



**The Experience of
Balancing Employment and Caring**

October 2022

About Carers Tasmania

Carers Tasmania is the Peak Body representing the more than 80,000 informal carers (hereafter carers) in the state.

Carers Tasmania's vision is for an Australia that values and supports carers.

Our mission is to work to improve the health, wellbeing, resilience and financial security of carers and to ensure that caring is a shared responsibility of family, community, and government.

Our values drive everything we think, say, and do.

- **Carers first** – we listen to what carers need, commit to their desired action plan, and deliver results that matter most to carers
- **Care in all we do** – we care for our work, about each other, about Tasmania's family and friend carers, and the bigger world we all share
- **Integrity always** – we are transparent, act ethically, own when things don't go to plan and do what we say we will
- **Quality every time** – we don't accept 'good enough' because carers deserve our very best every time
- **Speed that matters** – we are agile and don't put off what can be done today

These values represent how we engage with and serve carers, how we work with each other, and our commitment to the broader community. Carers Tasmania encourages partnership with government and the health and community sectors to enhance service provision and improve conditions for family or friend carers through policy development, research and advocacy.

Carers Tasmania has offices in Moonah, Launceston and Burnie.

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Background

Carers Tasmania acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional owners of the land of lutruwita/Tasmania and we pay our respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge and support people of all genders, sexualities, cultural beliefs, and abilities and understand that carers in Tasmania, whilst sharing the common theme of caring for a family member or friend, are diverse individuals with varying beliefs, experiences, and identities.

Carers Tasmania is the Peak Body representing the more than 80,000 informal carers within the state.

A carer is a person who provides unpaid care and support to a family member, or friend, with disability, mental ill health, a chronic or life-limiting condition, alcohol or other drug dependence or who are frail or aged. Carers are predominantly family members, but may also be friends, neighbours, or colleagues. Informal carers are not to be confused with paid support workers who are often called 'carers', with the difference being that support workers are fully employed and remunerated with all the benefits of employment. On the contrary, informal carers perform their caring duties without remuneration, other than minimal carer payments and allowances from the Australian Government. The term 'informal carers' does not automatically include kinship or foster carers, unless they care for a child with disability, mental ill health or other condition as previously noted.

In addition to representing carers through the Peak Body activities, Carers Tasmania provides support to carers living in Tasmania through its service delivery arm, Care2Serve. The Commonwealth Carer Gateway program is delivered through Care2Serve, as are other supports and services, such as the Tasmanian Government's Home and Community Care program.

The Carer Gateway program provides a range of services and supports for carers which are designed to build resilience, increase wellbeing, improve quality of life, and sustain carers to effectively continue their caring roles. The available supports include the provision of information, advice and referrals, holistic identification of carer strengths and needs through a carer support planning process, professional counselling, peer support, and coaching which aims to support carers in achieving specific goals.

Care2Serve, through the Carer Gateway, has capacity to fund certain instances of planned, practical support services such as in-home respite, personal care, domestic assistance, and meal preparation. Care2Serve may also fund items such as laptops to assist carers who are studying or trying to enter the workforce. Care2Serve also coordinates the provision of emergency support during instances where a carer may be unable to provide the care that they usually do, resulting from unexpected illness or injury of the carer.

Introduction

The year 2022 has presented several national inquiries relevant to the challenges of balancing work and unpaid care. The most prevalent inquiries include the *Select Committee Inquiry into Work and Care*,¹ the *Productivity Commission Inquiry on Carer Leave*² and the *Jobs + Skills Summit*³ followed by the associated *Employment White Paper*.⁴

We wanted to understand, as best as possible, the experience of carers in Tasmania who are trying to juggle securing or maintaining employment whilst caring. To inform our understanding we developed a survey, which was sent via email and post to all carers living in Tasmania aged 15 and older who were registered with our organisation. Those of retirement age were also surveyed, as we wanted to capture the insight of past experience. For the same reason, we also included responses from people who had formerly been in a caring role. We posted on social media and accepted feedback and case studies via phone.

For the purpose of this report, carers or former carers who participated in this are referred to as respondents.

Several key themes emerged from the results as presenting challenges. These challenges are consistent with difficulties and suggested recommendations that we advocate for improvements in on both state and national levels. The survey also provided an opportunity to explore the positive experiences that carers/or former carers have encountered as these positives may be examples that could be considered as best practice.

A total of 287 responses to the survey were received. 184 of these were completed online via Survey Monkey and the remainder were hard-copy paper responses that were completed and returned in pre-paid envelopes. 283 total carers or former carers responded and the results of the four respondents who indicated they were not carers or had never been a carer were excluded. This left responses from 258 current carers, 22 people who had formerly been a carer and 4 people who skipped the 'are you a carer?' question.

Main findings

The majority of respondents indicated that they had remained in a caring role for approximately 10 years. 59 respondents said they had been in a caring role between 11 and 21 years. 26 respondents reported being in a caring role for more than 21 years, with 49 years being the longest duration reported as being in a caring role.

Most respondents were aged 55 years or older ($n=208$). It is important to highlight that a small number of respondents ($n=6$) who identified as young carers (aged under 25 years) participated in this survey. Young carers are often a hidden cohort of carers, so it was important that they were represented in this survey albeit not in the numbers we had hoped to receive.

¹ https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Work_and_Care

² <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/carer-leave#draft>

³ <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/inline-files/Jobs-and-Skills-Summit-Outcomes-Document.pdf>

⁴ <https://treasury.gov.au/consultation/c2022-322158>

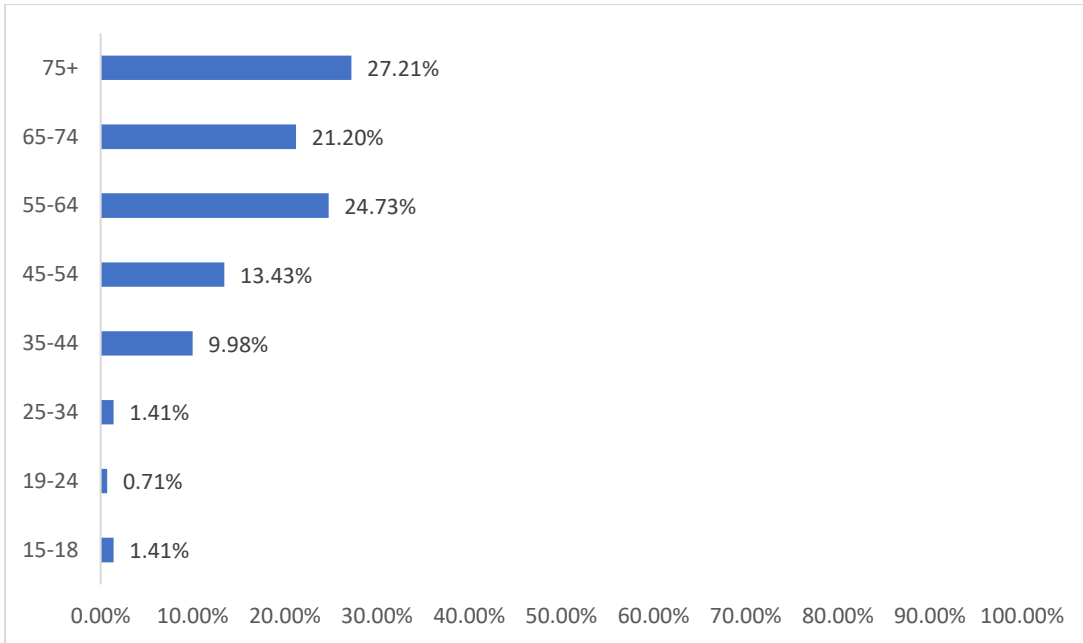


Figure 1: Age of carer/former carer by percentage

Most respondents of the survey indicated they identified as female (n=205).

