

Facts about carers

Who is a carer?

- A 'carer' is someone who provides unpaid care and support to a relative or friend with a disability, mental illness, chronic condition, terminal illness, drug or alcohol dependency or who are frail.
- Carers can be of any age and from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. They could be parents, partners, brothers, sisters, children or other relatives or friends.
- Carers may care for a few hours a week or all day every day.
- A *primary* carer is the person who takes most responsibility for providing care for the person requiring support.

What does a carer do?

- Some carers assist with the tasks of daily living: feeding, bathing, dressing, toileting, or administering medications.
- Many carers provide care for 40 or more hours each week.
- Others care for people who are quite independent but who may need support with transport or finances.
- All carers generally provide some form of emotional support, with some helping to sustain some of the community's most vulnerable and isolated members.

Why do people become carers?

People become carers for a variety of reasons, including:

- The person needing care is a relative and the carer feels a family responsibility to provide care
- The carer believes they can provide better care than anyone else
- The carer feels an emotional obligation to provide care
- There are no other family or friends available to provide the care, other than the carer
- The carer feels they have no other choice but to provide the care.

Key demographic statistics on carers and disability

In Australia

- There are 2,694,600 carers – 12% of the population.
- 769,800 are primary carers.
- 70% of primary carers and 56% of all carers in Australia are women.
- 12% of carers were aged under 24 and 8% were aged 75 and over.
- 4,234,200 people have a disability – almost one fifth of the population.¹

In NSW

- There are 857,200 – 12% of the NSW population.
- Of these, 251,800 are primary carers.
- 1,350,500 people have a disability – 18% of the population².
- Approximately 13% of the NSW Indigenous population are carers.³

The value of caring

- In 2010 it was estimated that carers save taxpayers \$40.9 billion annually (the cost of replacing carers providing informal care with paid care workers).⁴
- As carers assist people to remain living in the community for longer they also make substantial savings on premature admission to costly residential care or supported accommodation options.
- Carers also experience benefits from caring, particularly in terms of their relationship with the person being cared for. Caring can be a very positive, rewarding experience.

What are the impacts of caring?

Social isolation

Carers often miss out on important social relationships, including those associated with work, recreation and leisure pursuits, which leaves them feeling very isolated.

Carers are more likely than the general population to have little face-to-face contact with friends or relatives outside the household, especially when caring for someone with high level care needs.⁵

Financial disadvantage

Caring responsibilities can adversely affect carers' financial situations. There can be a drop in income if a carer has to give up work to become a full-time carer. Most carers are on low incomes and have no opportunity to accumulate or preserve superannuation or any other savings.

- 45% of all carers of workforce age and 60% of primary carers are not in the labour force, compared to 35% of the total population.⁶

- Often there are extra associated costs with caring (medical supplies/incontinence supplies/ transport costs etc.) which impact the carer financially. The average weekly cost of caring for a person with a disability was estimated in 2006 at \$118, or \$162 for an elderly person.⁷
- Government payments for carers include the Carer Allowance (\$121.70 per fortnight) and the Carer Payment (\$840.20 per fortnight for a single carer with Pension Supplement). For a single carer receiving both payments this works out to \$480.95 per week, which is \$159.95 less than the weekly minimum wage of \$640.90.⁸
- The estimated lost earnings for carers is over \$6.5 billion a year.⁹
- Carers have a lower median gross personal income per week (\$454) than non-carers (\$600). The median personal income of primary carers was even lower again (\$400), or 67% of that of non-carers)¹⁰.
- A larger proportion of carers (39%) and primary carers (52%) are on low incomes than average (28%). (Households in the bottom 40% of equivalised gross household incomes are considered to be 'low income' households).¹¹

The future of caring

- The population is ageing. The percentage of the Australian population aged over 85 will increase from 1.5% to 5% of the total population by 2044.¹²
- Technological advancement is contributing to increased longevity of people with disabilities, which subsequently increases the number and length of informal care relationships.¹³
- A dramatic drop is projected in the ratio of carers to older people needing care over the next 30 years, from 57 primary carers per 100 people needing care in 2001 to just 35 primary carers per 100 people by 2031.¹⁴
- Over the next 30 years the number of carers is projected to rise by 57% while the number of aged people needing care will rise by 160%.

Carers health and wellbeing

A national survey of carers health and wellbeing¹⁵ revealed:

- Carers have the lowest levels of wellbeing of any Australian group
- Over half reported some level of depression, with one third found to be severely or extremely depressed
- More than one third of carers are experiencing severe or extreme stress
- Caring does not get easier with time
- Caring compounds the effect of any other factor that leads to reduced wellbeing
- Any level of consistent, daily, immediate caring responsibility is sufficient to severely damage wellbeing
- Wellbeing decreases as the number of hours spent caring increases

- The presence of a person in the household who requires care severely compromises the wellbeing of other family members, whether they have primary carer responsibility or not.

