you may want to suggest to management that they consider implementing some of these ideas to support you in balancing work and care.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

Many larger employers already have Employee Assistance Programs in place to offer their staff a range of supports. These EAPs may or may not be specifically for working carers, but programs which provide access to free counselling services or wellness programs which are designed to reduce stress and anxiety can be beneficial for carers.

Carer Networks

Establishing a Carer Network for employees can provide working carers with the opportunity to connect with other employees in a similar situation. These networks facilitate information sharing about the caring role, allow carers to gain new knowledge about available services and also provide the opportunity for carers to form support groups.

CASE STUDY

The **Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)** Disability and Carers Employee Network was established in early 2014, delivering on an action in the ABS Workplace Diversity Action Plan 2013–17 to provide support to staff with disability and carers of people with disability. The ABS has offices in each capital city and the network is open to all ABS staff. There are currently around 60 members of the network and new members are regularly encouraged to join via all staff advertisements.

The network meets monthly via video conference, and members discuss work-related matters that may impact on people with disability and caring responsibilities and share personal experiences (for those that want to share). They also provide input into related internal and external initiatives. External guest speakers from carers and disability organisations, selected by network members, are also invited to talk at meetings. The ABS Senior Disability Champion attends the meetings and has helped to raise and address specific workplace-related issues raised at these meetings.⁴

Workplace facilities

Your employer can make simple changes to the workplace which can go a long way in supporting you in combining work and care. For example, allowing you to access your personal phone or to be contactable at work can help to alleviate the stress and concern about the person you care for during work hours. Access to a private room for conversations can also be useful. Other useful facilities for working carers (but which won't necessarily be available in all workplaces) include easy access to transport services or parking to allow you to come and go during the day if you need to attend to a family member or friend.

"I have access to a telephone, so if I leave Mum in the morning and she is depressed or unwell, I can call her through the day. I can go somewhere private and have a chat with her without having to worry about what's going to happen 'til I get home."⁵

Carer-friendly workplace examples

EXAMPLE

Matthew is a senior manager at a law firm. Last year his elderly mother had a fall at home and lost much of her mobility, confidence and independence. She increasingly needed assistance from Michael to undertake everyday tasks such as cooking and cleaning, but wasn't ready to move into residential care. Michael had been reluctant to discuss his new caring role with his employer for fear of being over-looked for promotion.

After finally telling his employer about his situation, Michael was given a Carer Resource pack which included referral information to a Carers Association which helped him to negotiate paid support for his mum through an aged care provider. Michael's manager also offered to let him work a compressed working week (weekly full-time hours in 4 working days) so that he could stay with his mum on the days that the support worker doesn't come in.

CASE STUDY

The **UK ministry of Justice** is a large scale employer with approximately 95,000 employees across around 900 sites. Its employee carer network is longstanding and has around 2,000 members. The aims of the network include to raise awareness, provide policy input into relevant areas, challenge attitudes, and identify and support carers' champions. The network benefits from having a Champion on the Management Board, and produces a monthly newsletter.⁵

CASE STUDY

IBM Australia has a range of diversity and flexibility policies. It offers flexible work options which allow employees to make changes to the way they work and meet their work and personal needs. IBM underpins its work/life vision with policies and programs to support its employees. 'Flexibility@work' includes individualised work schedules; a compressed or flexible work week; part-time work; job sharing; and working from home when the role allows. Flexible leave options include self-funded leave; personal work/life leave; study leave; and leave of absence.⁶



YOUR WORKPLACE ENTITLEMENTS

Right to request flexible working arrangements

The *Fair Work Act 2009* provides employees in the national workplace relations system with a legal right to request flexible working arrangements. To be eligible employees must have worked for their employer **for at least 12 months on a full-time or part-time basis**. Long term casual employees who have a **reasonable expectation of ongoing employment** are also eligible.

Who's eligible?

Employees are eligible to request flexible working arrangements in the following circumstances:

- > The employee is a parent, or has responsibility for the care of a child who is of school age or younger.
- > The employee is a carer – within the meaning of the *Carer Recognition Act 2010* (see page 16).
- > The employee has a disability.
- > The employee is 55 or older.
- > The employee is experiencing violence from a member of the employee's family.
- > The employee provides care or support to a member of their immediate family or household who requires care or support because they are experiencing violence from the member's family.

NB: state or territory laws about flexible working arrangements apply if they give employees a better entitlement than the National Employment Standards.

What is a flexible working arrangement?

Flexible working arrangements include:

- > Changing hours of work (e.g. working less hours or changing start or finish times).
- > Changing patterns of work (e.g. working 'split shifts' or job sharing).
- > Changing the place (e.g. working from home).

Making your request

Setting out a formal written request for flexible work is a good way of starting a discussion with your employer and allows both of you to better understand each other's needs and consider how they can be accommodated.

You and your employer may have ideas about how the business's activities can be organised around your changed work arrangements while minimising disruption. You might even come up with a new idea that still meets your needs but is different to your original request.

IF YOU APPROACH YOUR EMPLOYER WITH A SOLUTION, NOT A PROBLEM YOU ARE MORE LIKELY TO GET A POSITIVE OUTCOME.

Some tips for writing your letter

- > Ask if your employer has any policies on flexible work. If your workplace has a Human Resources area they might be able to offer you advice and assistance.
- > Explain your situation and your needs clearly.
- > Think about how the needs of the business may also be met and suggest options to make it easier for your employer to accommodate your request.
- > Identify how your proposal might help the business. For example, the change to working hours would allow clients to contact the business at later or earlier hours or allow more staff to be on at peak periods.
- > Talk to colleagues who might be affected. They may be able to suggest ideas on how to manage the work. For instance, someone else might be prepared to start early and finish early if you want to start late and finish late.
- > Remember that your proposed change needs to be realistic and workable for everyone.
- > Ask someone to read over your letter and provide feedback.
- > Make it clear that you are committed to ensuring that the arrangements work effectively for everyone.