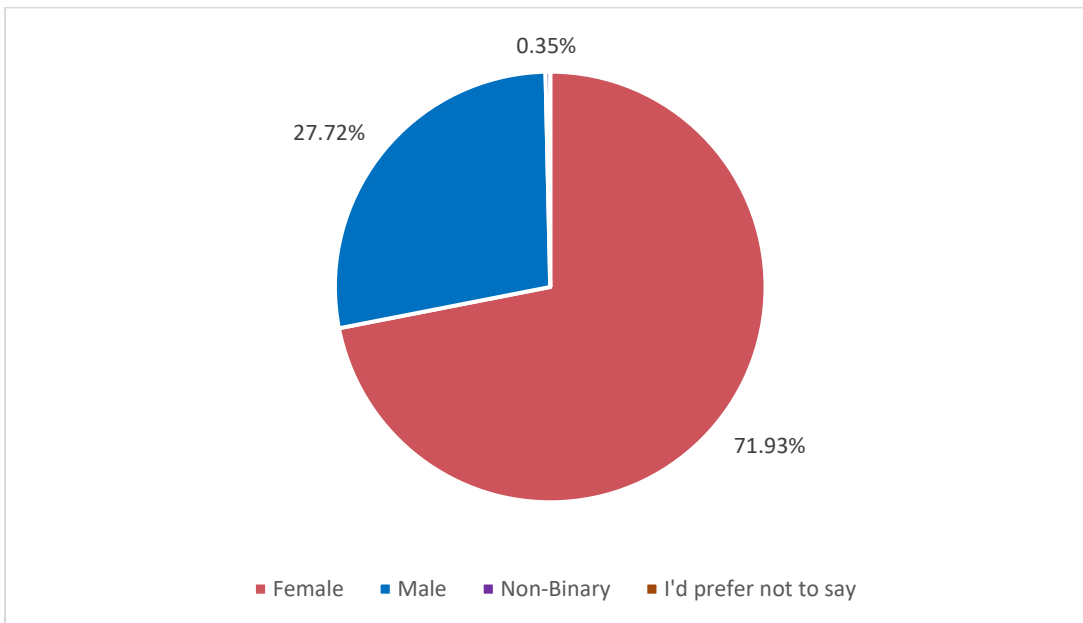


Figure 2: Gender of carer/former carer

It is incredibly important to recognise that all carers are individuals and come from varying life circumstances. Diversity must be celebrated and understood to ensure that the needs of all carers are met and supported. Sometimes people are indirectly or directly discriminated against because they do not meet the definition of what is expected to be 'normal'. This is sometimes further compounded by adding the role of carer to one's identity, often leading to more discrimination. Diversity of all types must be supported, but to be supported we first need to understand the specific challenges that these sometimes-marginalised groups face.

12 of the survey respondents reported that they identify as LGBTIQ+, 10 respondents indicated that they identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and 24 people reported that they identify as culturally or linguistically diverse. It is important to highlight the poor literacy rates across Tasmania, which are even more prevalent in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, or for people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. For this reason, it is assumed that there was an underrepresentation in the results from these particular groups of carers.

57.55 percent of respondents reported having a disability or health concern of their own (see *figure 3 below*) despite being a carer or former carer for someone else. This is consistent with data from the *2018 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC)*⁵ that describes that more than half of carers in Tasmania have a disability themselves despite providing care to others.

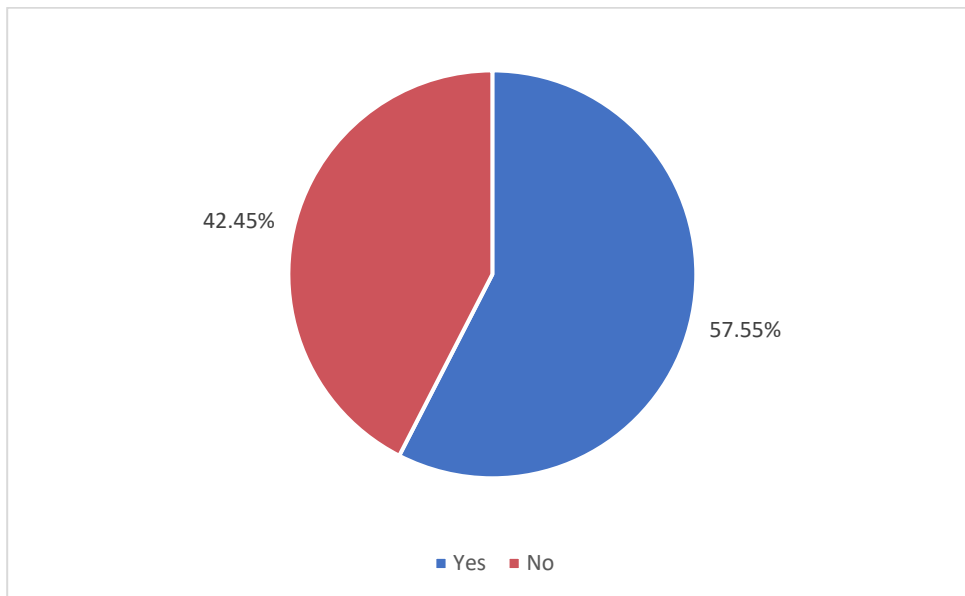


Figure 3: Own health concerns or disability

Some respondents were not comfortable sharing their health concerns or disability, but of those who did, they reported poor health outcomes and/or disability such as:

- Knee, back, and leg issues
- Arthritis, and/or Osteoarthritis
- Diabetes
- Blood pressure issues
- Migraines, vertigo
- Heart issues
- Stroke
- Stress, anxiety, depression, PTSD, and other mental health challenges
- Auto-immune disease
- Cancer
- Asthma
- ADHD

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) 44300DO006_2018 Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Tasmania, 2018. Released at 11:30am Wednesday 5 February 2020

- Crohn's Disease, reflux
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Autism
- Burn out
- Thyroid issues
- Kidney and or liver issues
- Epilepsy
- Vision or hearing issues

Carer wellbeing

The average wellbeing score reported by respondents was 5 out of 10. Data from the *2021 Carer Wellbeing Survey*⁶ found that carers are 2.5 times more likely to have low wellbeing compared to non-carers, with 55% of carers reporting poor wellbeing compared with only 20% of the broader population. We know that supporting a family member or friend can come at a significant cost to the wellbeing of individuals.

Employment status

For carers who are able to participate in paid employment, many choose to take up part-time or casual methods to assist them in balancing their caring responsibilities and work.