Financial assistance for carers

Carer payment

Eligibility

To be eligible for Carer Payment a person must be providing care in the home of the person(s) being cared for and also provide one of the following levels of care:

- Full-time care to an adult who has a disability or medical condition which is long-term and severe and has a minimum level of care needs assessed by the Adult or Child Disability Assessment Tools.
- Care for a person whose care requirements are less severe but who has a dependent child that needs care, so their combined care needs are equivalent to the care needs of a person with a severe disability or medical condition.
- Full-time care permanently or for at least six months to a child under 16 with a profound disability.
- Full-time care permanently or for an extended period to two or more children under 16 with a disability who, together, need a level of care that is at least equivalent to the level of care needed by a child with a profound disability.

The Carer Payment is adjusted twice yearly on 20 March and 20 September and is subject to income and asset tests.

Current rate

Single rate = \$840.20 per fortnight

Couple rate = \$633.40 per fortnight for each partner

Note: These payment rates include a Pension Supplement of \$63.50 for singles and \$95.80 each for couples (per fortnight).

No. recipients

221,954 carers received this payment in 2012-13¹⁶

Cost to government

\$3.59 million in 2012-13¹⁷

Carer Allowance

Eligibility

This is an income supplement paid to someone who provides daily care and attention at home to a person with a disability or medical condition who is:

- Aged 16 or over where the disability causes a substantial functional impairment, or
- A dependent child aged under 16:
 - for a Health Care Card only, the child must require "substantially more care and attention" compared to a child of the same age without a disability
 - for Carer Allowance and a Health Care Card, the child's disability must appear on a list of disabilities/conditions which result in automatic qualification or must cause the child to function below the standard for his or her age level
- The child and the carer must live together in the same private residence or, if the child is hospitalised at the time of the claim, there must be an intention for the child to return home to live with the carer.
- The Carer Allowance is adjusted 1 January each year and is not subject to income or asset tests.

Current rate

\$121.70 per fortnight

No. recipients

563,079 carers received Carer Allowance (adult or child) in 2012-13¹⁸

Cost to government

\$1.86 billion in 2012-13¹⁹

Carer Supplement

The Carer Supplement replaces the former Carer Bonus and was introduced in 2009. It is paid to all recipients of a Carer Payment or a Carer Allowance. Note: If a carer receives a Carer Payment and a Carer Allowance they will receive the Carer Supplement for the Carer Payment and the Carer Allowance (ie two Carer Supplements will be paid). A carer will receive a Carer Supplement for each Carer Allowance they receive.

Current rate

\$600 annually

Cost to government

\$506.20 million in 2012-13²⁰

Child Disability Assistance Payment

The Child Disability Assistance Payment is a \$1,000 annual payment made for a care recipient aged under 16 years and for whom their carer receives a Carer Allowance. The payment is not subject to income tax, and it does not count as income for social security or family assistance purposes.

Low Income Household Rebate

The NSW Government announced that from 1 July 2011, the Low Income Household Rebate would replace the pensioner energy rebate and provide eligible customers with a rebate for electricity costs. From 1 July 2013, the Low Income Household Rebate will increase from \$215 per year to \$225 per year, and will increase again on 1 July 2014 to \$235 per year. Holders of current Centrelink or DVA Concession Cards, DVA Gold Cards or Centrelink Health Cards will be eligible for the new rebate. People who were receiving the pensioner energy rebate will receive the Low Income Household Rebate automatically.

Explanation of References

The most recent and complete SDAC report was published in 2010 on findings from the 2009 SDAC. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has conducted the 2012 SDAC, with findings still being released. In 2008 the ABS said that its other sources of estimates of carers **should not be used** in place of carer estimates in the *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers*. This is the major reason Carers NSW uses this source for carer estimates.

References

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2012*, Catalogue no. 4430.0.

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³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012, *Census of Population and Housing: Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2011*, Catalogue no. 2076.0.

⁴ Access Economics, 2010, *The Economic Value of Informal Care in 2010*, for Carers Australia

⁵ Australian Institute of Family Studies and FaHCSIA, 2007, *The Families Caring for a Person with a Disability Study and the social lives of carers*

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⁷ Taskforce on Care Costs, 2006, *Where are we now?*

⁸ Fair Work Australia, 2014, *National Minimum Wage*. Accessible at <http://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/policies-and-guides/fact-sheets/minimum-workplace-entitlements/minimum-wages>

⁹ Access Economics, 2010, *The Economic Value of Informal Care in 2010*, for Carers Australia

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2012*, Catalogue no. 4430.0.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² Productivity Commission, 2005, *Economic Implications of an Ageing Australia*

¹³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2000, *Disability and Ageing Australian Population Patterns and Implications*

¹⁴ National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM), 2004, *Who's going to care? Informal care and an ageing population*

¹⁵ Carers Australia, Australian Unity, and Deakin University, 2007, Australian Unity Wellbeing Index Survey 17.1 *The Wellbeing of Australians: Carer Health and Wellbeing*

¹⁶ Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2010, *FaHCSIA Annual Report 2012-13*. Accessible at http://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/10_2013/facs_41449_ar123_accpdf_fa5.pdf

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*