Employer response

According to the *Fair Work Act 2009* employers can only refuse a request on 'reasonable business grounds'. If an employer refuses a request, they have to give reasons. Reasonable business grounds include when the new working arrangements:

- > Are too expensive for the employer to implement.
- > Would result in a significant loss in efficiency or productivity.
- > Would be likely to have a significant negative impact on customer service.

Other reasonable business grounds include:

- > There isn't any capacity to change the work arrangements of other employees affected.
- > That it would be impractical to change the working arrangements of other employees, or recruit new employees.

If there are reasonable business grounds to refuse a request for flexible working arrangements, employers should look at:

- > How the change would affect the workplace's finances, efficiency, productivity and customer service.
- > How easy it is for current staff to cover work.
- > How easy it is to find someone else to do the work.
- > The arrangements needed to accommodate the employee's request.

If you are refused

If your request is refused and you are not satisfied with the reasons provided, you may go to the Fair Work Commission for assistance if your employer has agreed to do so (for example, such written agreement may be provided for in your contract of employment, enterprise agreement or other written agreement).

IF YOUR REQUEST IS REFUSED –

the written response from your employer must include details of the reason for refusal.

The Fair Work Commission can hold a conference with you and your employer to talk through the issues and try to find a solution. They may also make a recommendation on how to resolve the issues. It is expected that these steps will resolve most disagreements. Ultimately, however, the Fair Work Commission and the Fair Work Ombudsman cannot direct an employer to agree to your request unless the employer has agreed to this.

It is illegal for your employer to take any adverse action against you because you make a request or ask the Fair Work Commission for assistance.

RIGHT TO REQUEST CHECKLIST

- > Identify flexible working arrangements that would assist you.
- > Think about the needs of the business.
- > Put your ideas down in writing.
- > Consider talking to your employer and colleagues to refine your ideas.
- > Make your formal request in writing.

Individual Flexibility Arrangements (IFAs): IFAs allow for variations to modern awards or enterprise agreements in order to meet the genuine needs of employers and individual employees while ensuring minimum entitlements and protections are not undermined. For more information on IFAs please visit www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/policies-and-guides/best-practice-guides/use-of-individual-flexibility-arrangements.

Protection against discrimination

Discrimination occurs in the workplace when an employer takes adverse action against an employee or prospective employee because of a protected attribute. Protected attributes include race, colour, sexual preference, disability and **family or carer's responsibilities**, among others. Adverse action includes firing an employee, not hiring someone or offering different and unfair terms and conditions compared to other employees.

If you've lost your job and believe you have been discriminated against, contact the Fair Work Commission within 21 days. For more information on discrimination in the workplace please visit www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/policies-and-guides/fact-sheets/rights-and-obligations/workplace-discrimination.

NB: The information provided in this section was accurate at the time of writing. However, legislative change may impact on employment arrangements in the workplace. For further information on employee entitlements visit www.fairwork.gov.au or www.fwc.gov.au or call the Fair Work infoline on 13 13 94.



Minimum employee entitlements

Minimum conditions at work can come from registered agreements, awards or legislation. The section below outlines the National Employment Standards (NES) which are the minimum entitlements that all employers must offer their employees under Australian law. An award, registered agreement or employment contract can't provide for conditions that are less than the national minimum wage or the NES, and they can't exclude the NES.

The minimum entitlements are included in this guide as a reference point so you can make sure your employer is complying. However, many organisations choose to go above and beyond these minimum requirements by offering their employees extra leave entitlements. For example, some employers offer their staff paid carer's leave that is in addition to paid sick leave, or may offer extra compassionate leave for employees.

Your employer may already offer entitlements that are above the NES, or you may decide to negotiate certain conditions that are in addition to the minimum standards.

National Employment Standards

The **National Employment Standards (NES)** are 10 minimum employment entitlements that have to be provided to all employees – regardless of the award, registered agreement or employment contract that applies.

The NES establish minimum entitlements for permanent employees to receive:

- > Paid personal/carer's leave.
- > Unpaid carer's leave.
- > Paid or unpaid compassionate leave.

Paid sick and carer's leave

Sick and carer's leave (also known as personal leave) lets an employee take time off to help them deal with personal illness, caring responsibilities and family emergencies.

The minimum entitlement to paid personal/carer's leave for an employee (other than a casual employee) is 10 days per year. Part-time employees get pro rata of 10 days each year depending on the hours worked.

NB: Carer's leave generally comes out of the employee's personal leave balance.

Who gets paid sick and carer's leave?

An employee may take paid personal/carer's leave:

- > If they are unfit for work because of their own personal illness or injury.
- > To provide care or support to a member of their immediate family or household, because of personal illness, injury or unexpected emergency affecting the member. A member of the employee's immediate family means a spouse, de facto partner, child, parent, grandparent, grandchild or sibling of an employee; or a child, parent, grandparent, grandchild or sibling of the employee's spouse or de facto partner.

When paid personal/carer's leave is taken, the minimum requirement is that an employee must be paid at their base rate of pay for the ordinary hours they would have worked during the period.

Unpaid carer's leave

The NES require that all employees, including casual employees, get 2 days unpaid carer's leave each time an immediate family member or household member of the employee needs care and support because of illness, injury or an unexpected emergency.

An employee may take unpaid carer's leave for each occasion as a single continuous period of up to two days, or any separate periods to which the employee and his or her employer agree.

Compassionate leave

All employees (including casual employees) are entitled to compassionate leave, also known as bereavement leave.