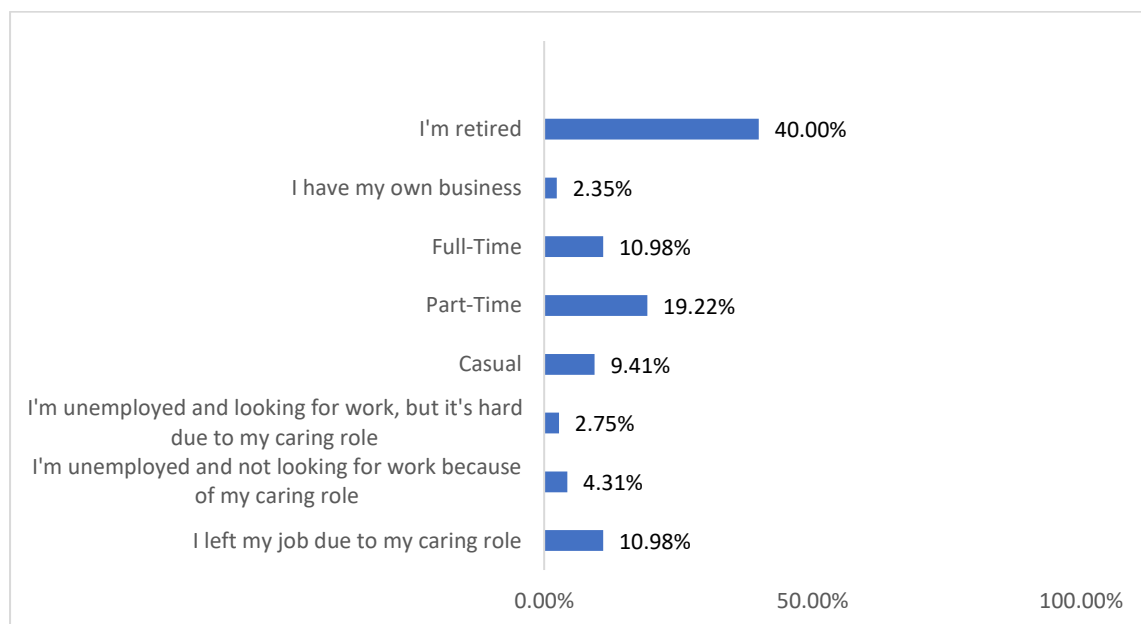


Figure 4: What is your employment status?

41.96% of respondents reported that they were currently employed. The *2018 SDAC*⁷ reported that only 46% of carers who live in Tasmania were in paid employment. For those carers who are employed, they are more likely to work part-time, casual, or in roles below their skill sets to enable them to have the flexibility they require to balance work and care.

⁶ https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/211011_Carer-Wellbeing-Survey-Executive-Summary_FINAL.pdf

⁷ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release>

Employment hours per week

The majority of working carers who responded to the survey indicated that they spent 36-40 hours per week in employment.

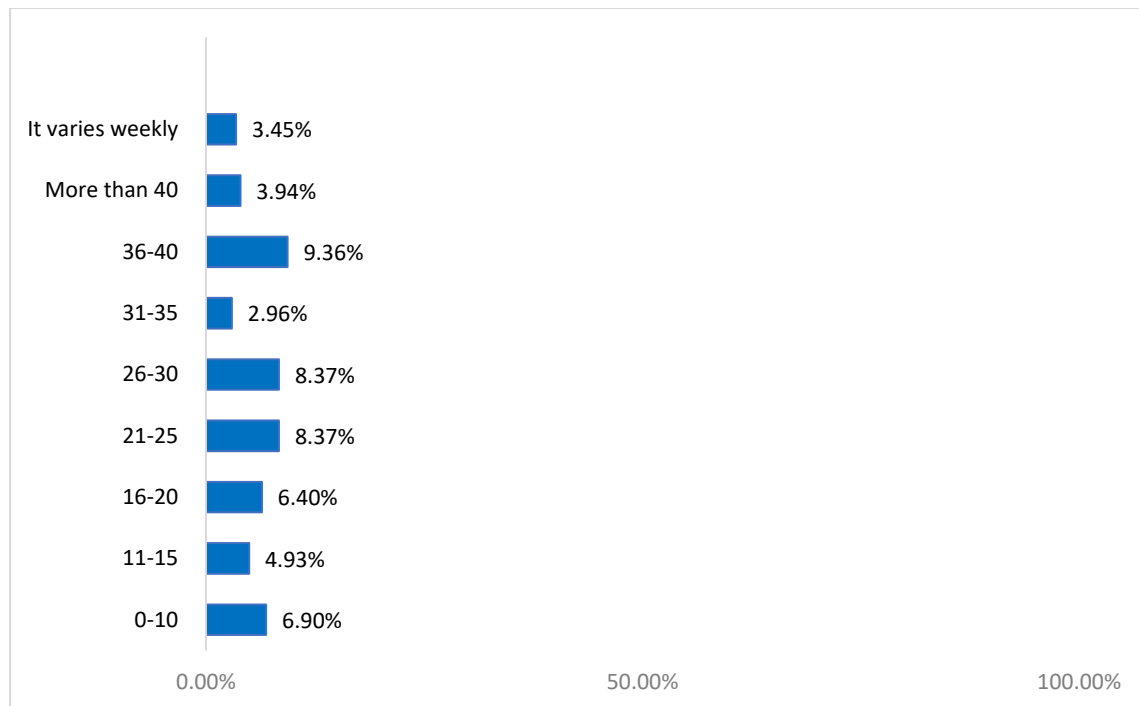


Figure 5: Time spent by carers who are employed in their work each week

Specific comments provided by carers include:

- “I work full-time to pay the bills and care for my high-needs child from the moment I get home including overnight, until the moment I leave for work”
- “I was employed full-time as a teacher while caring for my husband until his admission to a nursing home. I currently care for my daughter”
- “Currently working casual 1 - 2 days per week to top up pension against the rising cost of living”

Government financial support

Improving the economic security of carers is a major advocacy priority at local, state, and national levels. We know that increased cost of living pressures are having significant impacts on people, therefore we wanted to gain an understanding of carer knowledge and access to government carer payments. A significant number (42.7%) of respondents indicated that they received the Carer Allowance. The higher number of recipients for this payment instead of other payments is likely because most carers who are in paid employment would be eligible to receive this allowance as opposed to the means-tested Carer Payment which has a restriction on how many hours a carer can participate in paid employment per week. For the respondents who indicated that they receive both the Carer Payment and Allowance, it is highly likely that they are either not employed or working less than 25 hours a week as per the eligibility guidelines for the Carer Payment.

Interestingly, 4% of respondents reported receiving the Carer Payment only. It is reasonable to assume that all carers in receipt of the Carer Payment should be eligible to receive the Carer Allowance. The group of respondents who reported that they were not receiving Carer

Payment or Allowance quite possibly consist of working carers who don't qualify for either payment, former carers, carers who don't know about either payment, carers in receipt of another form of income support payment, or carers who are self-funded retirees. It is possible to be eligible for the Carer Allowance on top of payments such as the Aged Care Pension.

