

19 July 2023

Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: spla.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee members

Inquiry into the recognition of unpaid carers

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia (CCIWA) is the peak body advancing trade and commerce in Western Australia. We are fundamentally committed to using our insights to develop and advocate for public policies that will help realise our vision to make WA the best place to live and do business and contribute to a stronger Australian economy.

Maximising workforce participation underscores a strong and robust economy. We are currently engaged in a program of policy work around diversity and inclusion in workplaces, with a particular focus on improving employment opportunities for people with a disability. To maximise workforce participation - and the economic benefits that are created - we need to ensure those who are willing and able to work are afforded more opportunities to do so.

In the context of this review, we contend unpaid carers is an area that requires further policy attention. Unpaid carers play a critical role in the Australian economy, providing invaluable support and services to loved ones, which is often overlooked or undervalued. Our submission seeks to highlight the challenges unpaid carers face, the impacts these barriers have on their ability to participate in the workforce and what government can do to support them. Enabling more unpaid carers the opportunity to participate in the workforce not only creates significant financial and social benefits for carers and their families, it also delivers a benefit to the broader community and economy.

Lack of quality support and services

One of the biggest challenges unpaid carers in Australia face is the difficulty of locating and navigating the various resources and support services available to them. Navigating the vast array of programs, funding schemes, platforms, support organisations and government agencies can be overwhelming and confusing, especially for carers who are new to the caregiving role or those who face language or accessibility barriers.



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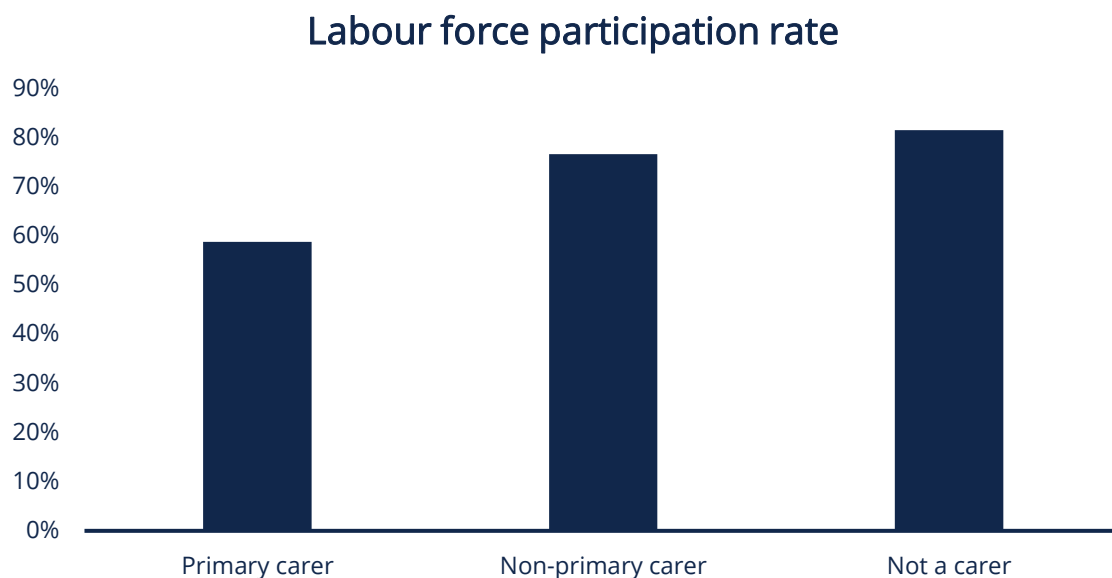
This level of fragmentation can make it daunting for unpaid carers to identify the specific resources and support they require. While there are platforms such as the *Carer Gateway*, which have been designed to serve as a central access point for carers seeking assistance, anecdotal evidence from unpaid carers suggests there are still gaps, particularly with respect to after-hour service availability, and further opportunities for resources or services to be streamlined.

Another key challenge unpaid carers face is the lack of quality support, especially when it comes to respite services. Respite care is vital for unpaid carers as this enables them to take a break, recharge, and attend to their own well-being, including via participation in the workforce. However, the availability of quality respite services can be limited, while demand is high, and respite arrangements can also be inflexible, leaving unpaid carers unable to find respite services that can accommodate their specific needs and preferences.

Inconsistencies in the quality and the limited availability of respite arrangements can leave carers experiencing prolonged periods without breaks, leading to fatigue, heightened stress, and a reduced ability to sustain their caregiving role effectively – in addition to the barrier this creates with respect to workforce participation.