Compassionate leave can be taken when a member of an employee's immediate family or household dies or suffers a life-threatening illness or injury. Immediate family is an employee's spouse, de facto partner, child, parent, grandparent, grandchild, sibling (or child, parent, grandparent, grandchild or sibling of the employee's spouse or de facto partner). Employees can also take compassionate leave for other relatives (eg. Cousins, aunts and uncles) if they are a member of the employee's household, or if the employer agrees to this.

An employee may take compassionate leave for each occasion as:

- > a single continuous two day period or;
- > two separate periods of one day each or;
- > any separate periods to which the employee and his or her employer agree.

If an employee (other than a casual employee) takes a period of compassionate leave, the employer must pay the employee at the employee's base rate of pay for the ordinary hours they would have worked during the period.

Casual employees are not entitled to any paid personal/carer's leave or compassionate leave. However, casuals are entitled to unpaid carer's leave or compassionate leave.

The Carer Recognition Act 2010

The *Carer Recognition Act 2010* came into effect on 18 November 2010. The aim of the Act is to increase recognition and awareness of the role carers play in providing daily care and support to people with disability, medical conditions, mental illness or who are frail aged.

A *carer* is defined in the Act as an individual who provides personal care, support and assistance to another individual who needs it because that other individual:

- (a) has a disability; or
- (b) has a medical condition (including a terminal or chronic illness); or
- (c) has a mental illness; or
- (d) is frail and aged.

An individual is not a *carer* in respect of care, support and assistance he or she provides:

- (a) under a contract of service or a contract for the provision of services; or
- (b) in the course of doing voluntary work for a charitable, welfare or community organisation; or
- (c) as part of the requirements of a course of education or training.

To avoid doubt, an individual is not a *carer* merely because he or she:

- (a) is the spouse, de facto partner, parent, child or other relative of an individual, or is the guardian of an individual; or
- (b) lives with an individual who requires care.

The Act outlines the following obligations of all public service agencies:

- (1) Each public service agency is to take all practical measures to ensure that its employees and agents have an awareness and understanding of the Statement for Australia's Carers.
- (2) Each public service agency's internal human resources policies, so far as they may significantly affect an employee's caring role, are to be developed having due regard to the Statement for Australia's Carers.

There are also additional obligations for public service agencies that are responsible for the development, implementation, provision or evaluation of care supports (also known as *public service care agencies*). This includes an obligation to consult carers, or bodies that represent carers, when developing or evaluating care supports; to take all practical measures to ensure that it, and its employees and agents, take action to reflect the principles of the Statement for Australia's Carers; and to report on its compliance to the Act.

Individuals or bodies which enter into a contract or funding arrangement with a public service care agency to develop, implement, provide or evaluate care supports also have obligations under the Act. They are referred to as an ***associated provider***. These obligations also apply when an associated provider enters into a contract or funding arrangement with another person or body to undertake all or part of the funded activities. The Act specifies that:

Each associated provider is to take all practicable measures to ensure that:

- (a) its officers, employees and agents have an awareness and understanding of the Statement for Australia's Carers; and
- (b) it, and its officers, employees and agents, take action to reflect the principles of the Statement in developing, implementing, providing or evaluating care supports.

To see the full Act visit www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/c2010a00123

ASSISTANCE IN YOUR CARING ROLE

Supports offered by the Carers Associations

Carers Australia is the national peak body representing Australia's unpaid carers. Our members are the Carers Associations which are located in every state and territory. Their contact details can be found on page 34. The programs run by the Associations vary from state to state. Below is a general list to give you an idea of the types of supports and services you can access at your nearest Carers Association.

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT SERVICES AND SUPPORTS AVAILABLE TO CARERS –

call the Carer Advisory Line from anywhere in Australia on **1800 242 636**.

Carer Advisory Service

The Carer Advisory Line **1800 242 636** provides information and support for carers from anywhere in Australia. It is the first point of call for information, emotional support, planning and referrals to help carers in their caring role. The advisory line is free from fixed telephone lines, however calls made from a mobile are charged at the normal mobile rate.

Counselling

The National Carer Counselling Program (NCCP) is a short term counselling program providing up to six sessions of counselling to carers. The program is generally free and assistance may be provided via telephone, face-to-face, via group counselling and sometimes via email or Skype.

Counselling can assist carers with:

- > Coping skills.
- > Grief and loss issues.
- > Transition issues.
- > Practical problem-solving techniques.
- > Emotional support.
- > Health and wellbeing.

Carer support groups

These groups encourage carers to come together on a regular basis to discuss their caring situation, socialise, share information and offer each other support. Groups vary in size and the frequency of when they meet. Some groups are based on the condition of the person being cared for, others are open for all carers to join.

Respite

The term 'respite' is used to refer to a range of supports which can assist carers in their role. Respite can be both short or long term, and includes direct replacement care in a residential facility or in the home; community based respite where the person being cared for joins a day program at an adult day centre, neighbourhood house or a community health centre; recreation based where the carer and the family member can join organised recreation, social or leisure activities either together or separately; or alternative family care where a trained volunteer carer or another family provide care.

Emergency respite can also be arranged in the instance of a sudden illness, accident or other emergency. The term 'indirect-respite' is also used to refer to supports such as assistance with household tasks which provide a break for the carer. For young carers, 'respite' support can involve tutoring assistance or attendance at recreational activities and camps.

Respite is available for all carers, whether they care for someone with a disability, mental illness or someone who is frail aged. Carers Associations can assist carers to identify and arrange the most appropriate respite option which is available in their area. Call **1800 242 636** for more information on respite.