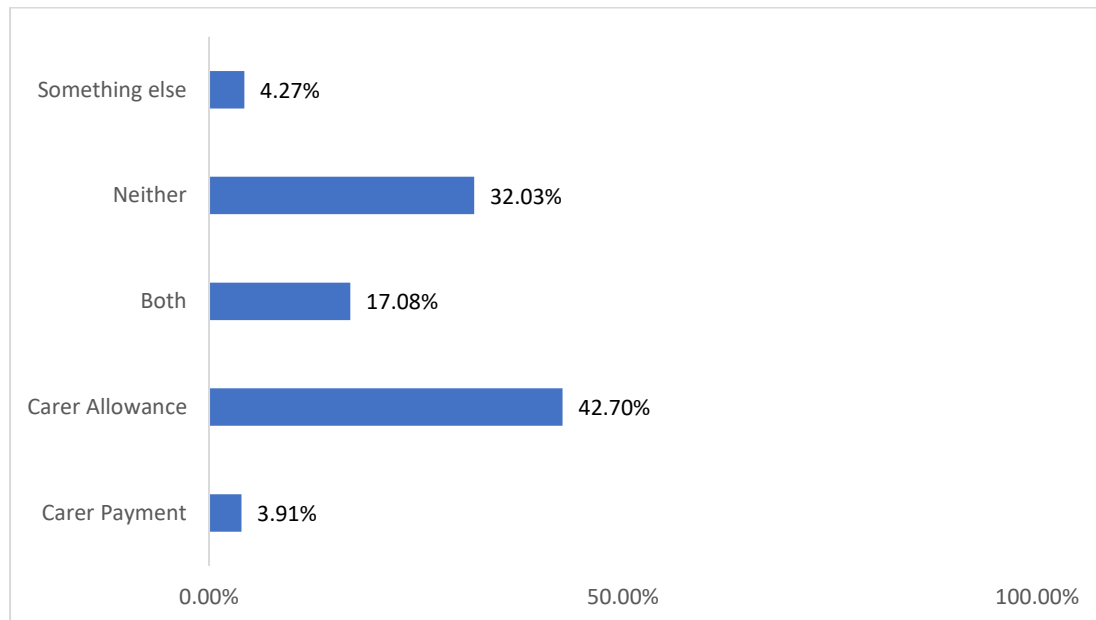


Figure 6: Government payments received

9,259 people were in receipt of the Carer Payment in Tasmania as of June 2022 and 16,875 people were in receipt of the Carer Allowance for the same period.⁸ This highlights a significant gap between the number of carers within the state (80,000+) and those who receive any form of carer support payment or allowance. On a national level, almost half (48.1%) of people in receipt of the Carer Payment receive it for more than five years and 21.5% receive it for more than ten years.⁹

The *Caring Costs Us* report¹⁰, commissioned by Carers Australia and the National Carer Network, found that in 2021 the Carer Payment was only equal to 28% of weekly ordinary earnings for singles in Australia and 21% of weekly ordinary earnings for couples in Australia, whereas when it was first introduced as the Wife's Allowance (noting this was an allowance at this stage, not a pension like the Carer Payment) in 1943, this parity was equivalent to 15% of the average weekly earnings and 28% of the maximum rate of the pension.¹¹ Furthermore, the report¹² found that the Carer Allowance is equal to only 10% of the basic Aged Care Pension for a couple.

41.86% of survey respondents indicated that they had not taken leave for caring purposes because of the financial loss that they would face as a result. This stems from the

⁸ <https://data.gov.au/data/dataset/dss-payment-demographic-data/resource/1188c950-542a-4ca6-9e3e-9f91f53d9314>

⁹ <https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Final-Economic-impact-income-and-retirement-Evaluate-Report-March-2022.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Final-Economic-impact-income-and-retirement-Evaluate-Report-March-2022.pdf>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

casualisation of employment that carers often access due to the flexibility it provides for caring responsibilities.

Employer entitlements and/or flexibilities to support balancing work and care

The 2022 *National Carer Survey*¹³ (not yet published) found that of Tasmanian respondents, 42.7% agree and 17.7% strongly agree that their manager supports them to combine work and care. We wanted to specifically explore what positive actions some employers are taking in terms of providing entitlements and additional flexibilities for working carers. Despite the National Employment Standards (NES) outlining what flexibilities working carers are eligible for, some employers are still not supportive of enabling carers to access these flexibilities. The following are comments from carers on what sort of entitlements and flexibilities they are or aren't receiving:

- *“Work has been great. However, now I am unable to work from home, therefore, if mum and dad or myself or my child become unwell then I cannot work at my place of work. Previously, I could make up the hours”*
- *“Work from home means I don't always have to access carers leave when my child requires additional care”*
- *“Currently working from home but needed to temporarily accept a lower-paid role to do this”*
- *“Some reduced hours (0.8 FTE) and flexitime”*
- *“None, I am in debt due to my incomings not matching my outgoings!”*
- *“Held my position for me”*
- *“None. Took a day off to take my 98 yr old dad to an appointment and then had negativity”*
- *“Reduced hours when needed, both short-term in response to crises and longer-term (months at a time) by negotiation”*
- *“3 days carers leave a year”*
- *“Currently on carers leave coming out of my sick leave bank”*
- *“Annual leave, purchased leave, personal leave, carer's leave, flexible start and finish times, flexible lunch times”*

Employer carer awareness and support

The average number that carers rated their employer for in understanding and awareness of carers was 6 out of 10, with some respondents reporting great provision of carer awareness and support by their employer and others reporting little or none. This indicates that some employers do have an understanding of carers and as a result are supportive in some way to carer needs, whilst others are not so understanding or may need further education.

The following is a case study from a carer living in Tasmania which highlights that despite the NES outlining specific rights for carers who are employed, it can still be quite difficult for some managers or employers to translate this into practical support for carers.

Case study: *Charlotte *name has been changed to protect privacy*

29/08/22: *Charlotte works for a government organisation and has done for the last 6.5 years. She is aged 62 and cares for her husband Bill who is aged 64. Bill has Dementia, is insulin-dependent, has diabetes, is non-verbal, and has low mobility and vision. He is supported by the NDIS with 2:1 worker ratio, but Charlotte coordinates the support workers to ensure they are providing the right care and monitoring of his health.*

¹³ <https://www.carersnsw.org.au/about-us/our-research/carer-survey>

Charlotte was forced to work from home during the pandemic period and recently requested flexible working arrangements with a mixture of some in-office and some working from home hours to assist her in being close to her husband and monitoring his support workers. Charlotte's role is not face-to-face and can be completed effectively via phone, email, and online platforms. She worked like this successfully during the pandemic.

Her request for flexible working arrangements was refused. Charlotte said her employer is not open to any negotiation and she was told she is either in the office or not working at all. Her Father passed away last month, and she took some leave for that. Her husband recently was admitted to hospital due to pneumonia and sepsis. She accompanied him in the ambulance and whilst he was in the hospital, she completed personal care tasks and fed him to keep his blood sugar levels stable. She also advocated for support from medical staff as they were run off their feet.

