



Submission to

**Inquiry into the extent, nature and consequence of
insecure work in the ACT**

**ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Education,
Employment and Youth Affairs**

June 2017

About Carers ACT

Carers ACT is the ACT peak body representing the diversity of Canberrans who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends with a:

- disability
- chronic condition
- mental illness or disorder
- drug or alcohol problem
- terminal illness
- or who are frail aged.

Carers ACT also provides advocacy support to ACT's Foster and Kinship carers.

There around 48,500 unpaid, family and friend carers in the ACT, who are an integral part of our aged, health and disability systems.

Carers ACT has a constitutional mandate to represent the voices of carers to government and the wider community. We actively consult with a wide diversity of caring families on an ongoing basis to enable improved understanding of their needs, and enable better inclusion for them and the people they care for.

For information contact:

Ms Lisa Kelly
Chief Executive Officer
Carers ACT
Unit 2, 80 Beaurepaire Crescent
HOLT ACT 2615
Telephone: 02 6299 9607
Email: lisa.kelly@carersact.org.au
Website: www.carersact.org.au

Introduction

Carers ACT is the peak body for unpaid family or friend carers in the ACT. We welcome this opportunity to provide comments to the Inquiry into the extent, nature and consequence of insecure work in the ACT.

In our response to the Inquiry we address issues relating to employment and workforce issues for unpaid carers. As a member of the ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS) Carers ACT contributed to and supported the ACTCOSS response to this Inquiry.

Carers

Any person can become an unpaid carer, and most people will provide and receive care from a family member or friend sometime during their life because of a disability, a health condition, an accident or ageing. Nearly 45,000 Canberrans are unpaid carers. Of these, 3,000 are young adult carers aged 15 to 25 years.¹

Caring can affect the activities that people would undertake during their life – being a student, being part of the workforce, engaging with the community, supporting family and friends and planning for their economic security. Or, activities that the wider community consider to be ‘social inclusion’ or social participation.

Unpaid family or friend carers have lower workforce participation than similar age cohorts who do not have a similar caring role. When carers are in the workforce they may choose part-time employment that allows them to continue their caring role, or limit their career pathway by not seeking promotion with extra responsibility and longer hours that cause conflict with their caring. Other carers may be seeking to enter or re-enter the workforce but they lack the confidence or the skills to seek employment.

Caring can cause economic disadvantage or economic insecurity. Carers were more likely than non-carers to have household incomes in the lowest quintile for equivalised gross household income because of their lower employment participation. Half of primary carers (carers who provide the most care to a person needing care) live in a household in the

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) *2015 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings, 2016*, Canberra

lowest two quintiles for equivalised gross household income, compared with 26.3 per cent for non-carers.²

Our aged and disability community care systems rely on the support of unpaid family and friend carers, and 74 per cent of all community care is provided by carers. The estimated cost of formal replacement care services in 2015 in the ACT was around \$1 billion.³

There is a workforce shortage in the age and community care sectors nationally and in the ACT. The introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme in the ACT was anticipated to increase the workforce capacity of carers, and 2016 modelling forecast the impact on ACT Gross State Product when the scheme is fully implemented will be a direct employment growth for between 500 to 800 people with disability on a full-time equivalent (FTE) basis, and approximately 660 FTE carers returning to the workforce as a result of NDIS supports for their care recipient.⁴ This outcome is still to be achieved, with carers' employment barriers one contributor. Barriers include – lack of flexible employment opportunities to accommodate their caring role, lack of relevant work experience or skills to meet requirements of current positions and difficulty accessing training because of caring responsibilities.

Social Inclusion

In its 2016 research on carers and social inclusion, the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) University of NSW, explains 'social inclusion' as all members of a society having the opportunity to participate in activities that are recognised and valued in that society. In contrast 'social exclusion' is explained as groups that miss out on, or are left out of, some forms of participation.

Social inclusion for carers participating in the research meant, among other factors:

- opportunities for choices about participating in other aspects of their lives: employment, school, community and social activities,

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) *ibid*.

³ Deloitte Access Economics (2015) *The economic value of informal care in 2015*, for Carers Australia, Canberra.