Education and training

A range of courses are available to carers to assist them in their caring role. Some courses aim to provide carers with the skills required for the caring role itself, others provide information on specific conditions (such as dementia), and some are focused on maintaining the health and wellbeing of the carer. There are also courses focused on planning for the future, and to assist carers to get back into the workforce. Carers should check the websites or contact their local Carers Association to find out which courses are available in their area. A few examples of courses run by the Carers Associations include;

Caring skills	Carer wellbeing	Planning ahead	Courses
> Dementia: Managing Behaviours	> Taking Care of Yourself	> Caring till the end: unmasking palliative care	> Certificate III in Aged Care
> Self-Advocacy for Carers	> Mental Health First Aid	> Legal Issues for Family Carers (Wills and Estates, Power of Attorney, Advanced Directives)	> Certificate III in Community Services Work
> Supporting Carers of Ageing parents	> Transitions: managing	> Planning for the future; carers with adult children with a disability	> First Aid
> Navigating the mental health system and Suicide Awareness	> Change after the caring role		> CPR Training
> Working with Health and Service Providers	> Mindfulness		> Introductory computer and internet
> Respite without tears	> Coping with Bereavement		
> Prepare to Care Hospital Program (providing ongoing care to patients both during admission and post discharge)	> Safety Essentials		
	> Surviving Carer Stress		
	> Understanding Change, Loss and Grief		



Advocacy

Carers often feel that organising services for the person they care for, whether it is in the health or disability systems, aged care, or the mental health sector – can be a maze that must be battled every time they require a new service or support. Some of the Carers Associations offer an Advocacy Service that can assist carers to navigate these sectors and help with negotiating with bureaucracy, link them with financial or legal service support and access services such as the Human Rights Commission and Ombudsman. The Advocacy Service can also help to build carers' self-advocacy skills, enabling them to be more informed and prepared to negotiate with service providers.

Young Carers Program

This program is for carers under 25 years, and is available at local Carers Associations. The program is funded by the Federal Department of Social Services, provides support and assistance to young people with caring responsibilities, and includes organising short-term respite or in-home support; assistance with education costs and extracurricular activity fees; supplying information, advice and referral services; giving practical support to help maintain school attendance and grades; and referral to counselling, support groups and activities.

Better Start

The Better Start for Children with Disability initiative provides early intervention funding for children registered before the age of 6 years old who have a confirmed diagnosis of certain conditions such as Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, Microcephaly and others. The Federal Department of Social Services funds Carers Australia to run the Better Start Registration and Information Service component of the initiative which assists families by providing information about Better Start, registering eligible children and providing information about services and other forms of assistance they may be entitled to. Visit the Better Start website for more information on eligibility www.betterstart.net.au.

NB: Please note that Better Start is being progressively transitioned into the National Disability Insurance Scheme, visit www.ndis.gov.au for more information.

OTHER SUPPORTS FOR CARERS

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

The NDIS provides individualised support for eligible people with permanent and significant disability, their families and carers. The Scheme provides information and referrals, links to services and activities, individualised plans and where necessary, supports over a lifetime. While carers are not participants of the NDIS in their own right, they may be involved in the assessment and planning process of the person they care for. Depending on the age and condition of the NDIS participant, carers may choose to self-manage the package of supports which are funded through the Scheme, and may also be able to access respite support. While the NDIS is a national scheme, it is being progressively rolled out across the country. To find out more information about eligibility and when it will be available in your area visit www.ndis.gov.au or call 1800 800 110.

Aged Care Assessment Teams (ACAT)

If you need some help at home with caring for someone who is frail aged, or are considering moving them into an aged care facility, you may first need a free assessment with a member of an Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT). An ACAT will talk to you about your current situation and work out if you are eligible to receive government-subsidised aged care services. These supports can include nursing care, allied health services, domestic assistance, personal care, centre-based day care, and support for carers including respite services. To find out more call 1800 200 422 or visit www.myagedcare.gov.au.

Telecare and Telehealth

There are a wide range of telecare, telehealth and 'smart home' technologies which are designed to assist people with a variety of care needs to live safely and independently in their own home. Companies offer monitoring systems which can assist in managing the risk associated with an individual's health and home environment and triggers a call to a response centre or a designated care worker if assistance is required.

Telecare products include

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|---|
| > Emergency pendants | > Water flood detector | > Medication reminders |
| > Movement sensors | > Gas detector | > Reminder calls |
| > Door, bed and chair occupancy sensors | > Smoke detector | > Hearing impaired and deaf alerts for doorbells, telephones, smoke alarms, a crying baby and other sensors |
| > Enuresis sensor (detects moisture in the bed) | > Extreme temperature sensor | |
| > Custom made sensors and switches for those with limited movement (eg. so that a person can blow or suck on a tube, apply light pressure on a large pad or tap a wand to raise an alert) | > Property exit sensor | |
| | > Portable noisemakers | |

Alerts from these devices can be sent to a carer's pager, mobile or to a Response Centre. Installing systems such as these can help offer peace of mind for carers of people who have diabetes, dementia, epilepsy, chronic disease, physical disability, those who are at risk of falls and people requiring post-hospitalisation care.

Telehealth solutions involve the collection and secure transmission of vital signs and related health information to a third party via a Telehealth Monitor which prompts the user to measure vital signs and answer symptomatic health questions. These technologies are designed to support individuals who have heart conditions, unstable blood pressure, diabetes and those who require daily health supervision and monitoring or where access to a GP is difficult.

Over 60 per cent of carers surveyed in the UK said telecare/telehealth solutions had given them peace of mind as a carer, and 1 in 8 said these solutions had helped them stay in work or return to work alongside caring.⁷

Replacement care

Most carers at some point in time will need help with the caring role. The kind of support you put in place will obviously vary depending on your circumstances; the condition of the person you care for, the nature and intensity of the care they need, whether you want someone to come to your home, or if the family member or friend can be cared for elsewhere. Finding the right kind of replacement care can be a daunting task and you may want to seek assistance from your local Carers Association to help you make a decision.