Upon returning home, Charlotte was told that she needed to come into the office or would be forced to take leave. Charlotte took forced annual leave whilst waiting for advice from her union representative and Fair Work. She didn't want to use this leave as she wanted to keep it for when it is needed as Bill's condition is unpredictable. Charlotte's employer/manager did not provide her anything in writing requesting her to take annual leave until she complies to return to the office.

Charlotte also had a meeting via teams with a supervisor who told her that perhaps she should consider resigning and 'just be a carer'. Charlotte said she feels like she is being discriminated against for trying to manage care and employment and that possibly they are trying to force her to retire.

Charlotte said this is very upsetting and feels conflicted and unsupported. She also reported feeling degraded by being called 'just a carer'. She has also received comments from another colleague in the past that her husband should just go into a nursing home.

Charlotte's husband has severe and complex needs, and their goal is to keep him at home for as long as possible. Charlotte was upset and exhausted but said she will fight this with support from her union and Fair Work.

09/09/22: Charlotte sought advice from the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU). They have agreed that this is a discrimination case, and the lawyer has requested a meeting with the employer and Charlotte. The first meeting did not go ahead due to technical difficulties on the employer's end but a new meeting was scheduled for the 14th of September.

Charlotte said she is permitted to work from home until then. However, her husband is now in the hospital again and she is too upset to inform her employer.

15/09/22: Charlotte requested a phone call to check how the meeting with the lawyer and her employer went. Carers Tasmania phoned Charlotte as discussed and was informed that her husband had just died.

She was too scared to tell her employer about what had happened and was seeking support from her union to do this. Charlotte said these last few months could have been different if she was adequately supported to work at home whilst being close to her husband in the final stages of life. It has been a nightmare and emotional roller coaster for her. She does not want anyone else to experience this sort of situation.

Duration of current or most recent employment

Most respondents reported working for the same employer for 10 or more years (n=66). This could be due to the current employer showing carer awareness and understanding, or because the role offers the flexibility that the carer needs.

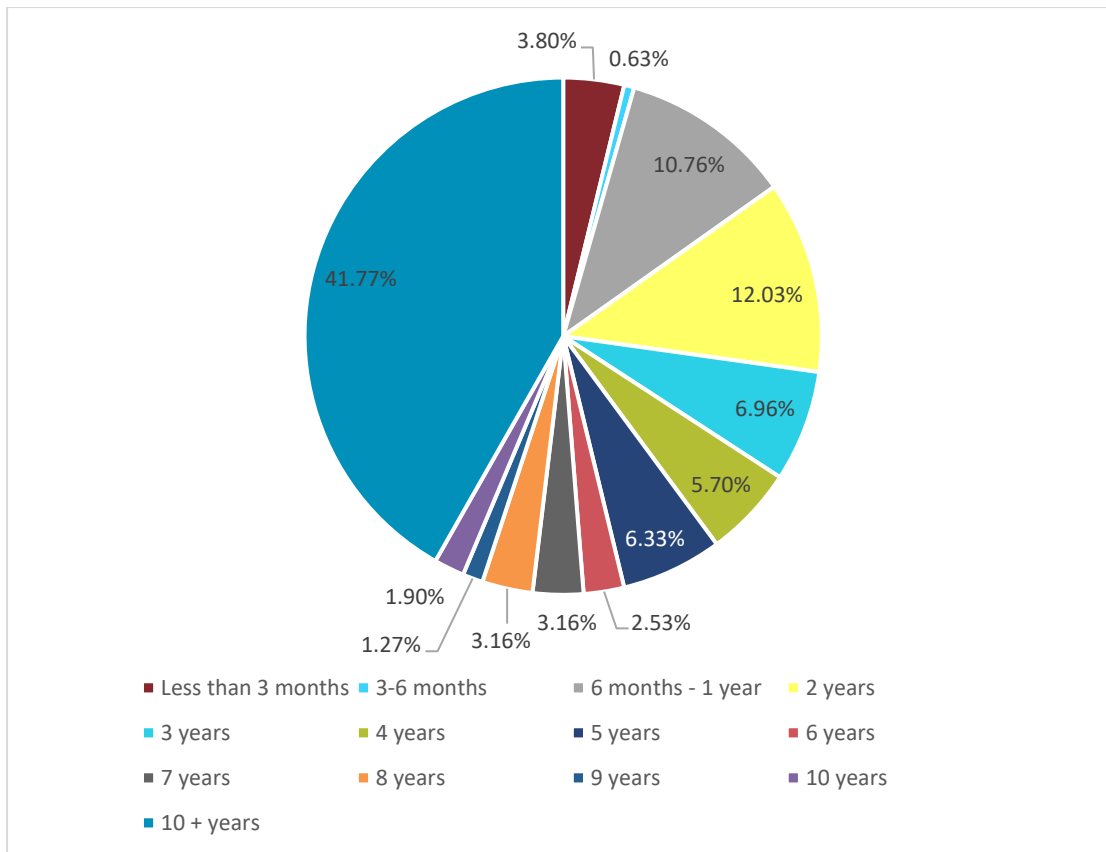


Figure 7: Time in current or most recent caring role

The non-financial benefits of working

We wanted to explore the non-financial benefits of working whilst maintaining a caring role. The 2022 National Carer Survey¹⁴ (not yet published) found that 28.7% of Tasmanian respondents strongly agree and 50.7% agree that their work provides them with an important sense of purpose outside their caring role.

- “To be able to mix with people outside the caring role”
- “Friendship, sense of purpose”
- “Socialisation”
- “I love my work”
- “Job satisfaction, contributing to a workplace, confidence, skills training, interpersonal relationships with colleagues”
- “Gives me a break from the emotional aspects of caring. I feel like I’m contributing. It gives me sense of purpose and self-worth”
- “Social, self-esteem, independence, self-confidence, routine, getting outside the home into the world”
- “Social relationships outside my caring role, assisting with not being isolated”
- “Time to be me and not a carer”

¹⁴ <https://www.carersnsw.org.au/about-us/our-research/carers-survey>

Taking time off work to care

Almost half of the respondents reported taking leave from work to provide care to someone with disability (46.94%). This was then followed by taking leave due to the need to provide additional care for someone who is frail or aged (38.78%). The average age of the person being cared for at the time taking leave from work to care was 54 years.

Many reasons may cause carers to take leave from work to provide additional care. Some of the common reasons reported included that a family member or friend experienced a sudden and unexpected health incident/emergency which initiated the caring role (27.27%), or that the person being cared for went into hospital suddenly (31.06%).

The most common reason that carers reported taking leave from employment was because the person they cared for could not be left alone (for whatever reason) at that time (37.9%). 6.06% of respondents reported that they needed to take leave to care for a child who was sent home from school as the school could not handle their behaviours.

Most people took leave periods of up to a week at a time (23.16%), which was followed by taking leave several times over the course of a year (a week here and there).

