



FACT SHEET 4

Carers

The Caring Role

- Carers provide support to older people and people with a disability or chronic illness, enabling them to live at home in their community while accessing services they require. In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on home-based care for older people, and younger people needing care. Community Care programs rely on informal carers – family, friends, neighbours - to support their loved ones when formal care providers are not present. The importance of the role of informal carers in maintaining frail older people and younger people with a disability in the community is set to increase as Australia's population ages and more older people choose to stay longer in their own homes.
- The level of support given by a carer varies depending on the level of care required. Informal carers can provide a range of assistance within or outside their own home. Care can range from feeding, bathing, dressing, and other daily tasks, for moderately or profoundly disabled people, to assistance with transport or paying bills for people with lesser levels of functional disability.
- A significant number of older people also provide care for children.

How Many Carers

Arriving at the number of carers in Australia is quite complex.¹

- 2.6 million Australians provide some unpaid assistance to others who need help because of disability or age (ABS Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings 2003 [ABS cat no. 4430.0]).
- These 2.6 million informal carers represented around 12.4 % of the total population of Australia, or one person in every eight Australians (ABS Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2003 (ABS 2003).
- One fifth of all carers are primary carers (ABS 2003). This means that around 500,000 Australians, or 2.5 per cent of all Australians are primary carers.

¹ The ABS provides two publications that have used different counting and inclusion/exclusion methodologies to derive the following figures. While the ABS census of 2006 found 1.6 million persons who provide some level of care to others, the 2003 *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC)* counted 2.6 million carers. According to ABS officers (personal communication, May 2008) the 2003 figure remains the most accurate count of carers. The 2006 figures do *not* supersede the 2003 figures, but measure a slightly different population of carers. Those wanting a detailed description of the different methodologies should refer to ABS 2901.0 *Census Dictionary 2006: Summary : Core Activity Assistance* <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/304E60A454FD00D2CA25729E0008A89F?opendocument#Quality%20Statement> [accessed May 2008].

Core Activity Carers (Carers of moderately or profoundly disabled persons)

The ABS census of 2006 focused closely on the number of people who provide 'core activity' support and care for people who are 'moderately or profoundly disabled in at least one core activity (communication, mobility or self-care)'.

It found that:

- 1.6 million Australians provide unpaid assistance to 821,649 Australians (including aged persons) with a moderate or profound disability in at least one core activity (communication, mobility or self-care) (ABS 2006 Census tables: Cat No, 2068.0).
- This 1.6 million carers of people with a moderate or profound disability in at least one core activity represents around 7.6 per cent of the Australian population in 2008 (ABS 2006 Census tables: Cat No, 2068.0).
- Of these 1.6 million core activity carers, 245,600 were aged 65 years and over (ABS 2006 Census Tables cat. No. 2068.0).
- 32,500 Indigenous Australians provided unpaid assistance to a person with a disability (ABS 2006 Census Tables cat. No. 2068.0).
- 19,617 of the people needing core activity assistance are Indigenous persons (ABS 2006 Census Tables cat. No. 2068.0).

Who Needs Care?

- 821,649 Australians (including aged persons), or around 4 per cent of all Australians, have a moderate or profound disability in at least one core activity (communication, mobility or self-care) and require assistance (ABS 2006 Census tables: Cat No, 2068.0).
- 41 per cent of people aged 65-69 years of age have a disability (ABS 2003).
- 10 per cent of people aged 65-69 years had a profound or core-activity limitation (ABS 2003).
- 92 per cent of Australians aged 90 years and above have a disability (ABS 2003).
- 74 per cent of Australians aged 90 years and above have a profound or core activity limitation (ABS 2003).
- Of people who reported needing assistance due to a disability, 60 per cent reported that their needs were fully met, 35 per cent reported their needs as partially met and 5 per cent reported their needs as unmet (ABS 2003).

Who Cares?

The best source of information as to 'who cares' in Australia is the ABS Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings 2003 (ABS 2003, cat no. 4430.0).

- Almost 20 per cent (494,000) of carers are *primary* carers - that is they provide the majority of informal, unpaid assistance to a person needing care. Women account for 71 per cent of primary care givers (ABS 2003).
- 113,200 persons aged 65 years and over are primary carers of people with a moderate or profound disability in one or more areas of core function (ABS census tables 2006: cat no. 4430.0.55.004: Table 24).
 - 78% of primary carers care for a person in the same household. Of these, 53 per cent of primary carers are caring for a partner, 26 per cent for a child and 16 per cent for a parent.
 - 93,100 primary carers aged 65 and over care for their partner – an increase of over 27 per cent in the five years to 2003 (ABS 2003).
 - Primary carers have a lower labour force participation rate (39 per cent) than non-carers (68 per cent) (ABS 2003).

- 37 per cent of primary carers spent on average of 40 hours or more per week providing care and 18 per cent spent 20 to 39 hours per week (ABS 2003).
- The total number of carers (primary and non-primary) who are aged 65 and over decreased slightly from 1998 to 2003, from approximately 401,000 to 385,000 people (ABS 1998; ABS 2003).
- 56 per cent of all carers (primary and non primary) 65 years of age and older are women (ABS 2006 Census Tables)
- Over 14,000 carers are aged 85 years or over (ABS 2006 Census Tables).
- In this 85+ age category (only) more men than women are carers (53%) (ABS 2006 Census Tables).
- Of all carers, 868,600 - approximately one third - have a reported disability themselves. The proportion is slightly higher for primary carers – nearly 40 per cent have a reported disability (ABS 2003).