This can be an emotional process and many carers feel uncomfortable about using some types of alternative care, especially for the first time. You may be worried about whether someone else will provide the same quality of care as you do, and the person you care for might also be anxious or reluctant – this is normal. Consider taking advantage of the free counselling services provided by the Carers Associations. Remember, alternative care/respite is only for a short period of time and taking regular breaks will help you to keep providing the best care you can.

There are a range of options you may want to consider:

- > Employing someone directly.
- > Using a care agency.
- > Asking family and friends.
- > Using volunteer services (such as volunteer family respite).

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Below is an outline of the main payments available through the Department of Human Services for people with caring responsibilities. Some payments are means tested and designed as income support for those who are unable to work due to their caring responsibilities. Others are supplementary payments to help cover the additional costs of caring and may or may not be subject to means testing.

Please note that payment rates and eligibility criteria often change. We recommend you visit www.humanservices.gov.au to find the latest up-to-date information on payments, or call the Centrelink Carers line Monday to Friday 8am–5pm on 132 717.

Carer Payment

Is a fortnightly means tested income support payment for people who personally provide constant care in the home of someone with a severe disability, illness, or someone who is frail aged.

The care receiver must meet a qualifying score on either the Adult Disability Assessment Determination 1999 (ADAT) or the Disability Care Load Assessment (Child) Determination 2010 (DCLA) for those under 16 years. The ADAT and DCLA Determinations include a questionnaire completed by both the carer and a Treating Health Professional including that the person is likely to suffer from the condition or disability permanently or for an extended period of 6 months.

At the time of writing (March 2015) the single rate of Carer Payment is \$776.70 a fortnight, or \$585.50 for those in a couple.

Carer Allowance

Is a supplementary fortnightly payment for parents or carers providing additional daily care to an adult or dependent child with a disability or medical condition, or to someone who is frail aged. Carer Allowance is free of the income and assets test, is not taxable and can be paid in addition to wages, Carer Payment or any other Centrelink payment. A carer who cares for a child under 16 years who receives Carer Payment generally receives Carer Allowance automatically. A carer may be eligible for Carer Allowance for more than one person in their care.

Eligibility for Carer Allowance is also dependent upon a qualifying score as determined by the DCLA and ADAT (see Carer Payment).

At the time of writing, (March 2015) the rate of Carer Allowance is \$121.70 per fortnight.

Carer Supplement

Is an annual lump sum payment to assist carers with the costs of caring for a person with a disability or medical condition. To be eligible for Carer Supplement you must be in receipt of one of the following payments on 1 July each year: Carer Allowance, Carer Payment, Wife Pension with Carer Allowance, Department of Veterans' Affairs Partner Service Pension with Carer Allowance or Department of Veterans' Affairs Carer Service Pension.

At the time of writing, (March 2015) the rate of Carer Supplement was up to \$600 for each eligible person in the recipient's care. Some carers will receive two or more Carer Supplements, and those receiving a part-rate of Carer Allowance under shared-care arrangements receive a proportion of the Carer Supplement.

Carer Adjustment Payment

Is a one off payment to help families deal with the increased costs of caring for a child under 7 years of age who has had a sudden and severe illness or accident. To be eligible, the child must require full-time care for at least 2 months and the child's carer must be receiving Carer Allowance for that child but not be eligible for an income support payment and have a strong need for financial support.

At the time of writing, (March 2015) the maximum amount of Carer Adjustment Payment any family can receive is \$10,000 for each child in a single catastrophic event. The amount you receive is dependent on your family's circumstances and is non-taxable.

National Welfare Rights Network

Is a network of community legal centres throughout Australia which specialise in Social Security law and is administrated by the Department of Human Services (DHS) or Centrelink. Member Centres are located throughout Australia and provide free information, legal advice, community education and casework assistance to vulnerable clients about social security and family assistance problems. Welfare Rights Centres can assist with appeals against Centrelink decisions such as those concerning income support payments and debt. To contact your nearest centre visit www.welfarerights.org.au.



THINKING ABOUT LEAVING?

If you are thinking of leaving work, don't make any quick decisions and take the time to consider whether or not you really want to.

Consider your options

Consider what things would help you stay in work. Is it a short break for a while, or a reduction in hours to part-time? Would your employer offer unpaid leave or a career break? Maybe there are other positions at your organisation that would be more amenable to flexible hours?

KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- > Would greater support in your caring role allow you to stay in the workforce?
- > Could you afford to pay for private care instead?
- > Have you considered tele-care/telehealth options?
- > Could you consider a reduction in work hours?
- > Will you be able to manage on a limited income if you are no longer employed?
- > Will a period out of the workforce affect your future employability?

Talk to your employer

Employers value skilled, experienced and committed members of staff and are keen to keep them. You may be surprised by what your employer offers if they know you are considering leaving. Before resigning, take the time to talk through your concerns with management, there may be options you haven't considered before.

What will you lose?

Think about what you might have to give up by leaving work. Can you manage financially? What alternative sources of income are available? Would you be eligible for any income support through Centrelink? Is your job an important source of social interaction outside of your caring role?

*"I was thinking of quitting my job as it was getting so hard to juggle work with all the medical appointments, but then someone told me about Carers ACT. I got in touch and they helped me talk things over with my employer. We have sorted out a purchased leave option so I can take extra days off when I need them, and my manager was so happy, saying it would have been a real loss if I had left."*²

It's OK to say no

It's OK if you decide that combining work and care is simply too much. Your caring situation may have become too intense to balance both roles, or perhaps the person you are caring for is dying or has moved into residential care. Or maybe you just need a break. This is completely reasonable and you have to take care of yourself in order to care for someone else.

Keeping in touch

If you decide to leave work you might want to consider ways in which you can stay connected with your organisation or with other colleagues. This can be useful both to keep the social connections you have made at work, and to maintain professional links. Depending on the time you are out of the workforce, maintaining these connections can be an important way to get back into employment once your caring role ceases or is reduced. Consider meeting up with colleagues on a semi-regular basis so that you are up to date with any major changes in your industry, and to be aware of future job opportunities.

