

Date: 23 August 2022
Productivity Commission

Dear Commissioners

Submission to the Productivity Commission into Carer Leave

Thank you for inviting submissions from the Australian community and stakeholders to address the effects of extending unpaid leave entitlement to informal carers of older Australians under the National Employment Standards (NES).

In 2020 a research team at the University of Wollongong worked on a [collaborative research](#) project with the One Door Mental Health to evaluate the effectiveness of services for mental health carers residing in the Illawarra region of NSW. Our research aimed to consider the types of assistance required and to provide recommendations to improve the services.

We wish to draw this research to the Productivity Commission's attention in the hopes that services can be improved for carers.

Our research:

We have interviewed 27 mental health carers.. Over 44% were aged between 55 - 64, with a substantial portion (40%) in the over 64 age bracket. Almost 90% of the carers were women. Only 3 out of 27 currently receive carer allowances from Centrelink. While our interviewees experience significant stress and emotional burden, they are also disadvantaged by financial burdens due to their caregiving role. For example, carers felt obliged to pay for private insurance, as well as the fines, debts and living expenses of their loved ones with mental illness. Participants also indicated caring for their loved ones impacted their careers and their ability to control their work and generate income. For example, many participants described occasions where their loved ones interrupted their work or times that they had to temporarily leave work.

When he goes off his brain, he'll just ring or text lots of times at work.
(Interviewee no. 2)

When she's awake during the day, she'll ring me half a dozen times, at least. And it's really distracting. And you just can't explain to her that you need to get to

something so I have to just pack up and take off. But it makes it really difficult because it is a very stressful job that I do. And I'm struggling to keep on top of it at the moment as it is. (Interviewee no. 24)

I worked for a small company and so whenever I'd get a call where my son was, or if there was problems... we just had a deal that I would deduct the hours. So I was away from as long as I got the work done. (Interviewee no. 21)

Some participants indicated they had to retire to look after their loved ones.

When things were falling apart I retired. I don't know that I could have coped with working in the job that I had and being able to support her. So, I retired at 55. (Interviewee no. 4)

I was running my own business when she became ill... We sold the business about the time she became very unwell. So I was sort of retired at the time. (Interviewee no. 7)

Our findings show that the financial burden hinders carers' ability to plan for their life, socialise, and has an impact on carers' mental health. For instance, amongst other challenges, many carers expressed feeling lonely during their journey of supporting their loved ones. Ironically, this was not related to COVID-19 restrictions. In fact, participants stated COVID-19 restrictions has not impacted their social lives as much, since their caregiving roles have already limited their social activities. Participants also discussed how caring for loved ones impacts their ability to control their lives, plan for their lives and pursue their objectives.

In summary, it is clear that many carers in our research experienced great stress and hardship due to their role as carers. This situation made it difficult to maintain a full time job. Therefore any access to unpaid leave could significantly improve their situation.

We thank the Productivity Commission for the the oppountity to make this submission. We would be happy to provide any clarification.

Yours sincerely

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