



FACTSHEET: Navigating the ageing care journey: Support for employees

Caring for ageing family members presents a substantial societal and economic challenge. According to a 2020 report by Carers Australia, approximately 2.65 million Australians were providing unpaid care to family members or friends, with a significant portion of these caregivers tending to elderly relatives¹. Economically, it was estimated that the replacement cost of unpaid caregiving in Australia in 2020 amounted to approximately \$77.9 billion annually².

Whilst the economic impact is considerable, the dedication of individuals often comes at a personal cost. Informal caregivers are significantly more likely to have low wellbeing and higher psychological distress compared to the average Australian^{3,4}. Carer-employees may experience heightened stress, increased anxiety, depression, a higher risk of job turnover, reduced social connections, diminished life satisfaction, and limited opportunities for

career progression⁵. As a result, many carer-employees find it necessary to make significant adjustments to their work arrangements, often opting to reduce their working hours or, in some cases, leave the workforce entirely to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities.

In our [Leading Mentally Healthy Workplaces Survey 2023](#) we found that 25% of respondents cited carer responsibilities (children, elderly relatives, people with disabilities) as a personal source of stress outside of their professional roles. While employers have made strides in aiding employees with childcare responsibilities, there is a pressing need for further initiatives geared toward supporting the older, primarily female employees (60% of Australia's carers are female⁶) who shoulder the responsibility of caring for elderly relatives.

Arranging appropriate care for ageing parents or other elderly family members can be a multifaceted, time-consuming, and emotionally taxing process for many carer-employees. This information sheet offers valuable insights for employees who may find themselves navigating the intricate journey of aged care.

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WHY IS THIS RELEVANT TO BUSINESSES?

Employees dealing with researching and securing ageing care report increased levels of stress, absenteeism, presenteeism and distraction from their role⁷. On average, an employee will spend 190 hours working to secure ageing care. Much of this time is during typical office hours (dealing with government agencies and care providers as examples).

Sometimes the employee will feel that they face a choice between the care situation and

remaining in the workforce. This represents a risk to businesses as they lose experienced, generally female team members, often at the peak of their careers. Caregiving impacts diversity and inclusion outcomes and as a stressor impacts general staff wellbeing.

Providing active support for employees as they go through this process will increase the chances of retaining a happy, healthy, and productive team member.



TIPS FOR EMPLOYEES TO CONSIDER

Navigating aged care as an “adult child” supporting parents or elderly loved ones usually comes on top of significant existing responsibilities at work and home.

Here are ten tips to help employees navigate ageing care for parents or other loved ones:

- 1. Open Communication:** Initiate open and honest conversations with your ageing parents about their needs, expectations, and concerns. Ensure everyone is on the same page regarding their future care plan and where and how they will live as they age.
- 2. Plan Ahead:** Start planning early. Research and understand the available options for care, including financial considerations, legal matters, and available community resources. For example, ensuring a safe home environment can help avoid risks like falls, which often result in the health changes and family emergencies that can be so time consuming and draining.
- 3. Assess Needs:** Evaluate the specific care needs of your ageing parents, considering physical health, mental wellbeing, and any medical conditions. Determine whether in-home care, assisted living, or nursing home care is most appropriate. Be prepared to challenge their views of their own capability – “ageing denial” is an almost universal human trait!
- 4. Create a Care Team:** Don't try to do everything yourself. Involve siblings, other family members, and close friends to share the responsibilities. Delegate tasks according to each person's strengths.
- 5. Set Realistic Expectations:** Understand that you can't do everything perfectly and that you are on a steep learning curve. It's essential to find a balance between your caregiving responsibilities, your other family and professional responsibilities and your own wellbeing. Securing the right care will take time.

- 6. Self-Care:** Prioritise self-care to prevent burnout. Be conscious of your own energy levels and capacity to cope. Be honest with yourself. Use your care team to enable you to step away from the process / situation from time to time. Use a backup care or respite care option from time to time depending on needs. When you do get a break, use that time to actively engage in the pastimes you enjoy and help you maintain your physical and mental health.
- 7. Financial Planning:** Aged care can be costly. Involve your parents early (plan ahead), map out your parents' financial situation and explore all available options like government assistance programs and how to best utilise their assets. Specialist aged care financial advice makes a difference.
- 8. Legal Matters:** Work with a legal professional to ensure that all necessary legal documents, such as enduring power of attorney and living wills are in place. This will help streamline decision-making in case your parents are unable to make decisions on their own.
- 9. Stay Organised:** Keep all relevant documents, medical records, and contact information in one accessible place. Use tools like calendars, apps, and reminders to stay organised and track appointments and tasks. Document family decisions to ensure all involved are aware and onboard.
- 10. Seek Support:** Don't hesitate to ask for help when needed. Be open at work – whilst ageing care is not often discussed at work, employers will be understanding. You might be surprised how many people at work have been through similar situations. Join support groups for caregivers, seek advice from professionals, a GP or a geriatrician, and tap into community resources that can offer guidance and assistance. Expert advice can make a real difference to the outcomes you can achieve.



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We would like to thank Care & Living with Mercer for assisting in the compilation of this factsheet.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Care & Living with Mercer](#)
- [Access Australian aged care information and services | My Aged Care](#)
- [Home | Carer Gateway](#)
- [Carers Australia](#)

ENDNOTES

- 1 Carers Australia (2020). Carers Australia Annual Report 2019-2020. https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CarersAustralia-Annual-Report-2019-20_final_3.pdf
- 2 Deloitte Access Economics (2020). The Value of Informal Care in 2020. Carers Australia. https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/FINAL-Value-of-Informal-Care-22-May-2020_No-CIC.pdf
- 3 Hussain R, Wark S, Dillon G, et al (2016). Self-reported physical and mental health of Australian carers: a cross-sectional study. *BMJ Open* 2016;6:e011417. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2016-011417
- 4 Carers Australia (2022). Caring for Others and Yourself: The 2022 Carer Wellbeing Survey. https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2022-CWS-Full-Report_221010_FINAL.pdf
- 5 Schulz, Richard PhD; Sherwood, Paula R. PhD, RN, CNRN. Physical and Mental Health Effects of Family Caregiving. *AJN, American Journal of Nursing* 108(9):p 23-27, September 2008. | DOI: 10.1097/01.NAJ.0000336406.45248.4c
- 6 Carers Australia (2021). Caring for Others and Yourself: The 2021 Carer Wellbeing Survey (2021). https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/211011_Carer-Wellbeing-Survey-Executive-Summary_FINAL.pdf
- 7 Findings of an online survey of 510 US HR decision-maker respondents and 1,815 employee respondents during the period of 2 December 2018 and 14 January 2019

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Corporate Mental Health Alliance AUSTRALIA

The Corporate Mental Health Alliance (CMHAA) is a group of Australian businesses dedicated to providing mentally healthy workplaces for their people.

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