Returning to work

When your circumstances change, you may decide that you want to return to work. For those who have been out of the workforce for an extended period of time, this can be a daunting task. It's important to remember that while you may not have been undertaking a paid job, caring is still a complicated role which requires numerous skills. It might be helpful to start thinking about all the tasks you have been undertaking as a carer.

Many carers describe their caring roles as

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| > Hygienist | > Medical information interpreter |
| > Accountant | > Medicine administrator (including testing blood levels, preparing doses, filling syringes) |
| > Driver | > Technical care manager |
| > Secretary | > Advocate |
| > Cook | > First aider |
| > Cleaner | > Life style coach |

Think about the skills you have developed undertaking these tasks which might be transferable to other roles. For example, managing a budget, time management, planning and problem-solving, prioritising, flexibility and adaptability.

INFORMATION FOR YOUR EMPLOYER

The following section contains information from the *Work & Care Guide for Employers*. You may wish to provide it to your manager when you discuss your caring role with them or make a request for flexible work.

The benefits of supporting carers

Reduced costs of employee turnover

The financial impact of staff turnover can be considerable – around a third of the annual salary of an employee. This is due to the costs of recruitment, training and the loss of productivity in the lead up to an employee leaving, and before a new staff member is up to speed. By providing flexibility which allows staff to balance work and care, your organisation is more likely to hold onto experienced employees.

“We are in no doubt that our staff retention levels are driven by our attitude to work life balance rather than the generosity of our remuneration packages.”

Managing Director, Listawood⁸

Increased productivity

Implementing flexible work practices can help an organisation to focus more clearly on outputs and outcomes, rather than concentrating on the hours that employees are at their desks. It helps to clarify tasks and encourages multi-skilling across teams. Furthermore, less stressed employees are more likely to be productive employees.

“Embracing flexibility enables people to work smarter and is critical to maximising productivity and building a high performance work culture.”

Managing Director, Stockland.⁹

Improved service delivery

Fundamentally, if you look after your staff, they will look after your customers. Providing flexible provisions for employees such as extended start and finish times can also enhance the customer experience by providing services outside of standard business hours. This can be a competitive advantage for your organisation.

“Only a few people here still work a conventional five day week. The customers love it as we are open much longer and it hasn't affected the fees and charges.”¹⁰

Reducing employee stress and absenteeism

Employees who feel reluctant to request changes to their working practices or who are unable to utilise leave for caring responsibilities will often resort to taking personal leave to deal with caring emergencies. By providing workers with real options to help them balance work and care, and encouraging employees to take up these provisions, your organisation can reduce the stress of carers and reduce staff absenteeism.

CASE STUDY

BT Group is a British multinational telecommunications services company. Of its 102,000 employees, 75,000 work flexibly. The company found that the average increase in productivity for these workers was 21 per cent, worth at least £5–6 million. Annual staff turnover was also below 4 per cent (where the sector average is 17 per cent) and sickness absence among home workers averages below 3 days per annum. BT also found that stress-related absence reduced by 26 per cent through flexible working alone.¹¹

Attracting quality workers

Implementing flexible working arrangements has been found not only to benefit existing employees, but also acts as an incentive for job-seekers to choose that employer. By virtue of the nature and demands of their caring role, carers are also often highly organised and committed employees who value supportive employers and are dedicated and loyal in return.

“We attract a higher calibre of employee than is often possible at a larger firm because of the flexibility we offer.”
Management Consulting Firm⁵

Increased staff morale

Staff who feel they are understood and supported by their employer are more likely to be loyal and productive workers. Investing in services and supports for staff that foster a positive environment will improve the workplace experience of all employees, and this culture can flow through the entire organisation.

“I personally go that extra mile for them, because I appreciate what they’re doing for me.”
Employee of utility company, caring for elderly parents¹²

Building a resilient workforce

Regardless of whether your workplace currently has employees who identify as carers, it makes sense to implement carer-friendly policies. Providing staff with information about caring will help to build their resilience to potential change, and may improve their capacity to keep working if they need to take on a caring role.

“(In a caring emergency) you are not dealing with an absence, you are potentially dealing with a vacancy if you don’t respond appropriately. The cost of recruiting is incomparable to the cost of 2–3 days’ emergency leave.”
Policy Development Manager, HR utility company¹²

CARER FRIENDLY WORKPLACE PROVISIONS

1. Formal recognition

A first step to formal recognition of carers within the workplace is to include carers in existing equal opportunity and diversity policies. This will illustrate that your organisation acknowledges carers and their needs.

Larger organisations may also want to consider developing a specific Carers Policy which outlines the support options available for carers within the workplace, as well as options available to employees with caring responsibilities for flexible working conditions and leave arrangements.

An organisational definition of 'carer' will also be an important inclusion in any policy to ensure that all employees and the management team are aware of who is entitled to certain provisions. The Employers for Carers group in the United Kingdom have developed the following definition which is used by many of the group's member organisations.

"Carers are employees with significant caring responsibilities that have a substantial impact on their working lives. These employees are responsible for the care and support of people with a disability, elderly or sick partners, relatives or friends who are unable to care for themselves."⁵

Organisations who already have policies around flexible working conditions and leave options for all employees may consider including the term carer so that these policies explicitly state that they are available to employees with caring responsibilities.

It is important that any workplace specific policies and procedures affecting working carers are developed or revised in consultation with employees to ensure that their needs and preferences for working arrangements and conditions are taken into account. Larger organisations developing a Carers Policy may want to consider establishing a carer reference group to provide input.