Other comments about taking time off work to care:

- *“Due to high falls risk, resulting from dementia, care in a nursing home is not a suitable option for my father. On his first respite stay, he was admitted to hospital within 30 hours. On returning to the facility, he fell again within five hours. Due to staffing levels, my father can’t receive the necessary supervision and support to be safe in that setting”*
- *“I haven’t taken leave as my caring role is constant and never isolated to one event. If I need to take time off during my day for any of the above issues I then work at night (often through the night) to make up for the time. This is not ideal as I am exhausted most of the time, but I find it strikes a balance for me to maintain my personal privacy and respect from my colleagues as a reliable and valued employee”*
- *“I used all leave before resigning”*

It must be recognised that formal services such as home care packages, residential respite and NDIS do not negate the need for support from informal carers. Whilst formal services do alleviate some caring responsibilities, these services are often complex to initiate, are limited, or have long waitlists to access.

The Home Care Packages Program Data Report for the period of 1 October to 31 December 2021¹⁵ reports that in Tasmania 757 home care packages were approved in this quarter, compared with the national number of 32,853. For the same period, in Tasmania, there were 4,595 people who had a home care package and the total national number of people with a home care package was 198,109.

¹⁵ https://gen-agedcaredata.gov.au/www_aihngen/media/Home_care_report/Home-Care-Data-Report-2nd-Qtr-2021-22.pdf

The following table represents both the Tasmanian and national numbers of home care package recipients for the quarter 1 October 2021 – 31 December 2021.¹⁶

	Tasmania	Australia total
Level 1	318	16,648
Level 2	1,805	79,909
Level 3	1,502	56,713
Level 4	971	44,839

Table 1: Number of home care package recipients

At 31 December 2021, there were 68,429 people nationally seeking a home care package at their approved level, with 44,650 of these people not being offered an interim level home care package. This speaks volumes about the number of carers who would have needed to provide support in these instances. At 31 December 2021, the number of people in Tasmania waiting for a home care package at their approved level, with no interim level support was 1,267.¹⁷

Carers in Tasmania are currently faced with significant difficulty in accessing aged care facilities, restrictions around availability for respite, shortages in accessing support workers, and inappropriate hospital discharge due to bed shortages and poor discharge planning.

The 2018 SDAC reported there were 26.8% (140,100) of people in Tasmania with disability,¹⁸ however as of 30 June 2022, only 12,104 people were utilising the NDIS in Tasmania. The NDIS aims to support people with a significant and lifelong disability, but there are many people, who for various reasons are not eligible for this service. It can be difficult to obtain the correct diagnostic reports, and some people who are supported by a family member or friend deny that they would fit a particular diagnosis and that they don't need support. This is particularly common when supporting someone with mental ill health, meaning that it is likely that their carer is their only constant support.

Challenges returning to work after time off providing care

Many people find challenges when returning to work after taking time off. We wanted to understand in more detail the particular difficulties that carers faced upon return. The main finding was that nobody else had been hired or asked to assist in their role so there was lots of work to catch up on upon return (23.40%). Other common responses included *'I felt like my employer or manager changed their attitude towards me'* (15.9%) and *'parts of my job role had changed'* (13.83%). Specific comments included:

- *"I take intermittent leave. As I take frequent amounts of short leave, my pattern triggers automatic reviews under a computerised formula"*
- *"I actually had to change jobs and could no longer work full time"*
- *"No problem. Large org, dropped back into old role as though never away"*
- *"I didn't return to work"*

¹⁶ https://gen-agedcaredata.gov.au/www_ahwgen/media/Home_care_report/Home-Care-Data-Report-2nd-Qtr-2021-22.pdf

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2018 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/main/43010155010000000000000000000000?openview=1)

Skills from employment that may assist in the caring role

More often than not, people find themselves in caring roles unexpectedly. Some people who find themselves in a caring role may have an employment background that is directly related to the support they provide for their family member or friend (eg working in aged care and caring for an ageing parent), however, for many people, the reality is that they don't have specific training on the skills and knowledge they might need for the caring role. We wanted to explore further the diversity of skills that people have found transferrable from their employment to their caring roles. The following are a range of comments provided by respondents:

- *"Worked in aged care"*
- *"Counselling, money management, health knowledge"*
- *"Retired nurse"*
- *"I am a mental health practitioner"*
- *"Co-ordination of care, advocacy skills and time management!"*
- *"I am a support worker so I am working in the community with the elderly so most of the skills I have learned I am able to use at home"*
- *"Advocacy skills, understanding bureaucracy, the importance of putting things in writing, how to write persuasive emails, persistence"*
- *"I am a trained Social Worker"*
- *"Medication endorsed, first aid, manual handling"*

Skills from the caring role which could help in the workplace

Carers often report that they feel the skills, knowledge, and experience that they gain whilst caring for another person are undervalued, however, carers are resilient and skilled and learn a lot of skills within their sometimes-complex roles as carers. Some of the skills that respondents reported are transferrable from the caring role to the workplace include:

- *"Time management, advocacy - communication skills"*
- *"Patience and the ability to function under pressure"*
- *"Empathy. Dealing with people"*
- *"Case management"*
- *"Patience and a greater awareness of difference, disability and marginalisation"*
- *"Time management, thinking creatively"*
- *"I work with children with disabilities and my experience with my daughter has assisted me in my role greatly"*
- *"Conflict management"*
- *"Advocacy, problem-solving, empathy, continuous quality improvement, information gathering, accounts payable, budgeting, resilience procurement, contract management, communicating to a diverse audience"*
- *"Non-verbal communication cues. empathy, perseverance, and fortitude"*

What else is needed to support carers or former carers to re-enter the workforce?

For carers or former carers who wish to re-enter the workforce, actually achieving employment can be difficult. The following are comments about what is needed to assist carers or former carers to re-enter employment:

- *"For longer-term carers, an optional period of return to work confidence building programs"*
- *"Only receive small Centrelink payments which will entitle me to needed benefits to live. So any extra work income will kill my allowance and not worth it"*
- *"Training, employer understanding on why you had time out of the workforce"*

- *“I think the government needs to assist either by assisting the employer or providing more payments options for time of extended leave when you don’t qualify for normal payments”*
- *“Help to get back into current upgrade of qualifications and help study technology. Fees for studies and support. Supported respite to have study time”*
- *“More in home support services- one hour a fortnight for some services simply isn't enough”*
- *“Why is it always about getting people into the workforce. How about recognising the work that we do!? How about paying us to care for people?”*

What is needed to help carers remain in the workforce?