⁴ Long B (2016) *Economic Benefits of the NDIS in the ACT*, for NDS, Every Australian Counts and Centre for Applied Disability Research, Canberra.

- greater community awareness about ageing, illness and disability and better understanding of carers' lives: what they value and what they need.

Carers in all age groups prioritised the needs of their relatives over their own needs and often sacrificed their own social inclusion (including employment or the hours and type of employment) so they could support the social inclusion of the person the care for.⁵ This particular finding reinforces Carers ACT's engagement with carers and other research.⁶

Employment and Workforce Participation

In 2015, the national workforce participation for unpaid carers aged 15 to 64 years was 56.3 per cent for primary carers, and for all carers it was 77.2 per cent. This was lower than for non-carers (80.3%). Young adult carers aged 15 to 24 years were almost twice as likely to be unemployed than other 15 to 24 year olds without a caring role.⁷

In the ACT 26,100 carers in the age group 15-64 years were employed. Fifteen thousand carers were employed in the private sector and 11,800 were employed in the public sector. The highest ACT carer employment category was public administration and safety (33.2%), with health care and social assistance (12.9%) the second highest.^{8,9}

Of carers of working age in two age cohorts (mid-age 26 to 64 years and young adult 18 to 25 years) the SPRC research findings reinforced data cited above:

- Carers were less likely to be in paid employment and have lower secondary education achievement.
- Female carers experienced a greater negative impact on their capacity to participate in education and employment, particularly young female carers.
- Female carers aged 25 to 64 years were the most disadvantaged carer group compared to their peers in terms of education and employment, particularly carers without post-secondary school qualifications.

⁵ Hill T, Thomson C, Raven M et al (2016) *Carers and Social Inclusion*, Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW, Sydney.

⁶ The Lancet, Who cares for the carer? *The Lancet* 389, 763. Elsevier, London.

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2014) *Caring in the community: Summary of Findings, 2012*, Canberra.

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) *ibid*.

⁹ Discrepancy in the number of employed carers and the number employed in the private or public sectors occurred because of inadequate industry description. Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016), *ibid*.

- Female carers of working age are more likely than male carers to live in jobless households.
- Young adult carers were more disadvantaged with respect to household income, homeownership or purchasing, access to a motor vehicle, and access to the internet.
- Carers [and caring families] had higher rates of poverty and financial stress.¹⁰

Both these carer groups identified aspects to increase their social inclusion through education and employment:

- **Mid-age carers:** Flexible employment conditions, such as working part-time and understanding and supportive management.¹¹
- **Young adult carers:** Carer-friendly educational structures and employment conditions.

The Carers NSW 2016 Carer Survey of over 2,000 carers collected data on working carers' employment experiences. Thirty-seven per cent of survey respondents were employed carers – 39 per cent were in full time employment, 40.3 per cent worked part time, 14.6 per cent were casually employed, and 8.4 per cent were self-employed full time. The author identified findings reflective of existing literature, such as:

- disruptions to a carer's career path
- limited career progression
- discontent with working arrangements, with many carers who wanted to work either more or less hours, or who had considered quitting their job.

In regard to their relationship with their employer:

- 52.7 per cent of carers felt supported by their workplace, but only one in five carers used the available formal support
- many employers felt unsupported by their workplaces to balance work and care even if their employer was aware of their caring responsibilities
- many carers lacked knowledge or awareness of workplace practices that could better support their caring role e.g flexible hours, working from home, job share

¹⁰ Hill T, Thomson C, Raven M et al (2016) *ibid*.

¹¹ Carers ACT delivers the ACT Carers Advocacy Program funded by the ACT Government. Our advocates regularly support carers who experience employment discrimination because of their caring role.

- leaving work at short notice, carers' leave and flexible hours were the most used carer supports.

Caring and economic disadvantage

While many carers can balance their caring role and employment other carers are unable to participate in paid employment because of lack of affordable, replacement care, or other employment barriers including low education qualifications. These barriers are likely to have long term financial disadvantage and social implications for carers and caring families, particularly if carers are excluded from workforce participation over many years.

