

Inquiry into the recognition of unpaid carers

Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs

Submission

July 25, 2023

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

My name is [REDACTED], and I am a carer for my husband [REDACTED], who has lived with a range of disabilities and challenges since an accident in June 2001.

I receive the fortnightly Carer's Allowance and my husband has received valuable support from NDIS since 2020.

We live in regional NSW, in the electorate of Cowper. We moved from Sydney to this area to relieve financial pressure and in search of a slower pace of life and a kinder community.

I wish to make a submission to the inquiry into the recognition of unpaid carers. Thank you for the opportunity to do so, and thanks also to Carers NSW for sharing details about the inquiry.

As part of my research into the inquiry, I have downloaded and read a number of submissions. I can see that the issues of carer isolation, frustration, fatigue, anxiety, despair and invisibility have already been well-illustrated, so in the interest of brevity, I won't add my own comments, although I would like to emphasise that these are issues I am very familiar with and continue to struggle with, even after 22 years as a carer.

My comments focus on Key Principles 1 of the Carer Recognition Act 2010 in relation to unpaid carers - that all carers should have the same rights, choices and opportunities as other Australians I wish to comment on the lack of employment choices and opportunities for carers.

Here on the NSW Mid North Coast, there are very limited opportunities to secure new part-time work opportunities. The mindset of employers seems to be stuck in full-time employment.

There is a real need to implement measures that attract and retain carers as valuable contributors to the part-time workforce/economy. Like most carers, I am unable to engage in full-time work due to the nature of my caring role. However I very much want to secure more paid part-time work and have been actively seeking part-time work since 2019.

I have registered multiple online employment searches with the leading agencies. The saved searches relating to part-time opportunities provide little or no response. I receive regular responses regarding full-time roles that match my skillset, however when I enquire whether they would consider a jobshare or part-time applicant, the answer is always a firm "no". This particularly applies to employment opportunities advertised by my local Council.

Surely there are ways employers could be encouraged or incentivised to adopt a more flexible approach to employment, and to the employment of carers in particular – one that would allow us the opportunity to participate in the paid workforce, and therefore relieve financial stress?

For years now I have felt frustrated by the irony that the unpaid work I must do to care for my husband is a key factor in limiting my earning capacity.

Perhaps there are employee training and or communication/education programs that could be implemented to outline the benefits of employing carers. We are motivated, productive and resilient workers – we need the income, we need the break from our caring duties and we thrive when engaged in work/projects outside our homes. Who better than a carer to manage difficult people in the workplace, stay calm in a crisis and overcome obstacles?

Can something be done to encourage employers in my area to potentially split full-time roles into jobshare or part-time arrangements?

Could financial incentives be offered to those employers that create part-time roles that are taken up by people registered for the Carer Allowance? There have been plenty of examples of employer stimulus payments in other fields.

With regard to the recognition of unpaid carers broadly, in my experience, there has been increased awareness of the value and contribution of carers, mainly through the messaging and mind-boggling statistics shared by the media during Carers Week each year.

What I'd like to see are programs and strategies that convert this awareness into practical benefits for carers. Strategies that show the way for communities to better support carers (not just through employment, as outlined above).

What if communities were encouraged to adopt more of a "it takes a village" approach in relation to understanding and supporting carers? It would be wonderful if success stories outlining how certain streets or neighbourhoods or community groups are supporting carers could be shared to inspire other communities. Potentially Carers Australia/NSW could take the lead in this?

Thank you for conducting this important inquiry and for taking my experiences as a carer into consideration. I have included my contact details below and would welcome further discussion on carer issues.

I note the Deputy Chair of the Standing Committee is my local member, Mr Pat Conaghan MP and take this opportunity to thank him for his service on the Committee. I would be pleased to meet with or talk with Mr Conaghan if it would be of service to the inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

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