We wanted to explore what carers feel they need to support them to remain in the workforce. Some of the specific narrative provided by carers included:

- *“Be able to work without my pension being affected”*
- *“More flexibility, more carers leave – paid”*
- *“Empathy for the experience people have outside of the workplace, with clarity for how the employer can/will support their staff. I think when this is explicit and upfront, and referred to often it creates a culture that taking carers leave is as acceptable as taking annual leave so people feel less burdensome taking last minute, unplanned carers leave”*
- *“For myself, I need to be able to work from home so that I am there to monitor the person I care for and help if needed. I need the opportunity to accrue flextime (TOIL) to cover 'bad' mornings or doctor's appointments. I need understanding and the flexibility to be put into a role where I can be 'late' to work and allowed to make up the time at the end of the day. I need to feel as if I'm trusted, not as if I'm being monitored”*

Additional comments about balancing work and care

- *“I feel overwhelmed sometimes, but I am lucky to have supportive family”*
- *“I can't go out to work, but my caring role is working for \$136.50 a fortnight. 24/7 my husband's needs come before mine. Who would work for \$68 a week? And the Government wants to keep the elderly & sick at home. That \$68 a week is an insult.”*
- *“Caring role takes a toll on carers. Emotionally, psychologically, tiredness, isolation, lowers self-esteem & confidence. Feel like you are left behind with technology and work changes.”*
- *“I see working as paid respite and sanity”*
- *“Caring, even with aged care support, is still a full-time role. Organising carers, re-organising when they are unwell. Medical appointments for elderly increase. Fall monitors going off at all hours of night and morning, contacting police and ambulance. This is only a snippet of what the role requires”*
- *“My parents made threats that they would disinherit me if I went back to paid work”*
- *“Unless you are in this situation, you will never be able to appreciate the complexity and enormity of caring for another human being. My care recipient relies on me for all basic physical needs to be met and in addition, physical health support, mental health support, emotional support, and spiritual support. To be able to work as well I am sure, is what keeps a lot of carers 'sane' ! It is so easy to become disconnected from the 'outside' world as your caring role quickly starts to dominate your time, thoughts, and life. Without appropriate support, your 'world' inevitably diminishes to your immediate family dynamics and needs and surreptitiously you lose your sense of connection and community”*
- *“In my case, I'm about \$500,000 worse off than I would have been if I had worked to age 66 & not had out-of-pocket costs of caring”*
- *“If we had access to the NDIS, I would be in the workforce now”*

Access to carer support after hours

We know that for carers trying to balance caring and employment, it can be difficult to access even basic supports due to time constraints and 'normal' business operating hours. In terms of support, often the things that are put in place are home care packages, NDIS or other supports for the person requiring care, however, it is extremely important that carers are able to access the support they need as well. We wanted to understand if extended availability of Carer Gateway services would be worthwhile. The below figures show the responses of carers who indicated they would or would not access Carer Gateway services out of hours if available.

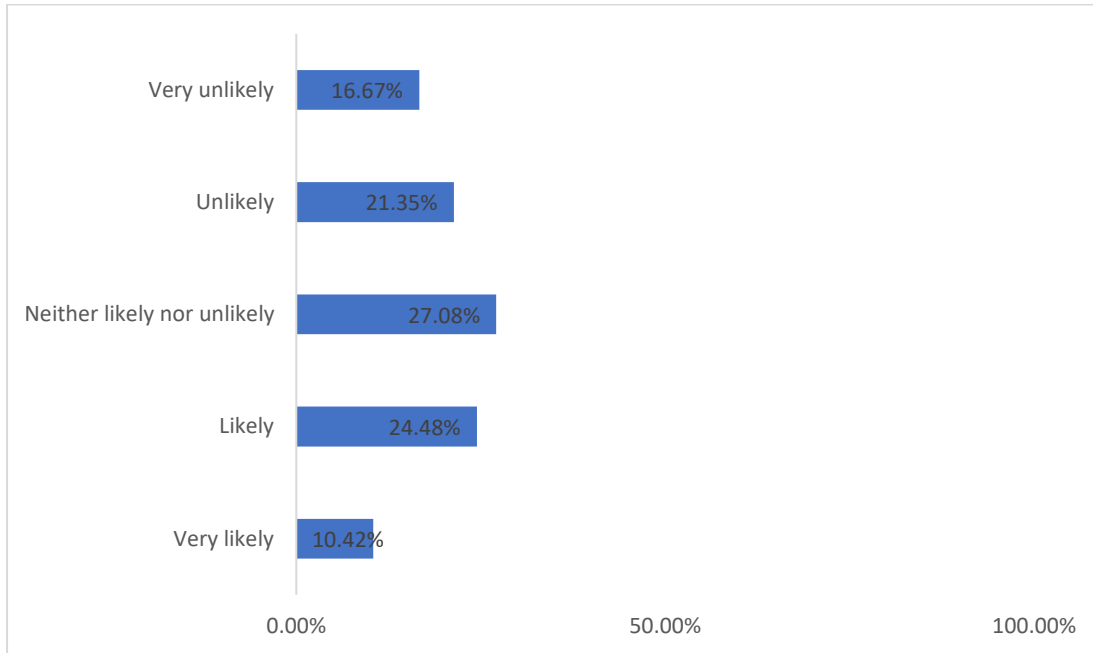


Figure 8: Would you use Carer Gateway on a weeknight after 5pm?

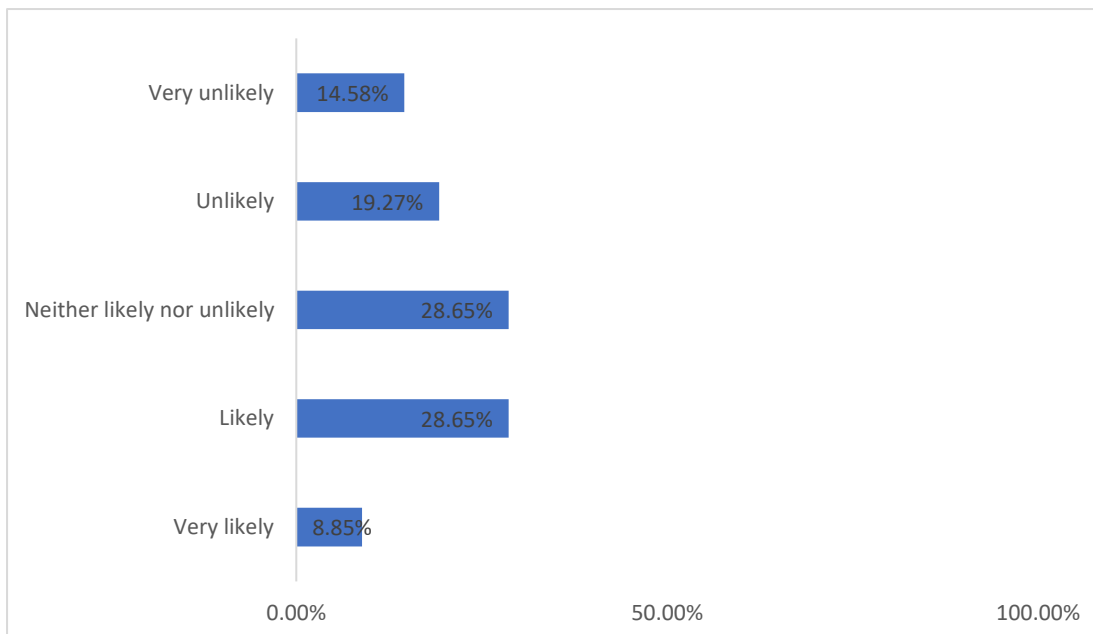


Figure 9: Would you use Carer Gateway on a Saturday morning?

National progress on carers and employment

Balancing work and care responsibilities is a popular topic, with several national inquiries in process. Whilst it is promising to see a commitment to positive change in this area, we want to ensure that the right changes are implemented to make real improvements to the economic security and wellbeing of carers – which are both two key pillars of the National Carer Network advocacy focus.