Social determinants, such as unemployment or underemployment over time can increase vulnerability to housing difficulties, such as affordable housing and the inability to purchase their own home. For example, 7 per cent of all primary carers live in public housing compared to 2.2 per cent of non-carers.¹²

Young adult carers (aged 18 to 25 years)

In a previous submission to the ACT Government Carers ACT recommended the need to improve and target support for young adult carers to improve their education, employment, financial and social opportunities their non carer peers experience.¹³ While younger young carers (aged up to 18) tend to be caring for parents and grandparents young adult carers, particularly those aged over 21, are more likely to be caring for a partner or their own child with a disability.¹⁴ Many adult young carers do not identify as a carer, and are unlikely to have access or be aware of services to assist their caring role.

It is well recognised that education, particularly higher education, is directly linked with employment and income that can determine economic and social inclusion. An ACT issues paper examining education inequity stated that "a young person may experience difficulties at school for a variety of reasons and there are likely to be multiple, intersecting issues

¹² Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings, 2012*, Canberra.

¹³ See Carers ACT (2015) Submission to the ACT 2016-17 ACT Government Budget Submission: *Caring for Canberra's Carers* for more information about young carers and our recommendations.

¹⁴ Bray JR (2012) *Young carers in receipt of Carer Payment and Carer Allowance 2001 to 2006: characteristics, experiences and post-care outcomes. Occasional Paper no.47*, Australian Government Department of Families, Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Accessible https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/02_2013/op47_text_print_ready.pdf

which impact on their lives and make it difficult to remain engaged in education.” The issues paper identified young carers as an at-risk group of disengaging from education.¹⁵

Importantly, research on young carers receiving the Carer Payment and Carer Allowance indicated that the duration of young adult carers in receipt of these payments or income support is similar to carers aged 25 to 54 years.¹⁶

In its 2016-17 Budget, the Australian Government announced funding for the Try, Test and Learn (TTL) initiative for new or innovative approaches to assist people who have the capacity to work, and who are at risk of long-term reliance on welfare, into stable and sustainable employment. Priority groups for the first funding cycle included young carers, young parents and young students at risk of long-term unemployment. This initiative is part of the government’s Australian Priority Investment Approach to Welfare.¹⁷

Carers ACT and other Carers Associations provided expressions of interest for programs to support young carers succeed at school and transition to further education or employment. The Australian Government is still to announce the organisations to receive funding in TTL’s first funding cycle.

Recommendations

Carers ACT recommends that the Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs consider a suite of recommendations to reduce the risk of insecure work for carers in the ACT and to improve their economic and social outcomes including:

1. Undertake a study into carer career pathways to identify barriers to employment, employer awareness of carers and their employment rights and the carer supports they provide to assist carers balance work and care,¹⁸ young carer identification in ACT schools and colleges and early intervention to support their education path and existing paths for carers seeking to re-enter the workforce.

¹⁵ The Youth Coalition of the ACT and ACTCOSS (2015) *Issues Paper: Educational Inequity in the ACT July 2015*, Canberra.

¹⁶ Bray JR (2012) *ibid*.

¹⁷ Australian Department of Social Services (2017) Try, Test and Learn Fund: Accessible <https://engage.dss.gov.au/try-test-and-learn-fund/>

¹⁸ While the ACT and Australian Governments provide carer supports, as flexible hours, the majority of working carers are employed in the private sector and little is known about carer access to carer supports.

2. The ACT Government and its agencies include carer employment initiatives in their procurement processes to increase carer-friendly workplaces and improve carer workforce participation and workforce participation satisfaction.
3. The ACT Government and its agencies invests in long term initiatives to support young adult carers to transition from secondary school to post school employment or higher education to increase their economic and social participation.
4. The ACT Government invest in the development of a tool or training for carers to recognise the skills and expertise they bring to employment or education, similar to the NSW Skills2Work program.¹⁹

Please contact Colleen Sheen, Senior Project Officer Carers ACT by email colleen.sheen@carersact.org.au or on 6296 9900 for further information if required.

¹⁹ NSW Government and Australian Government Department of Social Services, see <http://skillslink2work.com.au/>