Caring for the Grandchildren

- Around 250,000 Australians aged 65 and over also regularly provide some unpaid child care (All from ABS CAT NO. 2068.0 – 2006 Census Tables).

Ratio of Carers to Population 2001 to 2031

- In 2001 there were 57 primary carers for every 100 people over 65 years of age with a severe or profound disability needing care and living in the community. By 2031 this ratio is projected to drop to just 35 carers for every 100 people aged over 65 needing care (NATSEM 2004).
- While the number of carers will rise by 57 per cent over this period, the number of aged people needing care is projected to rise by 160 per cent. This means there will be a shortfall of 573,000 informal primary carers compared to the current shortfall of 152,000 (NATSEM 2004; Carers Australia 2005: v).

Time Spent Caring

- Carers often devote many years and many hours each week to the caring role. Of the time spent caring, 39 per cent of primary carers had spent less than five years in the caring role, 26 per cent had spent between five and nine years, 27 per cent had spent between 10 and 24 years and 6.4 per cent had spent 25 years or more in the caring role (ABS 2003).
- The 2003 ABS survey found that 18 per cent of primary carers spend 20 to 39 hours per week providing care and 37 per cent spend 40 or more hours per week providing care (ABS 2003).
- The AIHW has estimated that carers spend 1.192 million hours per year giving unpaid care to family members and friends (AIHW 2003:153).

The Impacts of Caring

- Despite often being a rewarding role, caring can have detrimental impacts on carers, including problems with health and emotional wellbeing, deteriorating financial situations, and foregone opportunities such as a career and education.
- The rate of involvement in the labour force decreases for carers as the rates of caring increase. Of all carers, over 41 per cent (over one million) are not in the paid workforce. This figure is higher for primary carers with approximately 59 per cent not employed in the paid workforce (ABS 2003).
- Carers in the paid workforce are under pressure to manage their competing roles and require flexible responses from employers.

- For 53 per cent of primary carers, a government pension or allowance is their principal source of income. Of all carers, 37 per cent receive a government pension or allowance as their primary source of income (ABS 2003).
- Australian Unity's *Well Being Index* (2007) found that carers have 'an alarmingly low' wellbeing score of 58.5, compared to the average score for Australians in general of between 73 and 76 points. This study found that carers experience high rate of depression and anxiety, poor general health, and enormous psychological pressures.

Caring for Carers

As Australia's population ages, the number of people requiring informal care, at home and in their community, is expected to increase, while the number of available carers will decline. This shifting balance in the ratio of carers to people needing care requires governments to develop policy settings that will support carers.

Most States and Territories now have, or are in the process of developing, Carer Action Plans.

Unpaid Carers are the backbone of Australia's aged care system. Their role must become more visible so that it is fully acknowledged in policy making, planning and resource allocation.

Governments must:

- identify the costs and risks of caring and intervene to ameliorate the impact;
- recognise the increasing age of carers and their differing support needs;
- respond to the increasing number of people needing care who do not have/will not have a primary carer;
- address the increasingly urgent issue of maintaining a skilled workforce to provide formal care and to support informal carers:
- In 1998 the ABS found that 16 per cent of primary carers receiving assistance reported that they needed further assistance in providing care, whilst 9 per cent of carers not receiving assistance, reported they needed assistance. 36 per cent of primary carers reported that there was no "fall-back" carer available. Data on carers needing assistance has not been collected since 1998.

Readily accessible respite care is a critical factor in maintaining the wellbeing of carers and their ability to continue to provide care.

The following section provides brief details of some of the support services, including government payments, available to carers:

Carer Payment

- The Carer Payment is subject to an assets and income test and is paid to people personally caring for someone who is 'a severely disabled person.' Carers who are eligible for the Carer Payment do not need to be living with the person they care for but they must be providing constant care.
- The Carer Payment supports those people who, because of their caring role, are unable to take on a substantial level of paid work. At the end of 2006, a total of 111,419 people were receiving Carer Payment.
 - Carers aged 65 years or over accounted for only 5 per cent of Carer Payment recipients,
 - 35 per cent of people being assisted by carers who received the Carer Payment were aged 65 or over (AIHW 2007: 96).
 - The rate for the Carer Payment (at May 2008) for singles is \$546.80 per fortnight and \$456.80 each for a carer couple. Additional supplements are available.

Carer Allowance

The Carer Allowance is paid to those caring at home for people who require additional care because of disability or a severe medical condition.

- On 31 December 2006, 382,490 people were receiving the Carer Allowance.
 - One-quarter of the recipients were carers aged 65 years or over,
 - 84 per cent of these older recipients of the Carer Allowance were caring for an older person.
- The rate for the Carer Allowance (at May 2008) is \$100.60 per fortnight.

Support and Respite for Carers

- The Home and Community Care (HACC) Program offers a range of services, including respite care, to support person needing care, and their carers.
- Commonwealth Carer Resource Centres have been established in each State and Territory capital city. These centres provide information and referral for carers. They can be contacted through Centrelink or on **1800 242 636** (free call).²
- Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres in each State and Territory coordinate respite services. They can be contacted through Centrelink or on 1800 059 059 (free call).
- Commonwealth Carelink Centres were established by the Government in 2001. They provide information to older Australians, to younger people with a disability, and to carers, putting them in touch with a range of community, aged care and disability services. They can be contacted through Centrelink or on 1800 052 222 (free call).

Further Information For and About Carers

- *Carers Australia* is a non-profit organisation that is dedicated to representing and supporting carers. Their web address is www.carersaustralia.com.au. Carers Australia has eight state/territory member organisations.

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² All phone numbers and websites current at May 2008

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