In February 2022, Former Federal Treasurer, the Hon Josh Frydenberg MP, formally requested that the Productivity Commission undertake an inquiry to examine the potential impact of amending the NES to provide a minimum statutory entitlement to extended unpaid carer's leave to care for older Australians.¹⁹ This was a direct result of the *Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety*, specifically recommendation 43 from the commission report.²⁰ We strongly advocate for any change to carer entitlements within the NES to be implemented for all carers regardless of the age or health condition of the person for whom they care.

The Productivity Commission has met with community and stakeholders to inform their Issues Paper.²¹ The Commission is currently collating all data and will release a draft report in February 2023 which will be followed by public hearings, and further consultation. A formal report to the Government will follow the release of the final report.

The Select Committee on Work and Care was appointed by resolution of the Senate on 3 August 2022 to inquire about the impact of combining work and care responsibilities on the wellbeing of workers, carers, and people being cared for.²² An interim report²³ has been published by the committee which contains the following eight recommendations:

“Recommendation 1

6.12 The committee recommends that, as a matter of priority, the Australian Government include new questions in the Census and/or new regular surveys of a representative group of workers to determine the extent, nature and effects of the interaction of work and care responsibilities across Australia. This data collection project should survey workers every five years with the aim of analysing the extent and nature of the interaction of work and care responsibilities across Australia, with consideration of particular sub-groups including (but not limited to):

- age
- gender
- type of care
- extent of workforce participation; and
- generating data to allow extensive analysis of the work and care system, and how it affects outcomes for working carers

¹⁹ <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/carers-leave/terms-of-reference>

²⁰ <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/final-report-recommendations.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/carers-leave/issues/carers-leave-issues.pdf>

²² https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Work_and_Care

²³ https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportsen/024963/toc_pdf/InterimReport.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf

Recommendation 2

6.20 The committee recommends that the Australian Government develop an analysis of care work classifications and wage structures to systematically address underpayments and lift wages in the care sector. Such an analysis should:

- consider the variability and value of work across the care sector
- establish the interrelationships across care types; and
- recognise the inherent value of care work

Recommendation 3

6.35 The committee recommends that the Australian Government amend the *Fair Work Act 2009*,²⁴ including section 65 of that Act, to:

- make the right to request flexible work available to all workers and to remove the stigma attached to its use when confined to carers
- replace the 'reasonable business grounds' provision at section 65(5) under which employers can refuse a flexible working arrangement, with refusal only on the grounds of 'unjustifiable hardship'
- introduce a positive duty on employers to reasonably accommodate flexible working arrangements
- require consultation with workers about flexibility requests; and revise sections 738 and 739 of the Act to introduce a process of appeal to the Fair Work Commission, for decisions made by employers under section 65 refusing to allow flexible work arrangements on the grounds of unjustifiable hardship, or on 'reasonable business grounds'.

Recommendation 4

6.45 The committee recommends that the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations investigate legislative reforms to the *Fair Work Act 2009*²⁵ and any other associated workplace laws, to enact a 'right to disconnect' from work. This right should:

- enable and support productive work from home and flexibility of work
- protect the right of workers to disconnect from their job outside of contracted hours and to enforce this right with their employer
- place a positive duty on employers to reasonably accommodate the right wherever possible; and
- allow employees to appeal to the Fair Work Commission where the right is not being enacted by employers.

²⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2017C00323>

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Recommendation 5

- 6.54** The committee recommends that the Australian Government amend the *Fair Work Act 2009*²⁶ to provide improved rostering rights for employees, and in particular working carers, by:
- ensuring employers implement rostering practices that are predictable, stable and focused on fixed shift scheduling (for example, fixed times and days); and
 - amending section 145A of the Act to require employers genuinely consider employee views about the impact of proposed roster changes, and take the views of the employee, including working carers, into consideration when changing rosters and other work arrangements

Recommendation 6

- 6.65** The committee recommends the Australian Government amend, as soon as is practicable, the *Paid Parental Leave Act 2010*²⁷ to legislate for a paid parental leave period of 26 weeks

Recommendation 7

- 6.80** The committee recommends that in the upcoming 2022-23 Budget, the Australian Government commits to long-term increases in funding to First Nations community controlled Early Childhood Education and Care, with a particular focus on regional, remote and some urban areas

Recommendation 8

- 6.88** The committee recommends that the Australian Government amend the relevant Social Policy and Family Assistance Laws to ensure that First Nations people are not required to meet the requirements of the activity test in order to receive subsidised childcare.”

The Jobs and Skills Summit was held in September 2022 and opened an opportunity for Australians to collaborate constructively on the challenges and opportunities presenting in the Australian economy and labour market. The Summit contributed to a range of proposed outcomes and immediate actions which centre around the objectives of gaining and maintain full employment, better labour force productivity and improving women’s economic participation. Overarching outcome areas include:

- A better-skilled, better-trained workforce
- Addressing Skills Shortages and Strengthening the Migration System
- Boosting Job Security and Wages, and Creating Safe, Fair and Productive Workplaces
- Promoting Equal Opportunities and Reducing Barriers to Employment
- Maximising jobs and opportunities in our industries and communities

²⁶ <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2017C00323>

²⁷ <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/maternity-and-parental-leave/paid-parental-leave>

These outcomes areas were supported by immediate actions, areas identified as needing further work, and an overview of what existing commitments are already in place. Following the Summit, the Employment White Paper consultation was released on 30 November 2022. The White Paper will build on the outcomes from the Summit and findings will be used to provide a roadmap for Australia to build a bigger, better trained, and more productive workforce, as well as boost incomes and living standards for Australians.²⁸

The Federal Budget²⁹ which was updated on 25 October 2022, has outlined some initiatives which could potentially have flow-on effects for carers/former carers who are employed or trying to re-enter the workforce:

- A commitment of \$76.4 million over 4 years for outcomes from the Jobs and Skills Summit, including \$2 million over 3 years to develop a Carer Friendly Workplace Framework
- \$19.4 million towards Disability Employment Services (DES) to extend it for an additional two years while a new model is built
- \$550 million has been allocated over the next 12 months, to be matched by states and territories for fee-free TAFE places, with a focus on courses in sectors experiencing acute workforce demands. An additional \$337 million has been allocated for 2024, for fee-free TAFE places, subject to negotiations with states and territories
- The Job Trainer Fund will continue for another year to provide low-fee and fee-free training places for job seekers

What is still needed?

We have proposed throughout consultation opportunities and continue to advocate for the following recommendations to improve the experience of balancing work and care:

- Additional carer leave entitlements must be accessible by all employees who are carers regardless of their employment status (eg casual or full-time), age, or any other variable
- Entitlements must include both paid and unpaid leave options which can be used flexibly as required
- Entitlements must be accompanied by comprehensive and best practice guidance on flexible work arrangements for staff with carer responsibilities
- The Australian Government must investigate and implement the proposals suggested in the Caring Costs Us Report (eg increasing both the carer payment and allowance and introducing a superannuation guarantee payment on top of the carer payment)
- The Australian Government must support national options to support carers or former carers into training pathways for re-entering the workforce
- Improve levels of access to support across all areas such as disability, aged care, mental health, palliative care services and access to GPs, specialists and allied health support

²⁸ <https://treasury.gov.au/consultation/c2022-322158>

²⁹ <https://budget.gov.au/index.htm>