Counting the cost of low workforce participation

The most recent ABS data shows that carers are less likely to be in the workforce compared to the general population, and are more likely to work fewer hours than non-carers primarily due to the need for flexible working arrangements.



Source: ABS (2018)

In 2020, Deloitte published a report on the value of informal care, which estimated the economic value and productivity loss associated with the time devoted to informal caregiving responsibilities.¹ Based on an estimated 160,900 primary carers and 53,000

¹ Deloitte Access Economics (2020) [The value of informal care in 2020](#)

non-primary carers across Australia not engaged in paid employment, Deloitte found that the opportunity cost of these unpaid carers in terms of foregone earnings amounted to \$11.4 billion for primary carers and \$3.8 billion for non-primary carers. The economic value associated with lost leisure time was not considered.² Based on this evidence, there is an economic case for increased government support and resources for carers to enable greater workforce participation.

In addition to this economic argument, the barriers to accessing meaningful employment can diminish a carer's financial wellbeing, thereby increasing the need for additional government support and assistance. This perpetuates a cycle of dependence with limited economic mobility and security and is considered a catalyst for mental health challenges as well.

Initiatives to recognise and support unpaid carers

The lack of appropriate and adequate support, including the availability of quality respite services, exacerbates the challenges unpaid carers face, including workforce participation. There are opportunities to ensure that Australia's unpaid carers receive the recognition they deserve and the support they need. We would be supportive of the following interventions:

1. *Support for easier navigation of available resources and support services:* To address the concerns around information delivery, we urge the Federal Government to carefully consider the user experience and devote resources to improving the functionality and delivery of information via such platforms as *Carer Gateway*. In addition, we recommend investigating the establishment of a dedicated after-hours crisis hotline specifically tailored to the needs of unpaid carers. This would serve as a centralised and easily accessible point of contact, providing carers with immediate assistance, information and guidance when required.
2. *More quality respite care services:* As the availability and quality of respite care services remain a material challenge for unpaid carers across the State, we recommend providing more funding for respite care services, specifically targeting the expansion of high-quality options that align with the diverse needs of carers. This funding should be directed towards improving accessibility, reducing wait lists, and ensuring that respite care services are flexible, person-centred, and tailored to the individual needs and preferences of carers. Additionally, there should be a focus on promoting culturally appropriate respite options and enhancing support for carers of diverse backgrounds, including those from First Nation communities and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

² Ibid

3. *Strengthening the Carer Recognition Act:* While the *Carer Recognition Act 2010* was an important step towards recognising the contributions of unpaid carers nationally, there is scope for further improvements. For example, the Western Australian Carers Charter adopts stronger language around the recognition and rights of carers, including explicitly outlining the rights and entitlements of carers, as well as their involvement in decision-making processes that impact them and their caring role. In addition, we support resourcing of programs that are aligned with the Statement for Australia's Carers, for example, point 9 which calls for carers to be supported to achieve greater economic wellbeing and sustainability and, where appropriate, should have opportunities to participate in employment and education.

By implementing these recommendations, significant strides can be taken towards giving Australia's unpaid carers the recognition and support they need, including in gaining meaningful employment if they wish. These measures would not only help alleviate some of the challenges faced by unpaid carers but also contribute to their well-being, financial security and overall quality of life. Furthermore, prioritising the needs of unpaid carers and enhancing their access to quality support services would ultimately benefit the overall economy by enabling unpaid carers to participate more fully in the workforce, therefore generating productivity gains.

To this end the government can also play a role in encouraging and supporting the workforce participation of people living with a disability to enable carers more opportunity to work. We encourage government to elevate their focus on inclusion, particularly employment, and support initiatives like the following to create meaningful change within the community:

- Awareness-raising campaigns which showcase the diverse skills and achievements of people living and working with a disability and which use actual business case studies to promote the value diversity and inclusion delivers for workplaces.
- Enabling and celebrating leadership skills within underrepresented cohorts.
- Educational programs about the legal context as it relates to recruitment, promotion and evaluation, including the creation of "how-to" guides to align policies and processes.
- Affordable access for SMEs to consultants who specialise in advising on diversity and inclusion policies and strategies.
- Partnerships with specialist employment service providers (e.g. Disability Employment Services); and
- The Disability Enterprises employment initiative.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to engage on this important matter.

Should you wish to discuss the content of this submission further, please do not hesitate to contact our Director of Policy, Aaron Morey, via email at aaron.morey@cciwa.com.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'CR' with a horizontal line extending from the end.

Chris Rodwell
Chief Executive Officer