CASE STUDY

Westpac has a comprehensive carer's leave policy which allows employees to care for someone in their family when they are sick or injured, recovering from surgery or involved in an emergency. They also offer a wide range of flexible work options, recognising that employees with caring responsibilities may need different types of flexibility, depending on their circumstances. For employees who care for an older dependent, Westpac offer an Eldercare Kit to help their employees understand what is available in the community, provide information on specific government and community support services and checklists to assist in making key decisions.¹¹

2. Flexible leave arrangements

Policy/arrangement	Example of care situations
<p>Carers' emergency leave</p> <p>For unforeseeable emergency incidents when leave is needed for a short period of time to care for a family member. If more time is needed, then absence usually becomes planned leave.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > To make longer term arrangements for a dependant's care. > To cover when existing arrangements break down. > To deal with an unexpected incident involving a dependent child at school.
<p>Carers' planned leave</p> <p>Leave needed for a foreseeable event lasting for a defined period. If more time is needed, absence usually becomes a career break, or a review of working pattern/hours can be undertaken.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Providing nursing care following hospital discharge. > Assisting a dependant to move accommodation. > Attending benefit/legal hearings with a dependant. > Attending hospital appointments with a dependant.
<p>Career break or sabbatical</p>	<p>Used when a carer has to take a longer period out of the workplace, but wishes to return to their former job. Not necessarily exclusive for carers. Minimum period usually 3 months – 2 years.</p>
<p>Unpaid leave</p>	<p>Usually used when all other paid leave options are exhausted. Not necessarily exclusively for carers.</p>
<p>Purchased leave</p>	<p>To build up a bank of leave to be used for caring.</p>
<p>Matched leave</p>	<p>An additional period of leave offered by an employer to 'match' annual leave an employee has to take to provide care – often used to cover a period following hospital discharge.</p>
<p>Compassionate leave</p>	<p>Used mostly following bereavement.</p>
<p>Cost of replacement care covered by employer</p>	<p>To enable a carer to attend training, or perform work duties requested by the organisation – at a time when they would normally have caring responsibilities.</p>

CASE STUDY

Lisa Jackson is the single mother of a 15 year old son and is also the primary carer for her mother who has dementia. The flexible work options she takes advantage of are working from home or her local Business Banking Centre on the days she has to be near home. "Westpac Group has been extremely supportive of my circumstances and the multitude of roles I have to fulfil in my life," Lisa says. "My manager allows me to shift my core hours so I can start work at 6am and leave early in the afternoon if I need to get my mum to a medical appointment. It's great to know that having the support when I need it won't negatively impact on my career or work opportunities."¹¹

3. Flexible working arrangements

Policy/arrangement	Description
Flexi-time	Flexible starting and finishing times – adjusting the working day to begin and end earlier or later.
Home-working or Tele-working	Working in a home or other environment, as opposed to the normal workplace, often through the use of technology.
Annualised working hours	Completed contracted hours, but making adjustments to allow for shorter or longer days or weeks across the period of a year.
Job rotation	Moving from one job to another for a specific period to reduce work commitments during a period of care.
Term-time working	Working contracted hours but within school term times.
Self rostering	Team voluntarily agree shift patterns for managers to approve.
Job sharing	Two or more people fulfilling the requirements of a single post. Option of having a job share register within a company.
Split shifts	For example, arranged with a period of time in the middle of the day or afternoon.
Compressed working hours	Completing contracted hours in a shorter period than normal. For example, a 9 day fortnight.
Flexible Combination	Ability to pick and choose, e.g. increasing/decreasing annual or unpaid leave for a particular working pattern.
'Day extender'	Working predominantly in the office but also carrying out additional work at home in the evening.
Phased retirement	Reducing hours progressively over a certain period rather than ceasing work completely. Often involves a cross-over period where the retiring employee helps to train their replacement.

4. Planning leave

Asking all workers to notify management of their plans for leave well in advance (wherever possible) can assist you to balance the workload and personal needs of your team. Some caring responsibilities that require time off work can be planned ahead (such as specialist appointments) and you can expect carers to notify you about these absences in advance. Consider a team approach where all employees are encouraged to discuss their needs for flexibility together – this way team members can explore ways to accommodate everyone's needs.

However, remember the nature of the caring role often means that issues may come up unexpectedly and carers may need time off without warning. By planning ahead and putting contingency strategies in place, such as identifying which team members can take over certain tasks or arranging for an employee to work from home, the impact of these incidents can be minimised.

EXAMPLE

Michael is a senior manager at a law firm. Last year his elderly mother had a fall at home and lost much of her mobility, confidence and independence. She increasingly needed assistance from Michael to undertake everyday tasks such as cooking and cleaning, but wasn't ready to move into residential care. Michael had been reluctant to discuss his new caring role with his employer for fear of being over-looked for promotion.

After finally telling his employer about his situation, Michael was given a Carer Resource pack which included referral information to a Carers Association which helped him to negotiate paid support for his mum through an aged care provider. Michael's manager also offered to let him work a compressed working week (weekly full-time hours in 4 working days) so that he could stay with his mum on the days that the support worker doesn't come in.

5. Recruitment of new staff

Advertise that you are a carer-friendly workplace and highlight the flexible working options available to employees. This will encourage carers to apply. Ensure any recruitment agencies hired to screen and interview applicants are also aware of your organisation's commitment to support employees who balance work and care and that this information is passed on to applicants.

Consider alternative avenues to advertise jobs that may be more likely to capture prospective employees with caring responsibilities such as community centres, hospitals or your state/territory Carers Association.

Ideally, internal staff conducting interviews should be fully across any carer policies and be aware of the key issues affecting employees with an unpaid caring role. Your Human Resources personnel may also want to consider altering interview questions or key selection criteria to focus on skill acquisition in different contexts rather than focusing only on previous paid employment. While many carers may have been out of the paid workforce for some time, they often gain a range of useful skills through their caring role that can be applied in other sectors and industries. For example; organisation skills, multi-tasking, flexibility, managing a budget and problem solving.

