

2022 NATIONAL CARER SURVEY

Supporting carers in the workplace

Briefing 2, May 2023

Carers who balance care with paid work can face significant challenges. Without suitable flexible working arrangements, carers often reduce their engagement with the paid workforce, limiting their income and their opportunities for career advancement. This can significantly affect carers' long-term financial security as well as their health and wellbeing. Supporting carers in the workforce to maintain paid work benefits carers, the people they care for, employers and the economy.

The 2022 National Carer Survey was conducted from June to July 2022 by Carers NSW with the support of the State and Territory Carer Organisations and funding from the NSW Government. A carer is any individual who provides care and support to a family member or friend who lives with a disability, mental illness, alcohol or drug dependency, chronic condition, terminal illness or who is frail due to age.

Benefits of paid work

Most Australian carers aged 15-64 years (66.6%) balance their caring responsibilities with paid work (ABS 2019). Of the 2,264 carers in paid work who responded to the 2022 National Carer Survey, 3 in 4 (74.7%) reported that paid work provides important social connections outside of their caring role, and 82% reported that it gives them a sense of purpose.

3 in 4

said paid work
provided important
social connections



Respondents balancing care with paid work also demonstrated significantly lower psychological distress, higher social connectedness and higher wellbeing than those who did not have a paid job. Importantly, paid work is a necessity for many carers simply because it provides the income they need to meet their living costs (Carers NSW 2023).

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Workforce participation

There are a range of factors that can influence a carer's ability to participate in paid work.

Hours of care per week

Respondents to the 2022 National Carer Survey cared for an average of 103.8 hours per week, with almost half (48.5%) providing 24/7 care. As a result, carers are more likely to be in part time work (ABS 2019), and some carers are not able to engage in paid work at all.

Access to care services

Many carers do not have others to help them care and rely on aged care or disability services to support the person they care for while they are at work. However, accessing suitable, timely and reliable services can be difficult. Fewer than 1 in 3 (30.9%) respondents to the 2022 National Carer Survey reported that aged care services enabled them to stay in or return to work, and only 1 in 4 (24.6%) said the same about disability services.

Workplace flexibility

In addition to seeking part time work, many carers choose more flexible jobs and industries and take advantage of flexible working arrangements. For example, many respondents to the 2020 National Carer Survey* varied their start / finish times (51%) or worked from home (33%) to accommodate their caring role.

Respondents to the 2022 National Carer Survey mostly reported (57.7%) having access to sufficient flexible working arrangements. However, nearly 1 in 2 (48.5%) were not satisfied with their work-life balance and nearly 1 in 2 (49.7%) did not have access to enough paid leave to meet their caring requirements. Analysis also suggests that work-life balance and access to leave significantly influence whether or not carers choose to stay in paid work.

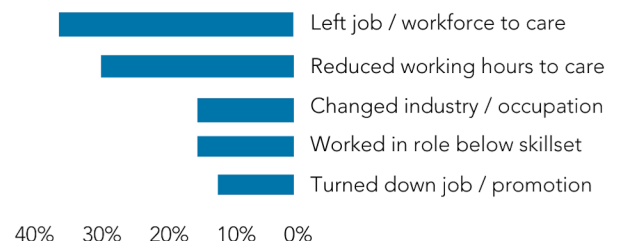


* This question was not repeated in 2022.

Career impacts

Where there is inadequate support in place, carers often either reduce their engagement with the paid workforce or limit their career development, thereby reducing their income potential and their superannuation reserves. These impacts can particularly disadvantage women, who are most likely to be primary carers and may experience additional career breaks due to parental leave.

Selected career impacts - all respondents



Of the 6,825 respondents to the 2022 National Carer Survey, 1 in 3 (33.6%) had retired or at some point left their paid job or stopped looking for work to care, and more than 1 in 4 (27.3%) had reduced their working hours at some stage. Many had made other trade-offs to focus on caring, such as changing industry or occupation (12.9%), taking a job below their skillset (12.9%) or turning down a new job or promotion (12.5%).

A supportive workplace

For carers who are in paid work, recognition, understanding and support from their manager can positively impact job satisfaction and retention. Most carers in paid work (64.8%) who responded to the 2022 National Carer Survey were comfortable discussing their caring role with their manager and most (60.3%) found their manager to be supportive. Carers who disclosed their caring role were more likely to feel supported and report access to sufficient flexible working arrangements.

64.8%

were comfortable discussing caring with their manager



A supportive work environment and an employer with a track record of supporting employees with caring responsibilities are also important to carers seeking paid work. More than half (54.9%) of those currently in paid work reported choosing their employer because they offered flexible working arrangements, and the majority (57.0%) were open about their caring role during the recruitment process.

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Summary

- Paid work offers carers social connection and a sense of purpose outside of their caring role.
- Carers in paid work have better health and wellbeing than their peers outside of the paid workforce.
- Time spent caring, inadequate replacement care services and a lack of workplace flexibility can make it difficult to balance paid work and care.
- Carers often make career trade-offs to stay in paid work, or leave the workforce altogether.
- Flexible working conditions, adequate leave and supportive managers can help carers to sustainably balance paid work and care.

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I don't have enough paid leave to adequately support my caring role... I'm often exhausted due being a carer and all the extra responsibilities.

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To find out how to make your workplace more carer-friendly, please visit www.carersandemployers.org.au or contact the Carers NSW national Carers + Employers program by emailing info@carersandemployers.org.au or phoning 02 9280 4744.



Sources

ABS, 2019: Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers. TableBuilder dataset. Australian Bureau of Statistics: Canberra.

Carers NSW, 2020: 2020 National Carer Survey. Unpublished dataset. Carers NSW: North Sydney.

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NCOSS, 2022: Tough Times, Hard Choices: Struggling households and the rising cost-of-living in NSW. NCOSS: Darlinghurst, NSW.