Induction packs for new employees should also mention any Carer Policy that your organisation has as well as options for flexible working and leave arrangements.

6. Carer workplace supports

The type and range of supports you offer carers in the workplace will necessarily vary depending on the size of your organisation.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

Larger employers may implement EAPs for working carers or, for those organisations which already have EAPs in place, they may want to look at integrating additional carer-specific provisions. Supports may include access to free counselling services for individuals and families and wellness programs for employees that aim to reduce stress and anxiety.

Carer Networks

Establishing a Carer Network for employees will provide working carers with the opportunity to connect with other employees in a similar situation. These networks facilitate information sharing about the caring role, allow carers to gain new knowledge about available services and also provide the opportunity for carers to form support groups.

7. Workplace facilities

Simple changes can go a long way. Allowing employees to access their personal phone or to be contactable at work can help to alleviate a carer's stress and concern about the person they care for during work hours. Access to a private room for conversations can also be useful to allow carers to discuss private matters relating to the care and support of their family member or friend.

Other useful facilities for working carers (which won't necessarily be available in all workplaces) include easy access to transport services or parking to allow carers to easily come and go during the day if they need to attend to the person receiving care.

"I have access to a telephone, so if I leave Mum in the morning and she is depressed or unwell, I can call her through the day. I can go somewhere private and have a chat with her without having to worry about what's going to happen 'til I get home."

8. Information and advocacy

Many carers, including those who juggle work and care, will need professional support and guidance at some time. Providing employees with information on how to access external supports can be an important step in ensuring the sustainability of both their caring and work roles. Carers Australia and the network of Carers Associations in every state and territory can provide carers with information, advice and support. The contact details of each of the Associations are at the end of this publication.

By providing the *Work & Care Resource for Employees* to all new staff, your organisation can reach out to potential carers in the workforce instead of relying on working carers to identify themselves to management.

9. Multi-skilling the workforce

The more opportunities employees are given to undertake a variety of roles and tasks, the easier it will be to fill roles and complete projects when staff members are unexpectedly absent. Good communication and team work are essential to this. As part of long-term planning, developing a multi-skilled team brings several advantages. It encourages good team work and helps to ensure that the organisation can maintain services and meet business targets should a member of the team be absent. Multi-skilling also benefits all staff by adding to their skills and expertise and should therefore enhance their career development.

10. Return to work arrangements and programs

While every effort may be made by an employer to offer leave and flexible working arrangements, sometimes the nature and intensity of the caring role may simply be too much for the carer to continue balancing work and care. In these circumstances, the carer may have no choice but to leave their employment for a certain period of time.

The employee may be very keen to return to the organisation after their caring role ceases or is reduced, and as an employer you may need to assist their transition back into the workplace. Depending how long they have been away from the organisation, they may have lost confidence to undertake certain tasks, or simply be unaware of any changes that have occurred within the organisation or the way it operates. Return to work programs can help to ease employees back into the workplace, through mentoring programs or a 're-induction' process which can bring employees back up to speed.

CASE STUDY

A global finance company in the US introduced a ten-week preparatory program providing returning individuals with an opportunity to sharpen their skills in a significantly changed work environment. The program is tailored to address individuals' concerns including their ability to transition into a new area of expertise.¹⁴

KEY CONTACTS FOR CARERS

Carers Australia

Unit 1, 16 Napier Close, Deakin, ACT 2600
Phone: (02) 6122 9900
Email: work&care@carersaustralia.com.au

The Carers Associations

Carers ACT

Head Office

2/80 Beaurepaire Crescent, Holt, ACT 2615
Phone: (02) 6296 9900

Carer Advisory Service

Call **1800 242 636** for information, support, planning and referral advice to help you in your caring role.
Operating Monday to Friday 9am–5pm.

The Carer Advisory Service and a range of other support services are available through the state and territory Carers Associations.

Carers NSW

Head Office

Roden Cutler House, Level 18, 24 Campbell Street, Sydney, NSW 2000
Phone: (02) 9280 4744

Carers NSW also have offices in Coffs Harbour, Dubbo, Newcastle, and Tweed Heads.

Carers NT

Head Office

59 Bayview Blvd, Bayview, NT 0820
Phone: **1800 242 636**

Carers NT also has offices in Katherine and Alice Springs.

Carers Queensland

Head Office

15 Abbott Street, Camp Hill 4152
Phone: (07) 3900 8100

Carers Queensland also have offices in Brisbane North, Brisbane South, Cairns, Gold Coast, Hervey Bay, Ipswich, Mackay, Rockhampton, Roma, Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba, and Townsville.

Carers South Australia

Statewide Office

66 Greenhill Road, Wayville, SA 5034
Phone: (08) 8291 5600

Local carer support is available from Carers SA in the Western, River Murray and Mallee, Eyre, South East and Northern Country regions.

Carers Tasmania

Head Office

64 Burnett Street, North Hobart, TAS 7000
Phone: (03) 6231 5507

Carers Tasmania also have offices in Launceston and Burnie.

Carers Victoria

Level 1, 37 Albert Street, Footscray, VIC 3011
Phone: (03) 9396 9500

Carers WA

Head Office

182 Lord Street, Perth, WA 6000
Phone: 1300 227 377

Other contacts for carers

Centrelink

Carers line and People with disability: Monday to Friday 8am–5pm, 132 717.

Lifeline

Phone: 13 11 14

Lifeline provides 24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention services.

There are also a number of condition-specific health consumer associations which may be able to direct you to supports including Alzheimer's Australia (www.fightdementia.org.au) and Palliative Care Australia (www.palliativecare.org.au)

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**TO FIND OUT MORE VISIT THE
CARERS AUSTRALIA WEBSITE**

www.carersaustralia.com.au